



Women falconers through history

Ellen Hagen, IAF WWG, 2017

<i>Kochicu daughter of Shukou</i>	Japan After 358	A man from China introduced falconry to the Emperor of Japan in 358AD. This man married the beautiful Shukou and they had a girl called Kochicu who went on to become a great falconer. From this comes the origin of several schools on falconry in Japan.
<i>Queen Theodelinda of the Lombards</i>	Germany Ca.570-628	Queen Theodelinda of the Lombards hailed from Bavaria and was the daughter of Duke Garabaldi I. There is a painting of a group of falconers where Theodelinda can be seen with a falcon on her golden glove.
<i>Astrid Tryggvesdatter</i>	Norway 960/80 -1028	Sister of King Olav Tryggvason; King Olav plucked the feathers of Astrid's hawk when she refused to marry Erling Skjalgsson. The Sagas tell of high-status Vikings hunting with hawks, and there are also pre-Viking graves in Scandinavia with birds of prey.
<i>Eleanor of Arborea</i>	Sardinia 1347-1383	Born in Catalonia, Eleanor of Arborea was a heroine and a judge. She was interested in ornithology and was the first to give legislation to certain species of birds such as falcons. The Eleonora's falcon was named after her dedication to its protection.
<i>Elisabeth (gen) Isabeau de Baviere</i>	Germany 1370-1435	In a text about Elisabeth of Bavaria-Ingolstadt it says: 'All the women at court did falconry at that time'. (Page 139 of Kulturgeschichte der Falknerei, Bayern, Band 1. R.Seidenarder).
<i>Prioress Julina Berners</i>	England 1388 -	From Hertfordshire, Julina Berners was the author of the well-known Boke of Saint Albans. Julina was a nun and writer, and she loved hawking, hunting and fishing.
<i>Mary of Burgundy</i>	Brussels 1457 - 1482	Mary of Burgundy was an active falconer from Brabant Burgundian. Hunting carried risks at that time, and she died after falling off her horse while out hawking with Maximillian of Austria.
<i>Mary Queen of Scots</i>	Scotland 1542 - 1587	Mary Stuart (later Mary Queen of Scots) enjoyed falconry and flew a Merlin. Some of her falconry equipment, including a glove, was once on display at the National Museum of Scotland.
<i>Mary of Canterbury</i>	England 1550 -	One source claims that she was the Grand Master of Falconry (after the falconer Henry Cary) for Queen Elisabeth I.

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Queen Elisabeth I	England 1533 - 1603	Hunting and hawking was greatly enjoyed amongst the upper classes in England and was a favourite pastime of Elisabeth I. The sport was even referred to as Elizabethan Hawking during her reign.
Queen Christina of Sweden	Sweden 1632-1654	There is a painting by Sébastien Bourdon from 1653 of Christina on her horse, followed by her falconer and dogs, while out hawking. The painting is now in the Museo del Prado in Spain.
Queen Sofie Amalie	Denmark and Norway 1647-1717	Sofie Amalie of Brunswick-Lüneburg was married to Frederik III. She loved hunting, and an Abraham Wuchters painting shows her with a white Gyrfalcon in ca. 1670.
Catherine the Great	Russia 1723- 1796	Empress Catherina was known for her passion for birds of prey. Her favourite was the Merlin.

Women falconers in literature and art

Women falconers occur both in literature and art throughout history. A few are mentioned by name while others are only an image. They would have been daughters or wives of high-status men. Some were even nuns. Who they really were, we might never know, but they were involved. Here is a selection of historically documented scenes of women in falconry. There is a great amount once one starts looking.

The Taymouth Hours

This illuminated book of hours was created in England ca. 1325-40. These women are hunting with large birds of prey instead of small falcons such as Merlins, and are catching both ducks and hares on their own.



Codex Manesse,

This manuscript was made between 1305-1340 in Zürich, Germany. It is about song and poetry, and was made for the Manesse family.

There are about 137 miniature images of the poets, some of which relate to falconry.

In Medieval times, falconry could be used as a symbol of love. Some popular falconry phrases at the time had (and continue to have) underlying romantic connotations, such as 'wrapped around the little finger' or 'feeding from the glove'. This image (left) shows the woman is as devoted to the man as the hawk is to its meat. The person with the bird is the one with control.



The Book of St Albans,

This book was written by Prioress Juliana Berners and printed in 1486. She hunted with hawks herself, and made a list of the hierarchy of birds that nobles could hunt with in Medieval England. The Merlin was the woman's falcon.

Emperor - The Eagle, Vulture, and Merloun

King - The Ger Falcon and the Tercel of the Ger Falcon

Prince: The Falcon Gentle and the Tercel Gentle

Duke: The Falcon of the Loch

Earl: The Falcon Peregrine

Baron: The Bustard

Knight: The Sacre and the Sacret

Esquire: The Lanere and the Laneret

Lady: The Marlyon

Young Man: The Hobby

Yeoman: The Goshawk

Poor Man: The Tercell

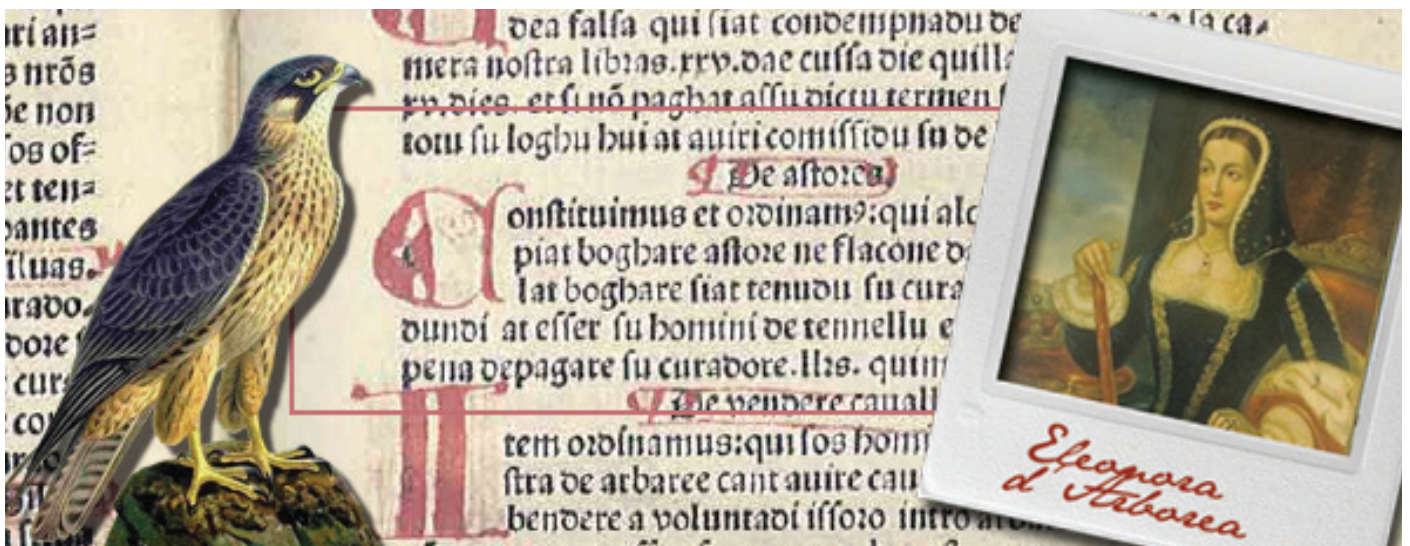
Priest: The Sparrowhawk

Holy Water Clerk: The Musket

Mary of Burgundy with a merlin



Eleonora's falcon was named after Eleanor of Arborea (image below from IAF.org)



Smithfield Decretals,

The Decretals of Gregory IX with comments from Bernard of Parma from ca. 1300-1340, shows images of women hunting and training birds of prey. These are much like the same self-sufficient women illustrated in The Taymouth Hours. Details show a woman in a red dress using a lure to recall a bird, while another in a blue dress has a stick which could be for beating bushes to flush prey (in this case, ducks). The third woman (in a white dress) is holding the leg of a hare to call her bird back to the fist.



Tapestries,

Medieval tapestries often show similar motifs of men courting women while out hunting, much like those seen in the *Codex Manesse*. Among the **many medieval hunting tapestries**, the most iconic from this time is *The Lady and the Unicorn* series from Musée de Cluny in Paris. These also depict elements of hawking. There are six tapestries that represent the five senses, including a sixth sense. The main focus of all, however, is the lady and the unicorn of the title. The tapestries are rich in representations of the noble life of the French court. Four of the six show a hawk hunting in the background; jesses and bells can be seen on the legs. The sixth tapestry has the inscription 'À Mon Seul Désir' which can be understood as 'my unique desire'. This refers to riches (such as the necklace she is holding) or activities like hawking. Strangely, in the tapestry Taste, the woman has a parakeet on her hand yet she is wearing a falconer's glove, while a Sparrowhawk chases a magpie above her head. The glove only occurs in this one tapestry and is the same style as other hawking gloves from that period.



Historical pieces of women and falconry

Falconry Maidens in May,

This unique wooden carving of a woman with a falcon on her hand is from Sweden and found in Lund Cathedral. All the months of the year are represented, with something to signify a characteristic of each month. It is dated from 1350. Other books also represent the month of May with a falconer; the British Library has a collection of books with images of falconers in May, showing both men and women falconers. Details that can be seen that relate to falconry include a bird of prey on the hand, a bird hunting, food being offered (often a leg), a bird being hooded, a falconer with a glove, or other falconry equipment such as lures.



(Left) The carved handle of a knife (a falconer's knife, perhaps?) shows a woman holding a falcon on one hand and a leg of a hare in the other. A few have been found in Scandinavia. This one is from the University of Lund's Historical Museum, in Sweden.

(Right) A mummified eagle huntress with leather eagle-hunting mitten (the same type used in the Xinjiang region of China to this day), from Tarim Basin and dating from the 4th-3rd century BC. It is housed in Urumqi Museum. Photo via article The Eagle Huntress: Ancient Traditions, and Evidence for Women as Eagle Hunters, by Victor Mair.



Female falconry Saints and Gods

St Cecilia

The noble St Cecilia engages in the aristocratic sport of falconry by feeding a falcon. The avian theme continues in the textile background, which shows the repeated motif of a winged boy holding a white hawk, and in the margins, which contain four large feathers. These feathers are in turn decorated with pairs of white wings (lures used to entice the bird back to the falconer). Also embellishing these large feathers are gold letters that, as elsewhere in the manuscript, have been interpreted as 'CD' for Catherina Duxissa (Catherine the Duchess). Created in Utrecht, the Netherlands, around 1440, the manuscript was taken apart sometime before 1856. This volume (rebound into two volumes) had been known by scholars as the Hours of Catherine of Cleves. It is housed in Morgan Library and Museum.

Did Catherine Duxissa also practice falconry, since this saint was in her book?



Hope,

In the heart of Stavanger in Norway, in the Domriike Cathedral, there is a family alter made by the Scottish artist Andrew Lawrenson Smith for a Norwegian aristocrat in 1674. There are two saints on each side, Hope and Love. Hope is holding a falcon on one arm, and an anchor in the other, what is interesting is that the bird is hooded. (Image to the right courtesy of Frank Wenzel, Eagle World, DK)

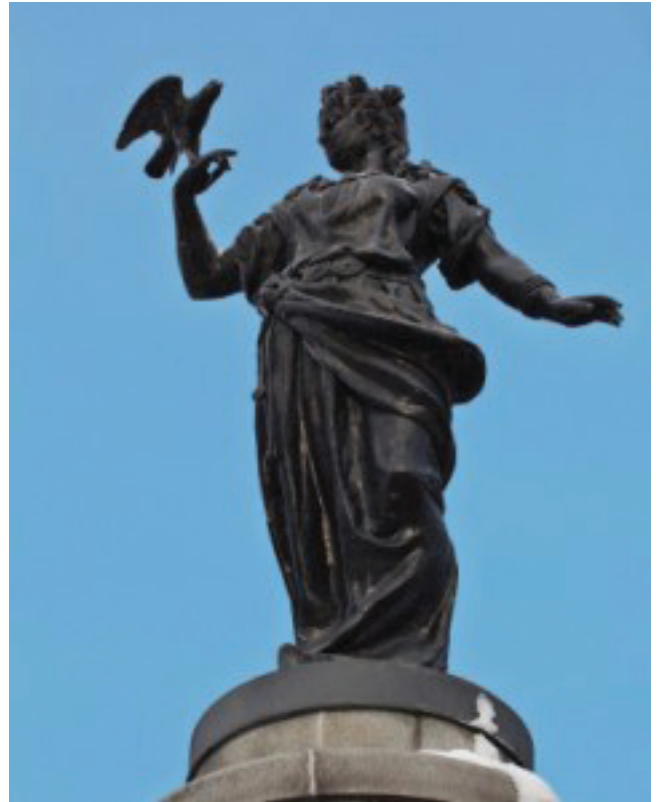


Gods,

Through prehistory and history, humans have created images of supreme power to look to for support, courage, faith and protection. Pre-Christian gods such as in Norse mythology are diverse and both male and female. Some of the male gods could turn into eagles, while Freya, a female god, could turn into a falcon with her falcon cloak. Not only are birds of prey supreme images of power, historically they were also part of political trade.

Hunting with birds of prey quickly became a sport of nobility. It makes sense that falconers found comfort in gods and saints to ask for luck and protection.

(Right) The Norse God Freya has a cloak that can turn her into a falcon (image courtesy of www.ulc.org)



This is an informative guide designed to share information about female falconers pre-1800.

If you would you like to contribute information about an historical lady falconer or other interesting evidence related to women in falconry history, please contact us in the IAF Women's Working Group at wwgiaf@gmail.com

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