



Falconry as Part of World Heritage

(Hungarian proposal for the Unesco Committee)

Some human activities have a history of several thousand years and the changes these activities undergo in the modern age furthermore the development justify that these activities should enjoy the highest protection, namely to be protected as world heritage thus preserving them for the present and for the future generations.

Falconry is one of these activities. Humans were amazed by the way of life and hunting style of predator birds from the very beginning. The dazzling attack of the falcon, when the bird dives with a speed over 300 km/hour at the prey or the strength of eagles which enables them to kill a wolf hit the fancy. Soaring high in the sky gave the impression of freedom and the daring birds became symbols of knightly virtues. What is there behind this passion spanning thousands of years?

To answer this question here is a quote from the chapter discussing falconry of the book entitled „Equestrian nation”:

„...what is there beyond prey acquisition can be understood only by those who were touched by this experience. Those who have already galloped freely in the wide fields or through the forests on the back of a good horse ... or who have already flown their falcon in the blue of the sky and experienced the feeling comparable to nothing else meant by the connection between a hardly visible point in the sky, the falcon and the falconer know the answer. This longing knows no borders and eras, origins, religion, nationality or age of life. It can touch anyone at any time, let it be young or old, man or woman ...”



Hunting peregrine

Falconry is an ancient, approximately five thousand years old hunting method which has by now surpassed its original food getting role and developed into a complex cultural and tradition preservation activity.

The origins of falconry, like of many other traditions, go back to the East. Birds of prey were worshipped in the ancient Egypt in the form of the Horuses (Gods) appearing in the shape of peregrine falcons. Human societies always had special respect for birds of prey. Kings and

rulers often chose such birds as their heraldic animal - it is enough to think of the biggest European dynasties, like the Romanovs giving a series of tsars to Russia, the Polish Piasts or the Habsburgs. All of these dynasties have the eagle as their heraldic animal and tradition is so strong that the coat of arms remained the coat of arms of the state even after the political changes!

We, Hungarians have an even stronger relationship with falconry. It is a well-known fact that the birth of Álmos, father of Prince Arpad, founder of the state, is related to the Turul myth. According to the legend Álmos' mother (Emese) was made pregnant by a hawk (Turul) in her dream.



Turul representation from the Nagyszentmiklós treasure

The Turul, the sacred bird of ancient Hungarians, whose picture illustrated the shield and flag of Attila, the Hunnish sovereign, was the best hawking bird of the age and can be identified as the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug altaicus Menzbier*), a species still alive. The Árpád Dynasty ruled Hungary for almost five hundred years thus the Turul remained one of the strongest national symbols of today's Hungarians. The falcon is a recurring basic motive of the various archeological finds, its original and stylized figure can be found on dishes, shields and ornamented metal cover plates of leather bags worn by Hungarian tribesmen on their belts alike.



Falconer on horseback from the IX.th century

Our burial customs also bear a relation to falconry as not only horses but quite often falcons were also buried together with the warrior.

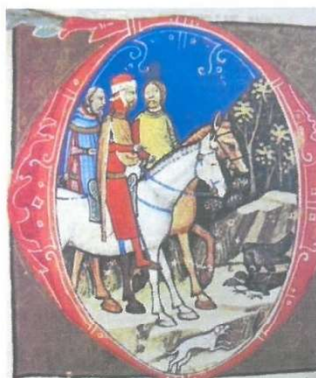
Falconry thus had a sacral role in the ancient Hungarian history, however, the prey acquisition hunting function was equally important. It was part of the military training and of exercise in times of peace. The mass participation at hunts on horseback with falcons, adaptation to the unpredictable features of the terrain, overcoming the obstacles, directing the hunting team, the performance of the horses equaled to a military exercise.

When the Hungarians arrived to the Carpathian Basin they had a developed falconry culture as proved by several linguistic relics and material artifacts.



Turul motiv

A number of geographic names refer to the dwellings of ancient royal falconers: Kerecsend, Kelecsény, Szokolya, Solymár, Solyomkő, Madaras, etc. Early pictures also contain evidence of this, like the initial from the Picture Chronicle of Vienna (1358). In this picture Prince Álmos, the younger brother of Könyves Kálmán King of Hungary, has a crow slaughtered at the Castle of Csőr.



Crow hunting at the XI.th century by a Hungarian prince

The dinar of Béla IV shows a falconer on horseback which confirms that falconry played an important role in those days.

Not only kings but also the aristocrats, lesser nobility, even the dignitaries of the church were passionate falconers, to such a degree that the Council of Buda held in 1279 sanctioned the hawking monks because they neglected the church service for their passion.

The special protection of falcon nests was often mentioned in deeds, estate purchase documents.

During the rule of the Anjou kings, a falconry school was operated the compendium of which was written by Magyar László, the grand falconer of King Lajos the Great. Unfortunately no copy of this has been found but the most important western literature referred to it as a basic work for hundreds of years ...

The importance of falconry did not diminish in the time of Sigismund of Luxembourg either, who, being the Holy Roman emperor, introduced Western European effects into Hungarian falconry.



Falconry in the middle ages

Falconry appears in Hungarian poetry quite early. The well-known Renaissance poet of the age of King Matthias, Janus Pannonius, bequeathed to us three poems about falconry.



Sculpture of a sitting falconer on the Matthias Fountain in Buda Castle

Falcons were also given as a gift, donation or wedding present. One can imagine the value of a trained falcon if we recall the generous gesture of Lajos II who cancelled the tax debt of 40,000 gold coins of the manager of the revenues of the Bishop of Eger in exchange of a single well-trained falcon.



Tapestry from the 16th century, Queen Mary, wife to Lajos II hunts with falcon

The fights at the borderland in the Turkish times brought not only struggle and sufferings, but a lively contact developed with the Balkan and Asia Minor as well as with Poland and Western Europe.

At those times the Hungarian falcons were on high demand in these countries. Everybody wanted Hungarian falcons from Belgium to Turkey, there was a fowler in every noble

household in Hungary. Giving gifts became a type of taxation in Transylvania called “falconagium” (falcon tax) which was paid regularly.



Falcon on a coat of armes (noble family Telegdi)

The most famous renaissance Hungarian poet, Balassi Bálint, chose the falcons, falconry as the subject of a number of poems whether it was about an analogy of love or a warrior's exemplary conduct. The tender confession below reflects the devoted love of the poet who had an adventurous life:

*„Now your little falcon
Your beloved bird,
Which you carried on your arm,
And kept on a leg string,
embroidered with gold and
Decorated with corals.”*



Bálint de Balassy portrait

The members of the reigning Rákóczi dynasty were also avid falconers. The diary of Rákóczi László is a valuable document of the era. In this diary he describes that during his constant travels from Poland to Transylvania he always found a few days or just a few hours in between the fights to devote to his passion. „ (October 9, 1653) ...I left Sáros for Szerencs ...Today I had a rabbit slaughtered. No.1.... (August 28, 1654)...I went to the field to have some fun and had my bird catch partridges No. 2., quails 3.... ”



Falconry between the battle breaks

As of the 18th century, when fire-arms were perfected, falconry lost somewhat of its popularity but it survived in the later ages as well.

Between the two World Wars court falconry operated at Gödöllő and the still existing Association of Hungarian Falconers was established in 1939.



Logo of the Hungarian Falconers Club

The birth of the association is hallmarked by famous names, like Lelovich György of Galánta who revived classic falconry in Europe or Bástyai Loránt who contributed to the development with his literary work.



Lóránt de Bástyai after a successful heron hunt

Falconry in contemporary Hungary, similarly to the other European countries, has transformed into a complex cultural activity. It primarily preserves one of the most ancient types of hunting: hunting with predator birds. It preserves the technical skills, technical elements and culture thereof.

In addition to the passion of hunting, falconry is such a physical and mental activity refreshing spirit and body alike, which today's people need more than our ancestors. The spirit and thoughts of the falconer soar together with the bird thus experiencing the unlimited freedom and the falconer detaches himself from the everyday troubles and problems, even if only for a short time...



Attecking peregrine

Every modern constitution gives priority to the right of humans to a healthy environment and what could better serve this than falconry.

The importance of the environment conscious education and of spreading the attitude focusing on nature protection cannot be emphasized enough.



Together with enquirers

We shall grab every possibility to put an end to the global destruction of nature and to preserve our natural treasures. Falconry is an excellent possibility for this. The falconer not only hunts, but is also interested in preserving the natural resources, in protecting the landscape and in preserving the healthy environment. The falconer is also interested in the survival of the hunted species.

Nowadays falconry is one of the most important activities all over the world which helps in keeping the link between mankind and nature alive, in promoting coexistence and identification with nature and in preserving the living tradition.

Universal science also needs the results of falconry.

The breeding methods for birds of prey were developed by falconers. In case of an unforeseen crisis, several dozen Hungarian breeders can provide new generations to replace the natural peregrine falcon population...



Breded goshawk

It was falconers who described the lifestyle, feeding habits, reproduction of falcons, who discovered their illnesses and developed treatments. This is a priceless contribution to global

science! Hungarian falconers have participated for decades in the programs aiming at the protection of birds of prey, in the guarding of nests and rescuing nestlings.



Nest guarding at Pilis Mountains

In Hungary, based on historic traditions, a new environment friendly activity is taking shape, namely ecological protection with falconry. Earlier, in the '950ies, the Hortobágy and Kiskuság fishing lakes were successfully protected with this method. Today a modern, extended form of this has revived. Falconers provide pest control services at airports, for the fishing lakes, in vineyards.

A permanent falconry service is responsible for keeping birds away from the Budapest Ferihegy International Airport thus preventing airborne accidents and giving a good example for the cooperation of living tradition with modern safety engineering. Falconry here replaces a number of environment polluting technologies and actively contributes to the protection of the environment.



Bird alarm at the airport

Hunters and wildlife managers always hunted the birds of prey as they were considered a rivaling group and this did not stop fully after the birds of prey were declared to be endangered species. Mostly due to the educational activity of falconers, the number of raptors killed reduced to a minimum level thus falconry contributes to the protection of nature also by this.

The cultural educational presentations where the public can meet the birds of prey personally for the first time and can watch their amazing flight, can admire their work and can learn to respect and love them are of great importance. Nothing is more suitable for changing the

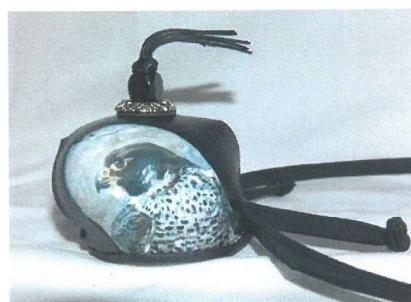
previously general negative opinion as meeting the raptors personally, in professionally controlled environment. In the sixties, the Hungarian delegation lead by Lelovich György depicted the classical equestrian falconry in live historic images in Western Europe and also participated at the Nagyvazsonyi Equestrian Games of international fame for years. Today there is a permanent exhibition in the Visegrád Castle as part of the historic images.

Applied arts and figurative arts creating material values are human activities worth to be preserved. Falconry preserved the ancient art and motives for today's people, which made and make the human environment nicer, friendlier and more aesthetical.



Falconers bag from the Hungarian renaissance

Cap makers, falconry bag makers, knife makers, glove makers created a live artisan activity preserving the original forms. This activity is of international importance and, in addition to its practical use, it undertakes an important role in the preservation of traditions. The hoods and bags - designed, made and decorated by hand - preserving their original functions are works of art and provide lasting aesthetic pleasure.



Painted falcon hood

Today when most of the ancient crafts died out, the craftsmen and artists manufacturing products for falconry maintain the rarest but living ancient craft thus preserving this valuable heritage for the world!



Falconer bodkin

The bird of prey and the falconer are recurring motives of literature and art.

Experience shows that if a topic dies out it will sooner or later disappear also from art making art poorer and this also justifies preservation as cultural heritage.



Falconers motif from Transilvania

The Hungarian falconry literature is remarkable. Excellent works were published as early as the 1840ies. „*Szárnyas vadászmesterek*” and „*From Blossom Time to Autumn Frost*” are the works of Homoki-Nagy István. Bástyai Loránt’s book „*Vadmadárból vadászmadár*” (1955) is a basic work. Lelovich György wrote his books one after the other starting from the 60ies: „*Encyclopedia of falconry*”, „*Monograph of the hawk*”, „*The Falconer’s Life*”, „*I was Falconer at Hortobágy*”. A number of famous foreign professional books were translated into Hungarian, like the world famous work of Taymur „*Pamphlet about Falconry*” or the great book of the British Gilbert Blaine but also the three volumes of Planiol’s „*Falconry*”.

Hungary was leading also in the film industry in the sense that it was the first country where falconry appeared in cinematographic art: it had an episode role before the World War II but was an independent theme for films in the 1950ies and 60ies. Falconry appears also in the films of Homoki-Nagy István, a world famous director of films on nature, whose films won prizes at Cannes.

Homoki, a pioneer of nature photography in international relations, contributed to the Hungarian and international cinematographic art with such films as the „*From Blossom Time to Autumn Frost*”, „*Buddies*”, „*On Hills and in the Valleys*”, „*The Story of a Saker Falcon*”, „*Kingdom on the Water*”. Hárs Mihály’s film entitled „*Winter in the Forest*” shall also be mentioned here.

Gáll István’s work „*The Falcons*” which revokes the life at the one-time Falconry in Hortobágy is a unique and significant film. When talking about global values which should be protected as world heritage, then this should not be forgotten about either.

Falconry plays an important role also in getting acquainted with other cultures and deepening the friendship between nations. The Hungarian Falconry Association has organized the international meetings of falconers since 1986. These are excellent forums where the different cultures of the various nations can meet. Visitors come from Japan to the United States to hunt together, to learn about each other’s different habits, methods and share the useful experience. The meetings are at the same time occasions for giving scientific lectures and organizing professional programs. In the frame of the international meeting the IAF conference was also held in Hungary.



Falconers from foreign countries

It is of great importance that in Hungary – mostly due to the consistent work over several decades – falconry has a stable legal framework and two acts (the act on hunting and the act on nature protection) regulate it. Nevertheless, in respect of the enforcement of the acts there are still a few problems to be solved.

All this is however not evident everywhere and for everybody. There are movements which - mostly because of lack of information - fail to realize the far-reaching values of an activity and fight against it with blind consistency. There are voices in the branches of green movements, among the otherwise reputable animal protection organizations, which urge that falconry be banned in Hungary. Luckily, this is not yet the case in Hungary but in light of the European trend, we shall be preparing for it.

In addition to the cultural values of falconry, the moral side of the activity should also be strengthened.

Contemporary falconry, preserving the noble traditions, applies such methods and techniques which comply with the humane principles and take into consideration the basic ethical norms, the animal-friendly solutions. The wild animals have a fair chance to escape, injuries are minimal, practically an activity repeated thousand times in each second in nature is reproduced.

To sum it up, falconry has developed into such a complex cultural activity which saves for the present day people the form closest to nature of the most ancient craft, hunting and practices it even today.

Quill hunting is the most humane hunting method. It got closely interlinked with nature and environment protection, ornithology, applied and figurative arts, literature and cinematographic art furthermore with education during its history, having a positive impact thereon.

Falconry maintains the closest living bond with nature at a high level, serves the spiritual and physical development, mental regeneration of humans furthermore widely and efficiently promotes the development of an environment conscious, nature-friendly approach which plays a crucial role in the survival of mankind. The cultural world heritage should not renounce the values which falconry represents!



Peregrine portrait

Hungarian Falconers Club 2008