



PRESENTS

On wings of the past

The motives of the birds in the archaeological relicts in the Polish lands
(11th cent. BC – 17th AC)



The love of archaeology and nature, in particular the birds, resulted in the exhibition entitled “On wings of the past”, which tries to combine these two, closely-related fields. Both of them contain many secrets, riddles and still undiscovered realms. Both of them hide precious treasures, which should be properly protected, in order to let the next generations enjoy their unique beauty.

The birds are, certainly, the real treasure of nature. Their singing and vivid coloration often are breathtaking. Some of the species were treated once as holy, admired with true respect, while others were to represent gods or souls of the dead, flying out into the underworlds. There are some species of birds which were hunted for and others which were domesticated. Some believed that swallows foresaw the weather, storks represented spring, and owl’s hooting symbolized unhappiness.

Nowadays, the birds are still a subject of great interest. *Birdwatching*, observing, and often photographing, birds by amateurs, was born in Great Britain. The number of birdwatchers in the UK can be counted in millions, when in Poland this hobby is less developed; however the number of birdwatchers increases every year.

Birds in ancient times were equally popular and inspired many artists. Bird drawings and little figures were placed, for example, on rocks, utensils and jewels: objects of every-day as well as ritual use. The first known presentations of the winged creatures can be dated back to palaeolith. One of these scenes depicted in the famous French cave in Lascaux, presents a dead man, a bison and birds. The representations of the birds can hardly be found in Polish lands in neolithic and early bronze periods. However their bones were discovered in many graves and around settlements. The significant change can be observed in the late bronze period, from which we start our trip to the past; the bird world, created by human hands, began to astonish with its richness and diversity.

As an addition to our archaeological-ornithological trip to the past, we offer you a short description of selected topics on literature, arts, hunting and cuisine with some current pictures of the birds.

Birds in the Lausitian Culture

The Lausitian culture, lasted from ca. 1300 to ca. 400 BC and known first of all from the great discoveries in Biskupin, can be considered as one of the most easily recognizable archaeological cultures. The Lausitian culture emerged as a result of many changes which were taking place in belief and burial rituals in that time. The burial ritual of burying the dead into a grave and covering it with earth or stones disappeared in Central Europe, which was commonly replaced by crematory burial ritual, often connected with putting into a grave clay vessels in various forms and richly ornamented. Another important characteristic feature of this period was the use of bronze, and by the end of Lausitian culture, the use of iron as weapons, utensils and ornaments.

The Lausitian culture lasting almost a millenium was characterized by permanent settlements and numerous burial grounds, where precious bronze and iron objects were discovered, as well as unique and unrepeatable figural arts. The little figures represented human creatures, four-footed animals, fish and birds. The presentations of human beings and four-footed animals have been already produced for a long time, starting in the neolithic period, but the motive of birds should be treated as a new phenomenon. Taking into consideration the number of discovered artefacts, these new artistic elements became very popular at the end of bronze period and early iron period. It seems that these artistic elements were popularized by the vivid contacts with the Hallstatt circle, to which sphere the population of Lausitian culture belonged, first of all in the territory of, what is now, Silesia and Greater Poland.

The majority of the "Lausitian" presentations of birds were found in the burial ground, less frequently in the settlements. One can distinguish among them full little figures, rattle-boxes, vessels, so-called ritual carts and decorative ornaments engraved on vessels and other bronze objects. The most numerous in this group were the rattle-boxes which should be treated as children's toys; however, the anthropological analysis of the human relics tends to prove that they were put into the graves of women and men as well. The little figures, usually depicting the upper part of human body, were often decorated with ornaments. A person who engraved them did not tend, however, to imitate the anatomic features of a bird, but according to existing decorative canons at that time, recognizable also on the vessels, bronze pins, etc., did only a few engravings. The lack of details excludes, in all cases, the identification of full species. One cannot determine whether the intention of an engraver was to present a bird in symbolic way or to depict a specific species.

Rattle-boxes and other objects decorated with the bird's motives were equally found in settlements and burial ground, which can confirm a hypothesis that the birds were of great importance to the contemporary population in the earthly existence as well as in the afterlife. The ritual character possessed undoubtedly carts with a shaft (hole for a shaft), because the symbols placed on them, including birds, indicate some kind of connection with solar cult.

Thanks to archaeo-zoological studies, one can assess that at the end of the Lausitian culture people were, most probably, trying to domesticate some species of the birds, e.g. greylag goose, fen-duck, and raised hens, for sure.



Kraków- Nowa Huta Pleszów; pin, detail; bronze; MAK.



Wartosław; vessel; clay; MZGS.

Biezdrowo-Zakrzewo; rattle; clay; MAP.



Pacanowice; rattle; clay; MOZK.



Topornica; rattle; clay; PMA.



Kowalewko; rattle; clay; MAP.

Wilanowiec; rattle; clay; MAP.



Topornica; rattle; clay; PMA.



Unknown settlement; rattle; clay; PMA.



Biernatki; rattle; clay; MAP.



Kowalewko; little figure; clay; MAP.



Brzezie; rattle; clay; MOZK.

Kowalewko; rattle; clay; MAP.



Kowalewko; rattle; clay; MAP.



Kałowice; cult cart; bronze; MMW.



Pierstnica; cult cart; bronze; MMW.



Białogard; vessel; clay; MK.



Kamień; vessel; clay; MOZK.



Manieczki; vessel; clay; MAP.



Wysocko; vessel; clay; PMA.

Birds in mythology and fables of the ancient Greece

At this same time, when the Lausitian culture still existed in the Polish lands, the great Greek civilization developed in Southern Europe. Birds, their motives and symbols one can find in Greek mythology, culture and art.

Birds in Greek mythology were often linked with numerous gods residing in Olimph. The attribute of goddess Athens has been owl, Zeus – eagle, Apollo and Aphrodite – swan, Demeter – crane, and Hera – stork. One of the best known Greek birds have been the mythical Stymphalian birds, with beaks and wings made of bronze, who killed human beings and animals, throwing on them their bronze feathers and poisoning excrements. Only Hercules, conducting the sixth of his twelve great labors, killed almost an entire flock, shooting with his bow, and this scene was often presented in decorations of vases. Another Greek hero Theseus, after killing a Minotaur and escaping from the labyrinth with the help of Ariadne's thread, performed a thanksgiving dance which later was named the "crane dance".

Even today, the famous Aesop's fables with their morals are often repeated and cited; nevertheless they were composed in the 6th cent. BC. These stories include both the unique human wisdom, and the bitter truth about the world, human weaknesses, simple-mindedness and stupidity. The Greek author, well known because of his bold mind and sharp language, did not want to criticize some persons directly, and therefore he hid them in a form of animals, including birds (e.g. swallow, raven and jackdaw).



Little owl



White-tailed eagle



Mute swan



Common crane



Black stork

The Spendthrift and the Swallow

A young fellow, who was very popular among his boon companions as a good spender, quickly wasted his fortune trying to live up to his reputation. Then one fine day in early spring he found himself with not a penny left and no property save the clothes he wore.

He was to meet some jolly young men that morning and he was at his wits' end how to get enough money to keep up appearances. Just then a Swallow flew by, twittering merrily and the young man, thinking summer had come, hastened off to a clothes dealer, to whom he sold all the clothes he wore down to his very tunic.

A few days later a change in weather brought a severe frost and the poor swallow and that foolish young man in his light tunic, and with his arms and knees bare, could scarcely keep life in their shivering bodies.

Moral Lesson: One swallow does not make a summer.



Common house martin

The fox and the crow

A Crow having stolen a bit of meat, perched in a tree and held it in her beak. A Fox, seeing this, longed to possess the meat himself, and by a wily stratagem succeeded. "How handsome is the Crow", he exclaimed, in the beauty of her shape and in the fairness of her complexion! Oh, if her voice were only equal to her beauty, she would deservedly be considered the Queen of Birds!" This he said deceitfully; but the Crow, anxious to refute the reflection cast upon her voice, set up a loud caw and dropped the flesh. The Fox quickly picked it up, and thus addressed the Crow: "My good Crow, your voice is right enough, but your wit is wanting".



Common raven



Red fox

Birds in the Pomeranian culture

The reasons for a collapse of the Lausitian culture were not precisely determined by the researchers. Besides the ethnic or tribal conflicts, invasion of the Scythians and climate changes, these reasons are often linked with the expansion of the Pomeranian culture and its population from Eastern Pomerania. Between the 5th and 4th century BC, this group moved into a vast area inhabited previously by the population of Lausitian culture. As the characteristic features of the broadly understood Pomeranian culture, the new burial rituals can be considered. Even today, archaeologists discuss the problem of the so-called bell-shaped graves, which some experts consider to be a separate archaeological culture, while others tend to combine it with the Pomeranian culture. The population of Pomeranian culture introduced a new form of grave – crematory with its equipment composed of bronze, iron, clay or bones: objects of everyday use as well as clay side-objects, put into so-called box grave made of great stone plates. The graves were used by several generations, which means that after the death of a family member he/she was put into this same grave, and cinerary urn was covered with a large vessel upside down (therefore this type of a grave was called a bell-shaped grave). Another important element of the Pomeranian culture has been a cinerary urn itself. It was shaped in a form of small house (cottage), but also often modeled as a pear-shaped vessel with only marked elements of human face: nose, ears (ornamented with ear-rings), eyes and vessel holes covered with a so-called cup lid. On the belly of these vessels one can find some scenes, e.g. hunting or a single presentation of an object for everyday use (e.g. pin) or weapons, such as shields or spears).

The presentations of the birds on the artifacts produced by the population of the Pomeranian culture and their relics from the burial grounds and settlements are practically unknown. These kinds of motives appeared rarely as a decorative element on clay vessels or as a single metal or bone relic. One can suppose that the birds did not play an important role in the beliefs of the population of the Pomeranian culture.



Stodzew; pendant; bone; PMA.



Warszawa-Nowodwory; pin, detail; bronze; PMA.

Birds in Celtic mythology

By the end of the Pomeranian culture the territory of Southern Poland was penetrated by Celtic influences. The cradle of the Celtic population can be located in the basin of upper Rhine and Danube. In the town of La Tène (nowadays in Switzerland) a burial ground was discovered, which being the first such burial, was identified with the Celts and gave the name for the entire archaeological culture. One can observe the first migrations of the Celts at the turn of the 5th and 6th century BC. After some time they inhabited and subordinated the vast territories in Western and Central Europe from the British Isles to the Black Sea; they crossed the borders of Greece and Italy too. Over the centuries the Celts were conquered in most cases by the growing power of the Roman Empire.

The attacks of the Celts brought with them not only destruction and death. They assimilated the conquered population but also transmitted the achievements of their own culture to them, spreading out the technology of iron production and the use of potter's wheel. The traces of the Celts in the Polish lands can be found in small circles from the middle of the 4th century in Lower and Upper Silesia and in the second half of the 3rd century in Lesser Poland. The existence of the Celtic settlements here, apart from the numerous discoveries of the so-called pottery produced with the potter's wheel, is often linked with the "famous" stone sculptures of the so-called "bear", "boar", "monk", "mushroom" and "girl with fish", found in the vicinity of the Ślęza mountains near Wrocław. According to some experts they were somehow connected with the supposedly Celtic ritual shrine there.

The birds played an important role in Celtic art and mythology. One of the most often employed symbols has been the eagle (e.g. helmets with fastened moveable wings to it), crane (e.g. in pottery), rooster (less or more official coat of arms of contemporary French people), owl (goddess owl – Rugani; bronze figure, Blodeuwedd), as well as swan, ducks and crows.

The Celtic mythology offers the stories about men being changed into birds. In the old Welsh legend called Mabinogion this motive is also present. Arianrod (daughter of Dôna and Beli Mawr) inspired by his brother Gwydion (wizard, warrior and poet) decided to take a job of “court maiden” at his uncle Math court, reserved only for the virgins. When she was jumping over the magic stick of Math a baby fell down from her. She was terrified by this fact and rushed to the door, giving birth to another boy. The second birth was seen only by Gwydion, who wrapped up the boy in his silken towel, put it into casket and secretly took him to his home. When the boy was four years old, Gwydion decided to show him to his mother, but she rejected him. The boy has been a sign of his moral misconduct. It was the mother’s privilege to name her child, to turned over him a weapon and to select his future wife, and the society kept punishing mothers for not paying his duties. Gwydion wished to help the boy, and by deceit and magic he forced his mother to fulfill her first two obligations. He transformed himself and the boy into shoemakers and went to the boat, where she was to wait for an artisan. During their meeting a wren approached; the boy hurt it, and his mother Arianrod, admiring his skills, named him Llew Llaw Gyffes (The Little-man with Solid Palm, Blond-hair, Skillful-hand). She understood later who these shoemakers in fact were and that she named her son Llew. For the second time, Gwydion and Llew Llaw appeared as wizard and his disciple, appeared in the Arianrod’s fortress during her besiege. The woman, who was not suspecting anything, ordered to give armor and weapon to his servant. In the way she fulfilled another obligation towards her son. The third condition was already prepared by Gwydion and Math. They produced a beautiful girl for Llew made of leaves of “oak, genista and sorb” and named her Blodeuwedd. Just after the wedding she fell in love in Goronwym. With her lover, Goronwym planned to kill Llew. When Llew was getting back home to his fortress, Goronwy killed him with a spear and changed into eagle, who took off in unknown direction. After many days of searching, Gwydion discovered the hungry bird sitting on an oak tree. Returned in a magic way to the form of human being Llew took revenge, together with wizard, on his infidel wife and changed her into an owl. Since that day she must hide itself in the daylight, because other birds could pick it to death.

Nowa Cerekwia; little figures; bronze; IAUW.



Birds in the Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures

The Przeworsk culture was formed on Polish lands at the turn of the 3rd and 2nd century BC based on the changes within the Pomeranian culture and under the strong influences of the Celtic culture circles. The basis for the maintaining of a family was agriculture, animal-farming and trade with the Celtic tribes, and after their collapse – with Roman provinces. The population preferred the crematory burial rite: the dead were directly placed in a grave hole and in a cinerary urn with the rest of the stove. As grave equipment one can find: clay vessels, utensils for specialized produce (pincers, files, chisels, etc.), weapons (swords, usually bent according to Celtic form, a shield element, arrow heads and spears) as well as parts of human clothes styled according to Celtic fashion (buckles, clasps, pin, etc.).

In comparison to previous archaeological cultures one can observe in the Przeworsk culture a clear and visible impoverishment of the researchable elements of the figural arts. It may have been somehow connected with a broadly unknown prohibition to present gods and other religious symbols. The presentations of birds on archaeological monuments can be traced less frequently; however, the number of burnt birds' bones among burnt human and animal bones discovered in cinerary urns, significantly increased. In most cases the birds' bones were relatively well crumbled and previously partly destroyed by high temperatures, which may indicate that the birds were put into a stake and burnt together with the dead body. Among the described birds' species one can point out chicken, rooster, garganey and goose. It is hard to state nowadays, whether the bird's bones, found in the cinerary urns much more often than any other animals, may reflect a sort of magic ritual or simply are the relics of funeral suppers. The earliest known so far egg shells were discovered in the crematory grave of the Przeworsk culture.



Macew; pin, detail; bronze; MOZK.



Głuszyno; pin, detail; bronze; MK.

Wymysłowo; vessel; clay; MAP.



Kraków, Nowa Huta Pleszów; vessel;
clay; MAK.



The territory of current Northern Poland was inhabited by the settlers from Scandinavia in the beginning of the 1st century AC. The archaeologist named this culture as the Wielbark culture and identified these settlers, without hesitation, with the Goths. By the ca. 70 AC they spread partly in the land of Central and Eastern Pomerania, land along the Vistula river, the valley of Nogat river and heights of Chełmno. They successfully moved into more remote areas later onto, for example, Northern Greater Poland (pushing out from these areas the people of Przeworsk culture), to entire Eastern, Central and partly Western Pomerania. The vast territory located westwards to Vistula river was abandoned in the first half of the 3rd century AC, and the Goths marched towards the Black Sea. A distinction between Eastern and Western Goths can be easily observed in 291 AC.

The Wielbark culture is known, first of all, from its burial grounds, where the graves were marked in characteristic way by a stone steles (similar to a pyramid), circles of stones and closely located grave-mound. The graves were made in two different forms: crematory and skeletal. The grave equipment was usually composed of preciously ornamented jewels made of bronze, silver and gold (buckles, necklaces, bracelets, clamps to fasten a necklace, etc.), but never of weapons and utensils. One can very rarely distinguish the presentations of birds among these funeral gifts and other objects of everyday use, and more often on the artefacts imported from the Roman provinces than locally produced. Therefore, it is hard to determine what the role of the birds for the population of the Wielbark culture was.



Otalążka; fibula; bronz; PMA.



Masłomęcz; fibula; bronz; MZ.



Masłomęcz; fibula; bronz; MZ.



Ulkowy; fibula; bronze, glass; MAG.



Pruszcz Gdański; fibula, detail; silver, gold; MAG.



Kowalewko; jug, detail; bronze; MAP.

It is also hard to determine what kind of relations linked the population of Wielbark and Przeworsk cultures. It seems that these two circles were rather hermetic, and inculturation between the two groups was minimal. One of the clear things uniting these two cultures has been the trade route, established and functioned already in the 1st century, known more commonly as the “amber trade route”. Thanks to trade and goods exchange with southern Europe, some unique objects presenting birds were transported into these two cultural territories. The main trade element has been the amber. It was found on the Baltic Sea shores from the Sambia Peninsula throughout Mierzeję Kurońską i Wiślaną, up to the outlet of the Vistula river, from where it was most transported by boats along the Vistula and Odra rivers, later via the Moravian Valley to *Carnuntum* (North Austria) and then to Aquillea in North Italy. As a consequence of the military actions of the Barbarian tribes against the Roman Empire (so called Markomaniąs wars) in the territory along the Central Europe in 166/167-180 AC, the import of these goods was stopped and the importance of this trade route diminished. Besides the above-described trade route, another one was form ca 70-170 AC – sea trade route from the Baltic Sea throughout Danish isles to the Roman province of Gaul (located South to Rhine), from where the objects were imported. At the beginning of the 3rd century AC the main trade route became the so-called Eastern trade rout, from the Baltic Sea throughout the Hrubieszów valley to the Black Sea shores. Regardless of time and direction of a trade route still the main trade object remained amber, which was exchanged into another precious and valuable goods, e.g. silver, bronze, glass or clay (*terra sigillata*) vessels, weapon and jewels.



Lwówek Śląski; coin of Ptolemy III;
bronze; MAP.



Unknown settlement;
coin of Antonius Pius;
silver; MAP.



Oszczywik; coin of Faustina the Elder; silver; MOZK.



Unknown settlement;
coin of Marcus Aurelius;
silver; MAP.

Birds in written sources of the ancient Romans

The knowledge of birds in ancient Rome, besides religion, mythology and art, can be traced in the written sources dedicated mainly to culture and economy (e.g. decrees, edicts), as well as satirical pieces.

The most extensive passages on these creatures one can find in “Natural history” (*Naturalis historia*) by Pliny the Elder (second half of the 1st century AC). He described in the Book X some feathers e.g. African ostrich, about which stupidity the author could not forget. He noticed that the ostrich “for although the rest of their body is so large, they imagine that when they have thrust their head and neck into a bush, that the whole of the body is concealed”. Besides they “have the marvellous property of being able to digest every substance without distinction, but their stupidity is no less remarkable”. Pliny also noticed that ostrich’s eggs “are prized on account of their large size, and are employed as vessels for certain purposes, while the feathers of the wing and tail are used as ornaments for the crest and helmet of the warrior”. Another fragment was dedicated to “*parrots and birds which speak*”, because there are some other species that can imitate the human voice. This kind of bird is a magpie (“It is said, however, that it is only the kind of pie which feeds upon acorns that can be taught to speak; and that among these, those which have five toes on each foot can be taught with the greatest facility”), blackbirds, starlings and nightingales, of which “the magpie has a broader tongue than is usual with most other birds; which is the case also with all the other birds that can imitate the human voice; although some individuals of almost every kind have the faculty of doing so”. The author presented the story of a unique raven:

In the reign of Tiberius, one of a brood of ravens that had bred on the top of the temple of Castor, happened to fly into a shoemaker's shop that stood opposite: upon which, from a feeling of religious veneration, it was looked upon as doubly recommended by the owner of the place. The bird; having been taught to speak at an early age, used every morning to fly to the Rostra, which look towards the Forum; here, addressing each by his name, it would salute Tiberius, and then the Caesars Germanicus and Drusus, after which it would proceed to greet the Roman populace as they passed, and then return to the shop: for several years it was remarkable for the constancy of its attendance. The owner of another shoemaker's shop in the neighborhood, in a sudden fit of anger killed the bird, enraged, as he would have had it appear, because with its ordure it had soiled some shoes of his. Upon this, there was such rage manifested by the multitude that he was at once driven from that part of the city, and soon after put to death. The funeral, too, of the bird was celebrated with almost endless obsequies; the body was placed upon a litter carried upon the shoulders of two Aethiopians, preceded by a piper, and borne to the pile with garlands of every size and description ...

There is also a chapter in the *Natural History* about the animals which were used to tell the fortune and foresee the future. Pliny stated that soothsaying “*from the bird’s flying is considered in Rome as a separate art, even possessing a separate group of priests, treated by the others as the prominent ones*”. It has been the class of augurs. Some Etruscan priests (*haruspices*) resided in the city as well. They told the fortune from the animals’ entrails, including birds. The soothsaying from the ritual chicken feeding was another common habit to predict the future. Before marching off for the military expedition the birds were kept in cages and fed with grain. If they did not want to eat, it meant a lack of fortune, but if they ate greedily – it was good sign. One can easily imagine that this kind of fortune-telling did not determine the future events, but it was used, in fact, by various clerks or commanders to justify their decisions, to initiate a battle or sign a peace.

Cicero in his treaty “On divination” (*O wróżbiarstwie*) (44 AC) also mentioned about fortune-telling from the behavior and entrails of the birds. He censured, however, these rituals severely and pointed out a rational and scientific explanation of some phenomena. He considered fortune-telling as a unaccepted superstition in an illuminated society and became angry, because “*all kings, all tribes and all nations tell fortune from the birds. Not even mentioning the ordinarily ignorance as the most often occurring phenomenon of that kind!*”

Svetonius in his “Life of Twelve Caesars” (*Żywoty Cezarów*) described Octavian August, whose victory was predicted by the eagles which symbolized the main Roman god – Jupiter:

“When the forces of the triumvirs were assembled at Bolonia, an eagle that had perched upon his tent made a dash at two ravens, which attacked it on either side, and struck them to the ground. From this the whole army inferred that there would one day be discord among the colleagues, as actually came to pass, and divined its result”.

Tacitus named eagles the Roman birds:

“*Meantime eight eagles appeared – the most splendid sign – which headed towards the forest and set there. The commander noticed them and shouted: ‘Go, follow the traces of the Roman birds, which are the proper protective goats of our legions!’*”

The legend of founding the city of Rome was connected with the divination from the birds flying. It says that Amulius, king of the city of Alba Longa, expelled his elder brother Numitor, when his niece Rea Sylwia became pregnant at the instance of Mars. The jealous king, being afraid to lose his power, ordered to kill her and the newborn sons: Romulus and Remus. The twins were dropped to the Tiber did not die, however, and were fed by she-wolf and woodpecker, the symbol of Mars, which was bringing them fruits and berries. The brothers decided to begin a town in the place where they were found, and the birds determined who of the brothers should conduct the proper ritual ceremonies.

The history of Rome is also combined with other birds – geese. In the year of 390 BC, they alarmed sleeping defenders of the last unconquerable fortress in the town – Capitol, when the Celtic Gauls were approaching to it. After the victorious battle and defeating the enemy, one of the geese was carried along the city streets in a litter to celebrate this great success.

Extremely important work was composed, most probably, by Apicius (1st century AB), entitled “On the culinary art” (*O sztuce kulinarnej*). He included not only the receipts, but also important information about the contemporary existing species. He presented in his book the dishes made of crane, duck, goose, partridge, turtle dove, ring- dove, pigeons, but also sauces made of fieldfare or wagtail:

The partridge is scalded with its feathers, and while wet the feathers are taken off; the hair singed it is then cooked in its own juice braised and when done will not be hard if care is taken to baste it. Should it remain hard if it is old you must continue to cook it until it is tender.

Take out remove entrails, clean wash and dress the bird and parboil it in water with salt and dill. Next prepare turnips and cook them in water which is to be squeezed out. Take them out of the pot and wash them again. And put into a sauce pan the duck with oil, broth, a bunch of leeks and coriander; the turnips cut into small pieces; these put on top of the duck in order to finish cooking. When half done, to give it color, add reduced must. The sauce is prepared separately: pepper, cumin, coriander, laser root moistened with vinegar and diluted with its own broth of the fowl; bring this to a boiling point, thicken with roux. In a deep dish arrange the duck on top of the turnips strain the sauce over it sprinkle with pepper and serve.



European greenfinch



White wagtail



European goldfinch



European turtle dove



Fieldfare



Grey partridge

Other Ancient sources stated that people consumed sparrows, fly-catchers, starlings, goldfinches, and less frequently cuckoos, green-finches, blackbirds and crows (jays, magpies, ravens) too.

The dishes made of birds were served at the table of Roman aristocrats, what can be proved by the work *Dinner of Trimalchio*, composed by the famous roman Petronius (27-66 BC):

A tray followed them, upon which was served a wild boar of immense size, wearing a liberty cap upon its head, and from its tusks hung two little baskets of woven palm fibre, one of which contained Syrian dates, the other, Theban. Around it hung little suckling pigs made from pastry, signifying that this was a brood-sow with her pigs at suck. It turned out that these were souvenirs intended to be taken home. When it came to carving the boar, our old friend Carver, who had carved the capons, did not appear, but in his place a great bearded giant, with bands around his legs, and wearing a short hunting cape in which a design was woven. Drawing his hunting-knife, he plunged it fiercely into the boar's side, and some thrushes flew out of the gash. Fowlers, ready with their rods, caught them in a moment, as they fluttered around the room and Trimalchio ordered one to each guest, remarking, "Notice what fine acorns this forest-bred boar fed on", and as he spoke, some slaves removed the little baskets from the tusks and divided the Syrian and Theban dates equally among the diners.

Thrushes made of pastry and stuffed with nuts and raisins, quinces with spines sticking out so that they looked like sea-urchins".

One can ask a question where were these birds, then served during elegant suppers, taken from? The answer can be found in an agronomic treaty of Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BC) entitled *Rerum rusticarum libri tres* (On the village farm). The author described in one of the books the chicken-farming, as well as that of wild animals and fish. As one can suppose, many information regarding the birds-farming was based on property of Marcus Seius in the vicinity of Ostia. This business was organized in his farm in rather large scale, what can be somehow compared to contemporary industrial farms.

One of the most important source has been the *Edict of Diocletian on prices of the goods for sale* (*Dictum Diocletiani de pretiis rerum venalium*), proclaimed in 301 AC, by which ordered to established the official price of many goods in order to limit the negative effects of inflation. Among many listed here goods one can also find the birds: *fed pheasant – 250 denarius; wild pheasant – 125 denarius; 10 thrushes – 60 denarius; 10 wild goldfinches – 20 denarius* (one can also find their the prices of goose, chickens, partridges, turtle doves, pigeons, ducks, jarzabka, wagtails, sparrows, peacocks, quails and starlings), but also *goose plumage– 1 libra (0,327 l) – 100 denarius, one peacock's feather – 4 denarius; griffon's plumage – 25 pieces – 6 denarius.*

Birds in medieval Poland

Christianity, introduced to Poland in 966, meant also a gradual acceptance of rich Christian symbols in which the representations of plants and animals dominated, as well as all kinds of hybrids and legendary creatures. But the origins of Christian symbols can be traced as early as the Ancient Times and were closely connected with an anonymous Greek treaty known as *Physiologus*, composed possibly between 2nd and 4th century AC in Alexandria. It contains the description of many plants and animals, both real and legendary (e.g. unicorn, basilisk), which were combined with moral comments and presentation of most important principles of Christian faith. Among birds, characterized in *Physiologus* one can find, e.g. tawny owl, eagle, hoopoe, partridges, crows, pigeon, woodpecker and stork.

About the woodpecker

[1] A Woodpecker is a smart bird, and diversity of its colors means a variety of devil's forms. A woodpecker arrives to coppice, climbs on tree, pecks with its beak and listens by its ear. When a tree is dry and without pith, makes a hollow scooped out in a tree trunk, walks into it and nests. But when the tree is strong and has a pith, the woodpecker immediately leaves it and looks for another one.

[2] the devil, in a similar way, climbs on tree; it is on people, striking with the arrows of corruption and listening by his ear. When a man is dry or deaf and with a heart of stone, the devil jumps on him/her and nests. But the conditions exist – man is strong and with his/her heart in the right place – the devil leaves him/her immediately and tries to approach to another coppice.

Correctly *Physiologus* described the woodpecker.



Another, extremely important work was composed by Hugh of Folieto between 1132 and 1152, and called *Aviarium*, it is a treaty on the birds. Many copies of this treaty have survived to present times. Similarly to *Physiologus*, also in this work the author often repeated allegories, moral commentaries, additionally the examples of the birds depicted the rules of monastic life.

About the crane

When the cranes start their long journey, they form themselves like the letter “V” They fly up in a high altitude, in order to observe better, where they want to move. The one who leads the flock, encourages the others with its voice. And when it wheezed, another replaces the leader. During the night they divide themselves in guards and alternately keep the order in night-watching, holding in a risen paw a little stone, by which they warn the sleeping. The obligation of night-watching is announced by a scream.

Both of these works, *Physiologus* and *Aviarium*, increased on composition of plentiful beasts' registers, which included also the description of animals supplemented with commentaries. Every new text contained the description of a larger number of animals, both actually existing and legendary, in which real people solidly believed. Some of these creatures were often presented in arts (painting and architecture) and heraldic.

The eagle should be treated as a symbol of power and governing in the period before the heraldic customs were introduced. Soon after it was shaped according to heraldic style and became a coat of arms in the 13th century. The white eagle, crowned and placed on a heraldic shield as an emblem of medieval Kingdom of Poland, appeared for first time in the royal seal of Przemysław II in 1295.

The white eagle is closely related to the legend of three brothers: Lech, Czech and Rus, written in the Chronicle of Greater Poland (*Kronika Wielkopolska*), composed at the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century. It contains the description of the historical events from the legendary period to 1273. This story was published in many versions so far:

Many long months passed by already, since the brother's Slavonic tribes left their original abodes, seeking for the new places to live for themselves and their belongings.

The detachment on horseback was headed by the leaders of the tribes, three brothers: Lech, Czech and Rus.

The entire tribe crossed over a small river in midday, which with its almost silver ribbon linked a number of small and picturesque lakes, glimmered among trees on left and right sides. The wilderness was becoming more sparse and finally it ended, like cut down with an axe.

A beautiful and vast valley appeared in front of the marching brother's eyes, and some not so high hills towered its center, surrounded by few small lakes. The huge and old oak stood on the top of the highest hill. Lech's eyes were almost smiling when he saw this beautiful place and stopped his horse unconsciously.

Suddenly, from the side of the most closely located lake, a bird with silver feathers went up. It was a huge eagle, carrying prey in its claws, and made a wide circle over the single oak on that hill, and set down on the top of it welcomed with happy chirp of young birds. Rus grabbed the bow and wanted to rush on the horse in its direction, but Lech put his palm calmly on the reins and said:

- Wait for me, brother! here God Almighty, Thunderer and Omniscient, Światowid, gave us his visible sign. I accept this white eagle as an emblem of my people, and around this oak I will erect my ducal castle and name it after the eagle's nest Gniezno.



Great bustard



Northern lapwing



Eurasian bittern



Snow bunting



Common nightingale



Common linnet

The birds in medieval Poland, a country famous for its multitude of animals, were used during the big hunts. Already the medieval chronicler Anonymous Gallus mentioned that king Boleslaus the Brave invited them to his court: *fowlers and hunters from most parts of the world, who according to their skills, hunted for various kind of birds and animals; every day the four-footed as well as birds of each species were served on his table.*

As one of the most interesting medieval sources describing the methods of hunting with birds and for birds, as well as another kind of their use, one can include a 16th century treaty “Bird’s Hunting” (*Myślistwo ptasze*) written by M. Cygański and an 18th century work “Natural History of Polish Land ... is a short collection of animals, plants and minerals existing in Poland and Lithuania, collected from trustworthy authors” (*Historya naturalna kraju Polskiego ... czyli zbiór krótki zwierząt, roślin i minerałów znajdujących się w Polsce i Litwie, zebrany z pisarzów godnych wiary*) by S.P. Ładowski.

The authors of these works stated that most often while hunting for little game, eagles, falcon peregrine, sakers, hawks and sparrow-hawks were used. The owls were usually used as a “decoy” – they were kept in a cage or attached to a tree branch in order to provoke other birds to attack.

Some species of birds were admired because of their particularly tasty meat. People constantly hunted bustards, wood grouse, black grouse, hazel grouse, partridges, quails, fieldfares and wild geese. These last ones have been especially well treated, because apart from its more tasty meat, compared to domestic geese, wild geese also provided fat and feathers. Besides, the nobility as well as village inhabitants, were interested in some other species, like bittern, lapwings, wood-cocks, snipes, various kinds of plovers and snowdrops.

People hunted for the cranes because of their meat and feathers. According to the old proverb “*Feathers for the hut, and meat on the table, such are the profits of a crane for the all*”. Similarly, the herons were kept because of their white and gray feathers.

It seems that the storks may have been the only bird which were not consumed or served on the tables. Stork was treated as a “suspicious” bird, because it ate “obscene” food: reptiles, amphibians, shellfish and insects. The consumption of this bird was, in fact, prohibited by Pope Zacharias in the 8th century.

Some of singing birds – siskins, golden orioles, skylarks and chaffinches - were captured to eat or for fun. Blackbirds, nightingales and linnets were kept in cages to sing and amuse the house inhabitants.

Some other species were also used for medical reasons. Hoopoe, whose meat was not considered as an excellent and tasty one, was consumed in special cases: “*it is eaten ... when one suffers with colic, and the wings are put on a head because they can heal from headache*”. However, the meat of rook “*was consumed by ordinary people; the boiled rook’s brain cured the headache*”.

The archaeologists also find another connection between men and birds. The bird’s bones were used, for example, for some kind of ornaments (necklaces, brooch), as well as simply music instruments (fifes).

Rybitwy; spoon; wood; MPPL.





Czacz; easter egg; clay, glass; MAP.



Dzieskanowice; easter egg; clay, glass; MPPL.

Kraków-Nowa Huta Mogiła; comb; bone; MAK.



Kraków-Nowa Huta Mogiła; comb; bone; MAK.

Gniezno; handgrip of a walking-stick; bone; MPPP.



Rudaw; pendant; clay; MOT.



Perkowo; fitting; bronze, gold; MAP.



Ostrów Tumski; plaque (copy); bronze; MPPL.

Unknown settlement; coin of Boleslaus the Brave (copy); MPPP.



Gralewo; coin of Wladislaus Jagellon;
silver; MAP.



Gralewo; coin of John I Albrecht;
silver; MAP.



Gralewo; coin of Louis II Jagellonides;
silver; MAP.



Gniezno; tile, bird in border; clay; MPPP.

Gniezno; tile, walking eagle; clay; MPPP.





Łąd; tile; eagle; clay; MAP.

**Gniezno; tile, in contrasting form from the top:
lion-bear, gryphon-eagle; clay; MPPP.**





Jankowo Dolne; stove tile, Pelican feeding its young on tree;
clay, glaze; MPPP.



Jankowo Dolne; stove tile, Pelican feeding its young on tree;
clay, glaze; MPPP.



Jankowo Dolne; stove tile, of arms: White Eagle (without crown);
clay, glaze; MPPP.



Pobiedziska; stove tile with eagle; clay, glaze; MAP.



Gniezno; stove tile, Coat of arms: White Eagle; clay, glaze; MPPP.



Gniezno; stove tile, Coat of arms: rooster (?); clay, glaze; MPPP.



Gniezno; stove tile with motif of the King hunting with a hawk;
clay, glaze; MPPP.



Gniezno; stove tile, Unicorn and tree with birds;
clay, glaze; MPPP.



Gniezno; stove tile, Adam naming the creatures in Paradise; clay; MPPP.

Birds Gallery



Black tern



Black-necked grebe



Common snipe



Common cuckoo



Common kingfisher



Eurasian penduline tit



Hoopoe



European crested tit



Common firecrest



Tufted duck



Common goldeneye



Great crested grebe



Grey heron



Black stork



Common crane



White-tailed eagle



Long-eared owl



Little owl



Red-backed shrike



Black-winged stilt



Ortolan bunting



Yellowhammer



Bluethroat



Eurasian wryneck



Spotted redshank



Green sandpiper



Northern shoveler



Common greenshank



Crested lark



White wagtail

Na skrzydłach przeszłości On wings of the past

Motywy ptaków na zabytkach archeologicznych z ziem polskich
(XI w. p.n.e. - XVII w. n.e.)

The motives of the birds in the archaeological relicts in the Polish lands
(11th cent. BC - 17th cent. AC)



WYSTAWA lipiec/july – wrzesień/september 2008

Muzeum Archeologiczne w Poznaniu / Poznań Archaeological Museum

Pałac Górków, wodna 27

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Salamandra
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Cracow Archaeological Museum – (MAK)

Poznań Archaeological Museum – (MAP)

The Koszalin Museum – (MK)

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Museum of the First Piasts in Lednica – (MPPL)

Museum of the Origins of the Polish State in Gniezno – (MPPP)

The Górk Castle Museum in Szamotuły – (MZGS)

The Zamość Museum – (MZZ)

The State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw – (PMA)



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