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## Hawking

HAWKING ACCOUTREMENTS- TYPES OF BIRDS



Hawking was an extremely popular pursuit amongst noble women who could afford the cost and upkeep of birds and the staff to care for them.

Many popular icons of medieval art show a lady with a bird of prey on her wrist, even when not participating in active sport. These images are more likely to represent symbols and signs associated with medieval art rather than actual sport.

There are other images in medieval art which show a more active

participation in hawking as a passtime for rich, medieval women. Falconry was not a sport for the income-challenged.

The image detail at the top of the page is from the German manuscript *Manesse Codex*, dated between 1300-1320, and it shows a women on horseback riding with her bird on her wrist. Her glove is easy to see and it would have protected her hand from the sharp talons of her bird.



The image at right shows a woman with her bird of prey and hawking glove. It comes from the *Holkham Bible* of 1325-1335. She too, wears a protective glove and the bird's bell is painted bright gold.



Other images, such as the image from the English illuminated manuscript, the *Taymouth Hours*, dated between 1325 and 1340, show a slightly less genteel and more actively energetic image of a woman with her bird and it's intended prey.

Here too, the little hawking bell can be seen attached to the leg of the bird. It is unusual to note that in this particular image, the lady appears not to be wearing a glove, both unusual for a lady outdoors and especially engaged in this kind of activity.



### Hawking accoutrements

Hawking was a passtime which came with its own specialised dress accessories. The lady and lord who hawked both wore a sturdy leather clove, often easily seen with a wider cuff and usually white.

A hawking pouch would have been employed, but we do not see pictures of these. There are extant pouches, but it is unable to be determined who owned them. I imagine there would have been no difference between one used by a woman or a man, as it is a fairly utilitarian item.

Jesse bells were attached to the legs of hawking birds and a leather hood was used when the birds were not actively in use, the style of which is the same as hawkers use today.



### Types of Birds

Types of birds used for hawking include many different types of raptors- falcons, peregrins, etc and of these, according to the 14th century falconing manual, the *Boke of St Albans*, the one considered most suitable for a lady to own and use would be a female Merlin.

The *Boke of St Albans* is an English manuscript whose author is not known. It dates to 1486 and was printed in the town of St Albans. The book provides a list of the falconry Laws of Ownership which determine who can own what kind of bird. Whether this was adhered to with any kind of obedience or whether, like the clothing sumptuary laws, it was roundly ignored can only be guessed at.

The birds are listed in order of importance of the social rank of the owner:



- King- Gyr Falcon, either male or female
- Prince- Peregrine Falcon
- Duke- Rock Falcon, belonging to the Peregrin falcon family
- Earl- Tiercel Peregrine Falcon
- Baron- Bastarde Hawk
- Knight- Saker
- Squire- Lanner
- Lady- Merlin, female only
- Yeoman- Goshawk or Hobby
- Priest- Sparrowhawk, female only
- Holy water Clerk- Sparrowhawk, male
- Knaves- Kestrel
- Servants- Kestrel
- Children- Kestrel

The most surprising of these is that servants are listed as being potential bird-owners. Perhaps these refer to the bird handlers themselves who operated the falconing mews and cared for the birds of their lords and ladies, not regular household servants.

Below is a detail from the early 14th century *Romance of Alexander* showing two women riding astride while out with their birds.



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