



Koraki – the raven

'That's a remarkable story'

'No, that's a remarkable bird.'

Stories of ravens are common in human history and mythology all over the world. Their interaction with heroes/Gods of legend was a major reason why we chose our name, Koraki, which for those of you who do not speak Greek, means 'raven'.

And the raven's engaging place in people's stories about themselves – in itself interesting for an agency which performs communications and analysis to benefit those who work with and for people – is matched by its existence and behaviour in nature.

Ravens and other corvids are long-lived birds, who display complex social behaviour, including an understanding of death, the ability to recognise individual human faces, to use tools and to teach this knowledge and these skills to other ravens.

Most famous, perhaps, is the 'parliament' in which the birds gather in large groups on the ground, and call to each other, as if sharing stories and experiences. Some tales describe these 'events' as lasting several days. Certainly, they often take several hours, during which time the birds seem to be focussed solely on this communication.

Recent research also shows that they repeat this behaviour – in smaller groups – when one bird finds a member of its species which has died. Often described as a 'funeral', current thinking suggests that in fact this may be an effort to learn more about what caused the death, and to share this risk with one another: in itself, a remarkable practice for a bird.

In human history and mythology – the stories we tell one another in order to guide, aid understanding and explain the world in which we live – raven stories told around the world share the same major themes: protection, communication and prophesy, travel, creation and intelligence.

In Native American stories from the Pacific Northwest, the raven is not only a 'creator' (in one tale, the raven creates the world when, becoming bored with the 'spirit world' in which all birds were supposed to have once lived, it picks up a stone and journeys to discover what lies beyond the realm – it drops the stone, which becomes all land in our reality), but also a being which delivers illumination – literal and figurative – to the world.

Stories told by different Native American tribes have ravens stealing the sun, Moon, stars and in some cases also fresh water and fire, from other birds (a seagull in some tales, a grey eagle in others), effectively giving humanity the means by which to see and understand the world, and the ability to change it for the better.

In another story, the raven coaxes men from a clam shell in which they have hidden and thus cut themselves off from the world, and showing the inquisitiveness common to ravens in all human mythology, then encourages men and women to meet and live with one another. As it was responsible for human pairing, it became protective of them, and used its wisdom and intellect (including unusual and innovative thought and ideas) to aid and keep them safe.

In Siberia and North Asia, the raven is in fact the ancestor of mankind, and remains on Earth to guide humans as a receptacle of knowledge and shamanic ability.





The Native American stories also explain that the raven is black not for any perceived 'negative' reason, but because in stealing the Sun (etc.) to illuminate the world, its feathers are burned.

Greek mythology combines the idea of the raven being burned by the sun, and its inquisitive and communicative nature: Apollo, himself associated with the sun and the earlier Greek sun-god Helios, uses the raven as a gatherer of information and messenger, and burns it in anger when the raven reveals that Apollo's lover, Coronis (another sun reference) has been unfaithful to him.

In Hinduism, the religion's earliest cosmology (which in fact included a great deal of what modern science has since built upon) was said to have been revealed to man by the raven Bhusunda, which carried within it – and shared – all the tales of the universe's history throughout ancient epochs.

Celtic tales, too, share the idea that ravens are carriers and communicators of knowledge; consistently portrayed as prophesiers. Celtic mythology also features the idea of the raven as a protector. Brann the Blessed, who relied upon ravens' knowledge throughout his life, was beheaded and his head is said to have continued to speak to ravens, who brought him knowledge of places he could of course no longer reach and see for himself. The legend describes that his head was buried at the White Hill in London, where the Tower of London now stands. Popular tales suggest that should the ravens ever leave the Tower, it will collapse.

In the Arabic telling of the Cain and Abel story, Cain did not know what to do with Abel's body, after killing him, and God sent a raven to show him how to bury it: another example of the raven communicating, as well as an echo of the raven's gatherings when one of their number has died.

In more recent history, ravens were said to have protected the body of St Vincent, who died in Portugal, from being eaten by wild animals, so he could be given a proper Christian burial. St Benedict of Nuria, meanwhile, claimed that a raven had saved him by stealing (and not eating) a loaf of bread which had been poisoned.

Finally, in Viking mythology, the leader of the Norse gods, Odin, uses two ravens, Huginn (thought) and Muninn (memory) as his 'eyes and ears'. They spend their lives travelling the world, gathering knowledge and experience, telling Odin what they have seen, and what it might mean for him. It is from the Viking tradition – though in fact the human tradition – that we at Koraki have taken our logo.

