

## Phoenix Around the World

The Phoenix is a common symbol around the world, known by various names and in various forms throughout Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas from ancient times. Almost universally a powerful, bird-like creature, brilliant to the eye, has survived the challenge of death and thus represents rebirth, immortality, and good fortune. Stories of its godly qualities have offered hope to mortal beings for centuries.

Modern people can more readily see the symbolism of that hope for immortality as spiritual continuity and rebirth. Those who study ancient societies and mythology believe this “resurrection bird” may have been inspired by the phenomenon of the solar eclipse.

- The Egyptian Bennu supposedly burned itself up in the evening and was reborn the following morning from the waters of the Nile.
- Buddhist myth portrays a golden bird with beak and wings characteristic of an eagle, but with a human body. It was said to have the power to cover the sun and turn day into night.
- Chinese mythology contains rich accounts of a bird called Feng-Huang and was associated with the duality of the universe, the principles of yin-yang, and the sun and moon
- The Greek poet, Hesiod (8th century BC), wrote that when the phoenix felt death approaching, it built a pyre of wild cinnamon and died in the flames
- North American legends represent the Thunderbird as a powerful spirit in the form of a bird. The thunderbird petroglyph symbol has been found throughout Canada and the United States, similar to those found in Africa, Asia, and Europe.
- The constellation “Phoenix” can be observed in the Southern Hemisphere. The constellation, almost universally recognized as a bird, has been called Griffin, Eagle, Young Ostriches (Arabic), and Fire Bird (Chinese).
- In Greece, the phoenix was a graceful, gentle-natured bird, with brilliant plumage, who wept fragrant tears, and whose blood was scented with spices. Ancient records of first-hand sightings include Pliny, who supposedly saw one exhibited in the Roman Forum during the reign of Claudius.

- In the middle ages, the phoenix symbol was used in signs over chemists' shops because of its associations with regeneration and rebirth.
- In an etching by Rembrandt in 1658, the artist depicts a victorious phoenix on a pedestal with fallen figures at its feet and the sun behind it.
- The phoenix was used as a symbol of undying Rome and its image appeared on coins of the late Roman Empire.
- In Japan, the mythical Ho-Oo appears infrequently to signal peaceful and prosperous times. The Asian phoenix symbolizes ideas and traditions that are quite different than the phoenix symbolizing resurrection and rebirth in other parts of the world.
- Mayan and Aztec civilizations of pre-Columbian America recognized a 'serpent bird' or 'plumed serpent,' called Quetzalcoatl. Among his many roles Quetzalcoatl is humanity's savior and protector, having at least once brought them back to life from total destruction.
- In Indian literature, as early as the Rig Veda, there are many references to the Sun-Bird, Garuda. Images of eagles or falcons, or other birds in association with rayed orbs of the sun, appeared on Indus ancient seals and pottery.
- Clement of Rome was the first Christian to interpret the phoenix myth as a correlation to Christ's resurrection.
- Ancient Mesopotamian bas-reliefs show a disk with wings, legs and claws of a bird, and often with horns.
- The Tlingit of the Pacific Northwest coast and the Inuit people had myths about Raven, who was responsible for bringing light into the world by stealing it from a man who kept daylight all to himself in a box. Raven also was responsible for creating the four winds and all the animals and races of people.
- In Jewish legend, the phoenix's name is Milcham. After Eve (the first woman) ate the forbidden fruit, she persuaded all the animals except the phoenix to share in her fallen state by eating from the forbidden tree. God rewarded the bird by putting him in a walled city to live in peace for 1,000 years. At the end of every thousand years, the bird was consumed by fire and reborn from an egg found in the ashes.

- Al-Jili (1306-1403) founder of the Qadiri dervish order and author of Universal Man, spoke of a Holy Bird, sometimes referred to as a green bird with red writing on its wing, representing a soul's movement through eternity.
- In the Lakota nation, it was believed that if you had a vision or dream of the Thunderbird, it was your destiny to become a sacred clown. The sacred clown holds a semi-religious position, honored as a powerful member of the community.
- Queen Elizabeth I had a phoenix engraved on her medals; Mary Queen of Scots also used the same emblem. Jane Seymour, who died giving birth to Edward VI, had a phoenix crest which her son later used. In the United States, the Phoenix was on the first Great Seal in 1782, ultimately replaced by the Bald Eagle in 1902.