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Preserving Our Intangible Heritage; Lessons Learned from a Quarter Century of American Efforts

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The 2010 recognition of falconry as a world intangible heritage places increased focus on both the need for and the opportunity to preserve the tangible portion of that heritage, our physical history. The UNESCO designation bears with it requirements for continuing preservation of the heritage which thence can be used to enhance local archiving efforts. Similarly, undertaking such activities in countries desirous of enrolment under the designation should prove useful in helping secure acceptance of such application.

For the past quarter century The Archives of Falconry, as one program within The Peregrine Fund in the United States, has conducted a unique, active role in collecting and preserving the physical evidence of our history, first of the Americas but more recently of falconry worldwide. This presentation describes experience accrued in that quarter century in order to assist falconer groups elsewhere to establish their own historical preservation programs, whether in response to UNESCO designation or to enhance acceptance for such designation.

Included are lessons learned pertaining to the orientation, personnel, facilities, archival conservation standards, falconer support and funding. Hopefully, this information will encourage efforts to preserve the history of the entirety of our cultural heritage, worldwide.

Creation of the Middle East Falconry Archive, a Unique Documentary Heritage

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The wealth of Middle Eastern manuscripts on falconry is still largely untapped. Many texts remain to be (re) discovered, or at least sufficiently appreciated. To address this issue, the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage has decided to create, for the first time in history, a documentary archive – the Middle East Falconry Archive-, where faithful facsimiles of all manuscripts on falconry in Arab scripts will be gathered. Thus, not only will the original manuscripts be preserved, but they will also become accessible reference works

from all those interested in falconry. For the first stage of the project, ADACH has selected 17 manuscripts, related to Al-Ghitrif Al-Ghassani's work, the oldest surviving Arab treatise on falconry. Written in the 8th century AD, it quickly became the most important source for subsequent works, with many of the Arabic falconry treatises written in later centuries containing references to this work, e.g. Al-Asadi's Al-Jamhara fi l-Bayzara, Kushajim's Kitab al-Masayidwal-Matarid, and IbnMangli's Uns al-Mala bi-Wahsh al-Fala. It also greatly influence European treatises through its Latin translation (together with the Kitab al-Mutawakkili, a 9th century treatise) known as Moamin, which was commissioned in 1240 AD by the Emperor Frederick II and quickly spread across Europe. So far, four manuscripts from the Bibliotheque Nationale de France have been reproduced.

The Falconry Heritage Trust

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The Falconry heritage Trust (FHT) was established in 2004. This organisation is a Charity, registered in the UK under Nr. 1125033 with a global coverage. The main purpose of the charity is to make all interesting artefacts on the history of falconry accessible globally on-line (so-called Virtual Falconry Museum). Guidance of the Charity is provided by a Board of Directors including: Dr. Nick Fox, Mark Upton, Kent Carnie, Frank Bond, Paul Beecroft, Jose Manuel Rodriguez-Villa, Nick Havemann-Matt and David Fox. The FHT has only one part-time paid employee – an archivist (Jevgeni Shergalin since 2005). For the last 6 years FHT has accumulated about 9000 images of falconry in 75 countries. Some of them are old and unique. Unfortunately the majority of them cannot be uploaded on the FHT web-site due to copyright issues. Since 2010 the program of FHT grants was launched. Applicants from 6 countries (Turkey, Croatia, Nepal, UK, Turkey, Ukraine, Germany) have already received support in their studies.

In 2001 the FHT web-site was updated and renovated: www.falconryheritage.com. In February 2011 the FHT has made about 1000 scanned images of covers and table of contents of non-English books in the Archives of Falconry in Boise, Idaho, USA which will be uploaded at the beginning of 2012.

Many people have voluntarily helped us for last 7 years: especially Roger and Mark Upton, David Horobin, Kris Ulens, Kenyon Gibson, Alan Gates, Mehdi Hamedi, Dogan Simit, Turan Basri, Alkesandr Abuladze, Bakyt Karnakbayev and Tula Stapert. The FHT needs a wider promotion, Any assistance is appreciated and welcome. Proper work is possible only with a wide involvement of all falconers throughout the world.

Trapping and Trading in the 17th century

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For centuries The Netherlands was the hub for European falconry, in particular the village “Valkenswaard”. In the 17th and 18th century it became the vogue for kings and noblemen to indulge in falconry. In every royal household, falconry was practiced, preferably with falconers from “Valkenswaard”. The European royals not involved in falconry did not matter in high society circles. The trend of royals indulging in falconry caused a major increase in the demand for Peregrine falcons.

The predominantly poor inhabitants of “Valkenswaard” gratefully used the situation to develop a trapping technique for migrating Peregrine falcons. Through contacts with the Danish king, the people of “Valkenswaard” also obtained a permit to trap Geer falcons on Iceland and in Scandinavia. Not only were the falconers from “Valkenswaard” skilled trappers, they were also capable craftsmen in developing supplies like hoods, bells and more.

In addition to trapping and developing supplies, the “Valkenswaard” falconers also trained their birds. It is this combination of skills that made them preferred master falconers to the European royal courts. This enabled the falconers to trade trained falcons for a lot of money and to exhibit the art of hunting with falcons throughout Europe.

In European trapping traditions two schools can be distinguished: the Scottish and the Dutch school. The Scottish school collected young falcons from their nests while the Dutch school was known for catching young and already hunting peregrine falcons. It was these wild caught falcons that were the favoured birds on the market. Through this, the Dutch school with its outstanding trapping technique became famous. The technique was especially applied in “Valkenswaard” and surrounding areas where most falcons were caught during the Fall.

Research on the Books of Japanese Falconry from the 13th-16th century

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According to Nihon Shoki (A.D.720) the first historical record composed in Japan, falconry was established in Japan during the reign of Emperor Nintoku (A.D. 355). In the past, falconry was practiced among the ruling class members including the Emperor, aristocrats and shoguns. They not only used the act of falconry to hunt animals, but also actively employed it as a ritual for symbolising their power or as a form of art. As a result, numerous schools of falconry were established on the basis of each group’s artistic awareness. For example, from the 13th century to the 16th century, the SAIONJI and the JIMYIN were established within the aristocratic society, while the SUWA and the UTSNOMIYA were established within the warrior society. Those involved in these schools (falconers, aristocrats, warriors and scholars) produced abundant texts called Japanese falconry books as tools for demonstrating their authority. Recorded in these texts, which appear to be literary work, are stories and episodes that show each school’s characteristics as well as Japanese waka poems about falcons.

This report introduces books of Japanese falconry that functioned as important tools for supporting falconry culture in Japan. This introduction will explain the perspectives of Japanese people who perceive falconry as a form of art or literature.

Falconry in Italy throughout the Centuries

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Falconry, the art of hunting with birds of prey, is a hunting practice that has ancient roots and is imbued with symbolic meanings and cultural high, as demonstrated by the recent recognition by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage.

The hawk, much more than a mere tool and a simple hunting weapon, leaning on the gloved fist of the falconer becomes the link between earth and sky, between the microcosm and the macrocosm of human affairs that is at the top, hidden anticipated by the sublime flight of the predator, as of the prey.

This research is presented as a journey through the ancient history of falconry in the various regions of Italy: from the Longobardi in the High Middle Ages, to the medieval towns of Tuscony with the great masters of literature such as Dannte Aligheri, to Frederick II, a key figure for the spread of arab culture in the Western world, up to the golden age of falconry at the courts of Sforza and Gonzaga.

It is a trip among suggestions and valuable manuscripts of famous literary works, lavish residences for hunting and magnificent frescoes of falconry scenes, to demonstrate how falconry wasn't only a pastime and a moment of leisure, but a noble exercise of the body and mind, a preparation to the art of governing and elevation of human beings.