

## Central Asian threads in Polish history and culture♥

### Gryphon

Many cities in the Northern part of Poland (Cashubia and Pomerania) have a gryphon in their coat of arms. This strange creature is shown as a half eagle-half lion with horse ears and a crest from a fish fin instead of a mane. This creature was known to the Greeks and Romans.

There are many legends and scientific works about the origins of the gryphon. In most recent works, its origin is attributed to Scythia (which in its territory included the area of present Samarkand in Uzbekistan). Gold was mined there and taken by Greek merchants to Europe. This area was abundant in the remnants of dinosaurs. The skeleton of one of them (*protoceratops*) reminds of a gryphon. May be it was brought by Greek merchants trading with Central Asian nomads or by the crusaders.

### Tatar invasion

Jan Długosz, first Polish historian, wrote, "Merciful and best Lord upset by ugly squalor and indecent and repugnant vices of Poles, who sinned against his majesty through various injustices and abuses, moved against them wild and barbaric tribe of Tatars". Norman Davies, contemporary historian of Poland, defined the Tatar invasion in 1241 as „God's whip”. In fact, this was normal for its time economic expansion of the ancestors of contemporary nations of Central Asia over Europe (which in the Polish area reached Wrocław, Sandomierz and Cracow). In Cracow it gave rise to two customs which continue until now. A dressed hero riding a wooden hobby-horse in Tatar disguise through the streets of the city eight days before Corpus Christi Day. The second custom is an hourly bugle-call sounded and broadcast from the tower of St. Mary's Church in Cracow. The call is interrupted in half tone in memory of a city watchman whose throat was pierced when he called alarm with the bugle.

### Bugler from Samarkand

In Samarkand this legend has a somewhat different interpretation. In line with it, killing a sounding bugler meant killing a mullah, what from heavens brought down a curse over the invaders. Only a bugler from Poland who plays his bugle in Samarkand could annul the curse by finishing the bugle-call interrupted in 1241. In 1942 at the request of local people, Polish buglers from the Army of General Anders finished that call in front of the mosque with the tomb of Tamerlane.

### Polish graves in Central Asia

In 1942-1943 about 2500 Polish soldiers died in Uzbekistan (in other Central Asian republics some 600). There are Polish cemeteries in 15 localities in Uzbekistan (Guzar, Karkin-Batash, Yakkabag, Shahrisabz, Kitab, Chirakchi, Karmana, Kanimech, Narpai, Yangijul, Vrevskaja (now Olmazor), Margelan, Karshi, Jizak, Tashkent). Most of them are, at least, partly preserved.

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♥ Piotr Ostrowski, Pojezierze Kaszubskie. Praktyczny Przewodnik, Pascal, Bielsko Biała 2000, s. 14; Norman Davies, Boże Igrzysko. Historia Polski, Znak, Kraków 1989, t. I, s. 129-30; Ksawery Pruszyński, Trębac z Samarkandy, Beskidzka Oficyna Wydawnicza, Bielsko Biała 1993; [http://www.wspolnota-polska.org.pl/index.php?id=kw3\\_2\\_51](http://www.wspolnota-polska.org.pl/index.php?id=kw3_2_51).