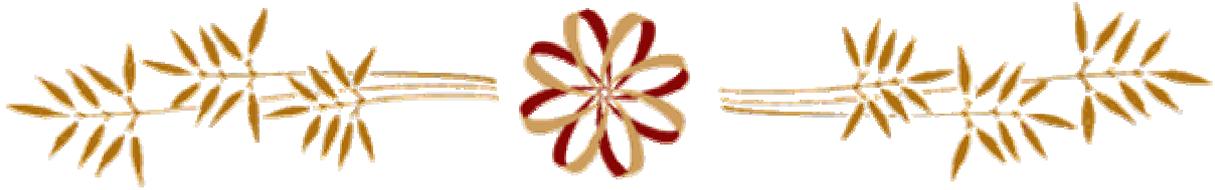


Here are two legends connected with the early beginning of Poland and our folk tradition still present in our lives and our school books.



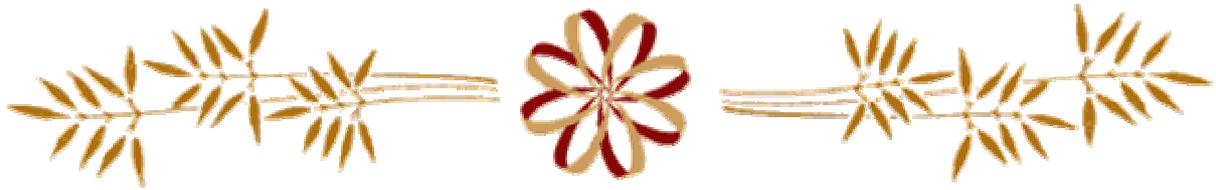
The Legend of Smok Wawelski (the Dragon from Wawel)

Some centuries ago there lived in a cave at the foot of Wawel Hill a most horrible fire-belching dragon, a monster that ravaged the nearby meadows by devouring grazing cattle. In vain the bravest knights tried to overcome the dragon. Even before they could draw their swords the fire from the beast's mouth destroyed them, so that one after another the best fell.

The king who reigned at the time sent out his heralds to announce that whosoever could slay the dragon would as a reward marry his daughter and sit on his throne after his death. Contenders encouraged by such a handsome offer came in hosts, but they too were destroyed. The king gave himself up to despair, while the king's daughter wrung her hands as she could not expect to ever be married. The dragon-ravaged country became poorer and poorer.

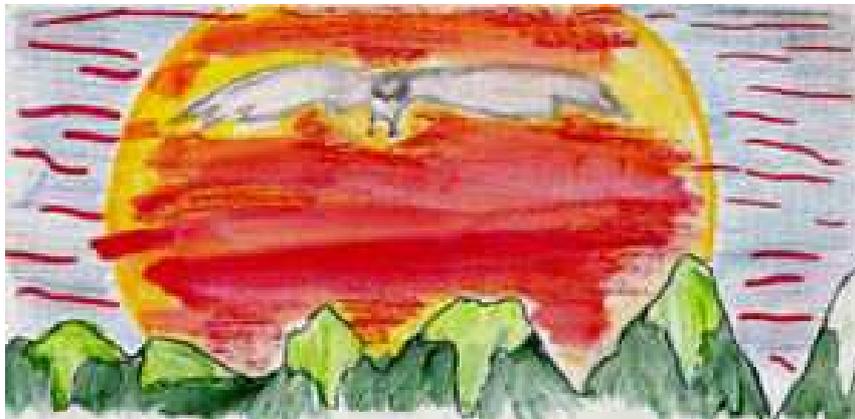
Then a shoemaker named Krak decided to conquer the beast by a unique strategy. After stuffing a fat ram with sulphur, he placed the tasty tidbit at the cave's entrance. The dragon, being greedy as well as stupid, swallowed the treacherous gift in one mouthful. Its throat burned so that it ran to the nearby Wisla river, gulping down so much water that it burst with a great bang, thus setting the town and the surrounding countryside free from its grip of terror.

The shoemaker married the king's daughter, and after the monarch's death, ascended to the throne. The town he rescued from the clutches of Smok, the dragon of Wawel Hill, took its name from him, and bears it to this day with great honour - the old capital of Poland, Krakow.



The Three Brothers

The beginnings of Poland



Once upon a time, over a thousand years ago, when the area of today's Poland was covered with thick and wild forests, there lived three brothers. Their names were Lech, Czech and Rus.

One day they decided to leave their parents and village and, accompanied by their servants and warriors, look for a new place to settle down and start a new life.

For many days they wandered together, but finally understood that they could never find a piece of land that would please all three of them. They decided to choose separate paths. Czech took the path leading to the south, Rus - to the east and Lech went westwards.

Lech and his people made their way through the forests and they observed that with each day the landscapes became more and more beautiful. Finally, after many days, they came to an exceptionally charming spot. As it was getting late, he ordered the camp to be put up for the night around a huge oak tree.

Suddenly, the sun started to set and covered the sky with its red flames and some strange noise could be heard, as if of the huge wings breaking the forest's silence. The warriors raised their heads and saw a huge, white eagle approaching its nest in the oak tree.

Lech understood that the place was not only beautiful, but also abundant in goods of all kinds and very safe. He thrust his sword in the ground under the oak tree and said: "Here I will build my kingdom and around this magnificent oak tree its capital will appear. Because the eagle's nest is in the oak's branches, the city will be called Gniezno ("gniazdo" is a Polish word for "nest") and the symbol of our country will be the white eagle in the red sky."