The legend of Krakow’s pigeons

Added by Jetting Around on November 5, 2011

According to a legend, the city’s pigeons are enchanted.

When Prince Henryk IV Probus rose to the city throne in the 13th century, he wished to unite (and rule) all Polish lands that had previously been divided into several parts. However, he neither had the necessary money nor support of local noblemen, so in desperation, he turned for assistance to… a witch.

She agreed to help and advised him to go to Rome and seek support from the Pope in reuniting the kingdom. In order to equip him with enough money needed for the mission, she turned his knights into pigeons. By pecking on the walls of St. Mary’s Church in the Main Square, the pigeons started a shower of little pebbles which, upon hitting the ground, turned into gold coins. The prince collected the coins and set off to Rome, as expected, and the knights were to remain pigeons until his return.

Unfortunately, Prince Henryk lost all his money along the way by indulging in balls and feasts. When he realized his mistake, it was too late. Ashamed, he never returned to Krakow, and the spell cast on the knights remains. They are said to still be waiting for their prince…

The story is one of my favorites associated with Krakow, and I am reminded of it every time I am back in the city. During the day, you can see pigeons all around the Main Square and Old Town, and at night they can be spotted inside the *Sukiennice* building (Cloth Hall), located on the Square.