

Messenger pigeons have been used since ancient times for communication across long distances. Of course, whatever message was sent had to be written in tiny characters on a small piece of paper or parchment or the pigeon couldn't carry it. Still, they have provided an invaluable service for many thousands of years.

“The first known use of pigeons as postal messengers was in ancient Egypt. In 2900 B.C.E. Incoming ships released pigeons as an announcement of their arrival. Around the time of Moses, the Egyptian army used carrier pigeons to deliver messages. In 2350 B.C.E. King Sargon of Akkadia- present day Iraq—ordered each messenger to carry a homing pigeon. If the messenger was about to be captured, he released the pigeon, which flew back to the palace. Its arrival meant another messenger should be sent. Pigeons also bore messages in ancient China, Persia, India, and Greece, where the names of Olympic victors were carried back to their cities.

During the Dark Ages the Arabs established regular airmail pigeon courier services. According to one tale, a caliph in North Africa satisfied his taste for Lebanese cherries by having pigeons fly them in. Each carried one cherry inside a silk bag. It was the first parcel post. Reportedly, a prize pair of carrier pigeons in the Arab empire could fetch one thousand gold pieces.

During the Crusades, Richard the Lion Heart's men captured a pigeon that carried a message reporting that a Muslim army would arrive in three days to break the Christian siege of Ptolemais. A forged message was substituted, saying that no help would be coming. The besieged town surrendered. The Muslim relief army arrived to find the Christians solidly entrenched.

Those ancients in charge of the health and care of those most important carrier pigeons were called “web ministers” since they ministered to those most valuable birds which lived in nests that were made up of a web of twigs, grasses and other materials. Pigeon post was the world's fastest communication system for all the centuries of the Dark and Middle Ages, and remained so until Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph in 1844 and Guglielmo Marconi's invention of radio in 1895.”

Today's Web minister oversees electronic publishing in their SCA, using electrons rather than pigeons, and maintains the ancient name.

