

# Birds In The Ancient World Winged Words

Throughout history, birds have captivated the human imagination with their ability to soar through the sky. Ancient civilizations from all corners of the world revered and drew inspiration from these winged creatures. The ancients believed that birds acted as messengers between the gods and the mortal realm, each species symbolizing a different aspect of life. Let us take a journey back in time and explore the significance of birds in the ancient world.

## Birds in Ancient Egypt: The Sacred Ibis

In the land of pharaohs and pyramids, the Ancient Egyptians worshipped a multitude of gods, with birds often playing a vital role in their religious practices. One bird that held particular significance was the sacred ibis, known as 'ba' in the ancient Egyptian language. The ibis was associated with Thoth, the god of writing, wisdom, and magic. Thoth was often depicted as a man with the head of an ibis or a baboon. The ibis' ability to spot snakes in the Nile riverbanks led to its association with wisdom and intelligence.

The Ancient Egyptians believed that Thoth would record the deeds of individuals and present them to the gods during the weighing of the heart ceremony. Therefore, ibis mummies were often placed in tombs, providing the deceased with a connection to the god of knowledge in the afterlife. The hieroglyphic symbol for a scribe often depicted an ibis, emphasizing their association with writing and communication.

## Birds in the Ancient World: Winged Words

by Jeremy Mynott(Illustrated Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

Language : English

ightless birds throughout

5. Phorusrhacos  
6. North Island Giant Moa  
7. Greater Rhea  
8. Darwin's Rhea



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## Birds in Ancient Greece: The Wise Owl

Ancient Greece, the birthplace of philosophy, art, and democracy, held a fascination for birds as well. Among the Greeks, the owl stood out for its perceived wisdom and connection to the goddess Athena. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, often appeared with an owl perched on her shoulder or in her hand.

The Greeks believed that the owl was a symbol of foresight and knowledge. The bird's ability to see and hunt in the dark symbolized the higher understanding Athena bestowed upon her favored mortals. Owls were honored and protected in the city of Athens, as they were seen as blessings from the goddess herself. The city's currency even featured an owl on its coins.

## Birds in Ancient China: The Phoenix

In Ancient China, birds played a crucial role in mythology and were seen as powerful symbols of good fortune and immortality. The phoenix, in particular, held a significant place in Chinese culture. Often associated with high-ranking officials and the imperial family, the phoenix represented virtue, grace, and harmony.

Ancient Chinese emperors believed that they were the direct descendants of the phoenix. The bird's appearance, which only occurred during peaceful times, was seen as an omen of prosperity and a lack of misfortune. The phoenix was believed to have the power to control the five elements - earth, fire, water, metal, and wood, representing the emperor's rule over the celestial realm.

## **Birds in Mesoamerica: The Resplendent Quetzal**

In the ancient Maya and Aztec civilizations of Mesoamerica, the resplendent quetzal held a position of reverence and honor. This remarkable bird, with its shimmering green feathers and long tail, was regarded as the embodiment of the sacred and divine. The Maya considered the quetzal as the god of air and the creator of life.

Due to their vibrant plumage, quetzal feathers were highly sought after and reserved for royalty and high-ranking individuals. They were utilized in elaborate headdresses, ceremonial cloaks, and other sacred artifacts. The capture and trade of quetzal feathers were strictly regulated, with severe penalties imposed on those who violated this sacred practice.

## **Birds in Ancient Rome: The Auspicious Eagle**

In Ancient Rome, the eagle held a special place in mythology, art, and military symbolism. Known as the "king of birds," the eagle was associated with the highest deity, Jupiter. The Romans believed that eagles were messengers of the gods and carried their divine will.

The eagle was closely linked to the Roman Empire's military prowess, acting as a symbol of strength and power. Roman legions carried eagle standards (aquilae) as they marched into battle, representing the divine protection and favor

bestowed upon them. The loss of an eagle standard was considered a great disgrace and a significant blow to the legion's honor.

## The Enduring Legacy of Ancient Bird Symbolism

Although the beliefs and cultures of ancient civilizations have faded into history, the symbolism and reverence for birds have remained ingrained in human consciousness. Birds continue to captivate our attention, inspiring art, literature, and even technological advancements. We can still find remnants of ancient bird worship in modern culture, reminding us of the enduring power these winged creatures hold.

Next time you spot a bird soaring overhead, remember the ancient stories and wisdom it carries within its wings. Let us continue to celebrate and appreciate these majestic creatures, whom our ancestors held in such high regard.



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Birds pervaded the ancient world. They impressed their physical presence on the daily experience and imaginations of ordinary people in town and country alike,

and figured prominently in literature and art. They also provided a fertile source of symbols and stories in their myths and folklore, and were central to the ancient rituals of augury and divination. Jeremy Mynott's *Birds in the Ancient World: Winged Words* brings together all this rich and fascinating material for the modern reader.

Using quotations from well over a hundred classical Greek and Roman authors, all of them translated freshly into English, and nearly a hundred illustrations from ancient wall-paintings, pottery, and mosaics, *Birds in the Ancient World* illustrates the many different roles birds played in popular culture: as indicators of time, weather, and the seasons; as a resource for hunting, eating, medicine, and farming; as domestic pets and entertainments; and as omens and intermediaries between the gods and humankind. There are also selections from early scientific writings about birds, as well as many anecdotes and descriptions from works of history, geography, and travel.

Jeremy Mynott acts as a stimulating guide to this varied material, using birds as a prism through which to explore both the similarities and the often surprising differences between ancient conceptions of the natural world and our own. His book is an original contribution to the flourishing interest in the cultural history of birds and to our understanding of the ancient cultures in which birds played such a prominent part.



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