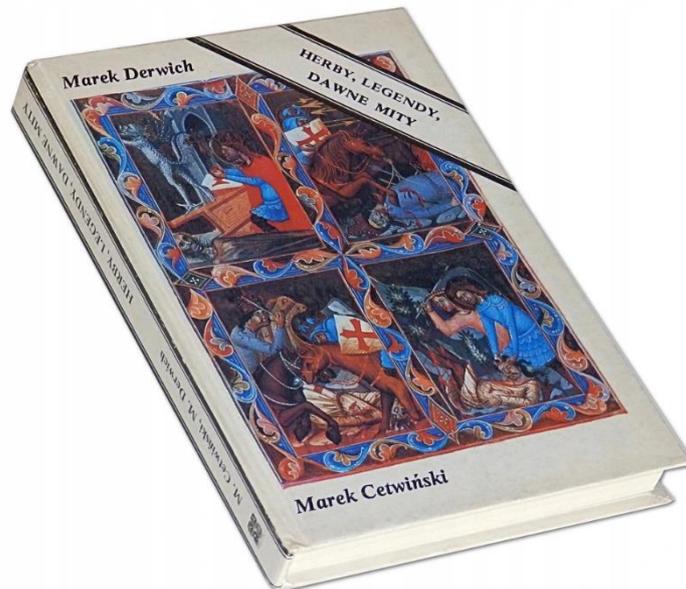

HERALDRY

Symbols behind the Paprzyca Legend



Published in 1987, the book of Marek Derwich and Marek Cetwiński *Herby, Legendy, Dawne Mity* remains a landmark study for Polish heraldry. The authors examine the Paprzyca symbol (page 218-220) and refer to a traditional cosmos representation in antique Slavic cultures. Derwich and Marek Cetwiński explain that paprzyca is the axis of the millstone with a strong relation to the archaic images earth and sky rotation mechanism.

Their analysis is worth reading and the text below is the full translation of their text regarding the symbolism of the Kuszaba/Paprzyca crest. However, the reading is complex and can be quite confusing because the authors refer to many “non-Polish” facts and symbols. Therefore, for a better understanding, we organized paragraphs, changed bold words, added some pictures and highlighted the content with additional notes.

Full Translation (text in black):

Brought to Poland from Czech or from Silesia in the time of Bolesław the Chaste, the coat of arms of **Paprzyca** is also known as **Kuszaba** or **Kuczaba** (= Kociuba and therefore Godzięba). The legend already attached to the coat of arms by the text of "*Klejnoty*"¹, bearing the conventional title "Countess Altdorf"², was also associated with the person of Lubomirska from Wiśnicz. It was also told in the vicinity of Grodno. In the Middle Ages the story was preached as one of many examples of moral lecturing. The German chronicles considered Countess Altdorf and her sons (twelve) to be the progenitors of the famous Welf or Wyżelk family³, as this legend refers mainly to the figure of six (in the Polish coat of arms) puppies above the coat of arms.



The nasty Dutch countess mocks and defames a beggar women with twins
and later gives birth to 365 babies the same day.

(English prints from a 1620 ballad)

The content of the Paprzyca legend is as follows: a certain Lady, learning that one of her subjects gave birth to triplets, punished her, claiming that she must have committed adultery, because one husband cannot give birth to three children at once. After some time, she herself gave birth to nine sons. Horrified by this fact, she ordered her maid to drown eight of them. While the maid carried away the babies she met the lord

husband over the mill stream. He discovered the intent of the crime and gave the alleged puppies to the miller for upbringing. When the boys grew up, the lord invited the neighbours and asked them what a mother would deserved for intending to drown her children. When the crowd said she should die, he ordered the "puppies" to be brought. However, at the sons' requests, the mother's life was spared.

The Kuszaba coat of arms was given to "puppies" in memory of the event. Others, however, claim that the coat of arms was given not to the boys but to the miller, who was their adoptive educator. The legend as it stands is derived from the preaching examples mentioned above. Its older version, the story is visible with the name **Paprzyca**, i.e. the axis of the millstone.



1578 – Kuszaba Herb in the book *Gniazdo cnoty zkąd herby rycerstwa sławnego Krolestwa Polskiego* of Bartosz Paprocki (c. 1543-1614) - page [1055](#) (265).



A quern-stone to mill grains

The symbolism in this crest is identical to the names of Piast pestle⁴ or Popiel navel⁵, referring to the mythical centre of the earth, guarded by holy kings who guarded the tree - the support of the sky. **Kuczaba**, on the other hand, is a block of the axis. So the **Kuszaba** symbol is a millstone. It has already been mentioned that the name Biberstein was associated in the legend of the Rogala coat of arms with Iberstein, i.e. the upper part of a quern-stones (the so-called hand pole). **Paprzyca** also designated a hole in a grinder stone used to pour grain and a device that allowed to regulate the thickness of the obtained flour. All these meanings refer to the mill or to rotary querns known to the Slavs from the 7th century.





Piast is the legendary founder of the Piast Dynasty who reign over Poland from 960 to 1370). According to different legends, he was either a ploughman (*Piast Oracz*) or a wheelright (*Piast Kołodziej*). Both versions introduce the image of an axe (*paprzyca*) in a millstone or in a wheel. In the traditional iconography, Piast is represented with a pestle (to repair wheels as a wheelright) or with a wood stick (to conduct horses as a ploughman). Above: Piast pictured as a wheelright.

The Piast pestle (*tłuczek*) refers to the concept of the earth as a blunt, and the sky as a pestle. As new devices were used to process grain into flour, the perception of the Cosmos has also changed. We have already talked about the Indian offering to the gods. In the beliefs of many peoples, including Finns, the Universe was considered as great mill. After all, the mill was the mythical Finnish *sampo* (*Haavio*). However, before

the invention of mills, the Cosmos was full of rotating querns stones. Earth there was the bottom stone, and the sky was the turning top stone. This relates to the ancestor of the Rogala Clan⁶, who were transformed by the God of Heaven and became Iberstein, and his estate became Żarnowiec. One of the deeds of the God of Heaven, identical to the lord of lightning, was to capture a live deer or aurochs, and this is what Iberstein. The most important element of the querns stones is their enabling axis rotary movement. This axle replaced the old mechanism of the sky - the tree or pole. The word Paprzyca meaning the axis of the millstone was chosen as the name of the feudal family. Paprzyca it is also a hole in the millstone, and in the mythical centre, in addition to the miracle tree enabling communication with the sky, there was also a hole leading to the land of the afterlife.



In the Finnish mythology, the *Sampo* is a round object that brings abundance and prosperity to whoever possesses it. There is no specifics about this object depicted as something between a mill and a cauldron. Experts believe that the *Sampo* might be some kind of magic millstone that produces abundance.

The rotation of the upper stone symbolized the apparent movement of the cosmos system. If the mill was a model of the Cosmos, it was the miller who was the supreme deity, giving refuge and instruction to Lech. The miller is the ancestor of the oldest and most distinguished Polish family Starz of the Topór coat of arms ("Gniazdo cnoty"⁷). The coat of arms reveals the miller's identity here with the God of Storm. In fairy tales, the miller turns into a bear – the symbol ancestor of the Rawicz family.



Derwich and Cetwinski mention the archaic cosmos representation of earth and sky being connected by a central axe. In the past, many civilizations have developed such interpretation.

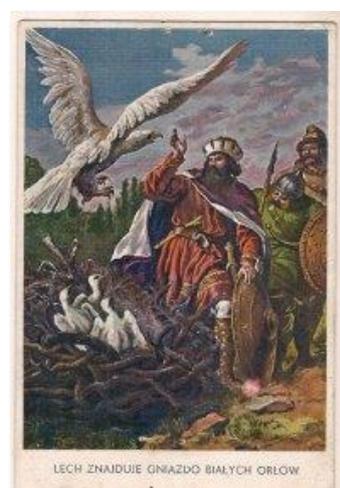
- upper left: a Dogon wood stool from Mali - National Museum of African Art (Washington DC).
- lower left: an ensemble of Chinese *bi* disks (heaven) and *cong* pillars (earth) - 2000-1600 A.C) - Freer Gallery of Art (Washington DC).
- below: In the Nordic cosmogony, *Yggdrassil* is the central tree supporting the earth.



Paprzysko, a word related to **paprzyca**, means a place to stay, a partridge nest, an egg hatching area, as well as bran and scabs on the head. The lodging place and the nest refer to the notion of **mythical centre**, where a nest was often placed in myths wonder bird. So the form of paprzyca connects with **Gniezno**, as the place of residence of the eagle - the heraldic bird of Poland⁸. **Paprzyca** himself seems to be Lech's double, father of the family who found the nest of the mythical eagle (according to Moszinski, the white eagle, analogous to the white deer, is the king of his species) and founded the capital city in the centre ■

Long ago, three brothers named Lech, Czech and Rus were living together with their respective families in a country where resources were depleting. They decided to leave separately and settle in a better place. Lech went to the North direction.

One day, while hunting during sunset, Lech discovered the nest of a White Eagle. Struck by the beautiful vision of a white eagle in the red background of the sun, he decided to settle there. He named this place Gniezno from the Polish word *gniazdo* (nest). Gniezno became the first capital of Poland and the White Eagle is on the white and red flag of the country. The two other brothers had similar destinies: In the East, Rus founded Russia and in the West, Czech founded Bohemia.



NOTES

¹ *Klenot* refers to the book *Insignia seu clenodia Regis et Regni Poloniae* written by Jan Długosz (1415-1480). Also known as “*Klejnoty*” or “*Klejnoty Długosza*”, this armorial book is a major reference for Polish medieval heraldry. The **Kuszaba** are mentioned in this book.

² According to an obscure medieval legend, the Countess Margaret of Henneberg, a notable Dutch noblewoman, gave birth to 365 children in the year 1276. The Countess died shortly after with her offspring. Altdorf and Henneberg families shared genealogy lines.

³ *Wyżełk/ Wyżeł* means pointing dog. The Welf and Altdorf families were related. Kunigunde von Altdorf was the mother of Welf I, Duke of Bavaria (1035-1101).

⁴ The authors refer to the legend making Piast a plowman committed to the land for prosperity. The etymology of the name Piast relates to Indo-European *pitya* (food) old Polish *pazt* (pasture) in the sense of feeding, nourishing. In the traditional iconography, the first Piast is represented with a long wood stick or a wood pestle.

⁵ Researchers note a strong connection with the figure of Popiel, the predecessor of Piast. They highlight a relation with the axis of the world, in which Piast would be the ruler of the upper part, and Popiel would be the ruler of the lower part.

⁶ Rogala is the crest of another Polish Clan.

⁷ *Gniazdo Cnoty* (The Nest of Virtue) refers to another reference book of Jan Długosz (1415-1480).