ILLUSTRATED DICTIONARY
OF SYMBOLS
IN EASTERN AND WESTERN ART
ALSO BY JAMES HALL

Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art
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How to Use this Book

The main dictionary is divided into six sections, according to subject: Abstract signs, Animals (including birds and insects), Artefacts, Earth and Sky, Human Body and Dress, Plants. This should make reference quicker and easier, but if in doubt turn to the index where the main entry is in bold type. Cross-references will be found in the index. In the dictionary itself they are shown in small capitals.

There is a final section (unillustrated) which contains what I call 'Collectives'. These are subjects such as the Four Seasons, Seven Liberal Arts and Twelve Ornaments that comprise numerous symbols and to which reference is made many times in the main dictionary. Gods and others who have multiple attributes will also be found here. This avoids the need for tiresomely repetitive explanations whenever they are mentioned elsewhere.

In choosing the illustrations with Chris Puleston, we usually preferred their less familiar aspects, particularly in the case of well-known, everyday objects.

Transliteration

There are often alternative systems for transcribing foreign alphabets into Roman. This can sometimes be puzzling, especially when using an index. I decided, after much thought, to stick to the older systems when there is a choice, because they are the ones used in most of the older-established reference books mentioned in the bibliography. For Chinese words I have kept to Wade-Giles instead of the more recent Pinyin (e.g., Chou and Ch’ing dynasties, not Zhou, Qing). See also the Appendix, p.216. For Sanskrit I have used the older, more familiar forms that have no diacritical marks (Krishna, Shiva; not Krṣṇa, Śiva). Mesopotamian gods are usually referred to by their Akkadian (Semitic) names without accents, though the Sumerian name is used when appropriate (Ea, not Enki; Adad, not Ishkur). Classical deities are given in both Greek and Latin forms (Aphrodite/Venus; Zeus/Jupiter).
About Symbols in Art

A symbol is simply 'something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else' (OED). We seem to have a natural tendency to create symbols in the way we think and in our art, which must reflect a deep-seated trait of the human spirit. Take the lion, for instance. In all essentials it is just 'a large, fierce, tawny, loud-roaring animal of the cat family'. Once we begin to call it the 'King of Beasts' or 'Lord of the Jungle' it is on its way to becoming a symbol. In fact, of all creatures it is one of the most richly endowed with symbolism, much of it religious, even among people where it has never been known in the wild state.

Symbols in art function at many different levels according to the beliefs and social customs that inspire the artist. Among the Chinese they may sometimes express no more than a graceful compliment. A painted vase or dish offered as a gift by a visitor to his host might, by its choice of decorative images, wish the recipient a long life, many children, or even success in the state examinations. This symbolic language was once widely understood among educated Chinese.

On another level are those images – and they form the great majority – that are related to worship. Let us consider for a moment the human body, when the artist uses it to represent a god or goddess. By itself a body is impersonal and anonymous. It must first be clothed and accoutred in a distinctive fashion in order to make a recognizable deity. We put it in armour to represent, say, Mars, the god of war. If we then add a pair of wings it becomes the Archangel Michael, Commander of the Heavenly Host. In thus giving substance and identity to beings whose form is, in reality, unknowable the artist is making a symbolic image. The Stoic philosopher, Zeno, who lived around 300 BC, put it this way. The Greek gods, with their distinctive, readily identifiable forms, were, he said, not anthropomorphic at all; they were all symbols, the different aspects of a single divine being whose true nature was wholly impersonal. When we come to oriental art we find it thronging with deities in human form, most of whom represent abstract, metaphysical concepts that have no counterpart in real life. They, too, are symbols.

But even the sacred figures of history may be treated as symbols. We can only guess how the Buddha or Jesus looked in life. The Buddha, with his tight, curly hair and top-knot, tuft between the brows, pendent ear-lobes and mystic signs on hands and feet, bears little or no physical resemblance, we may assume, to the historical founder of Buddhism. Jesus, when crowned and enthroned in the style of an East Roman emperor, is immediately recognizable as the sovereign King of Heaven, the Almighty. Yet when clad in a peasant's tunic, girded at the waist, and carrying a lamb round his shoulders, he becomes the Good Shepherd of the gospels. These are symbolic images of the religious leaders.
Zeno lived in an age when the Olympian gods were in decline. Athens had been conquered by Sparta, a defeat her guardian deity, Pallas Athena, had been powerless to prevent. An element of chance now appeared to govern people’s fate. Soon Chance, or Fortune, was deified and became, like the Olympians, a personalized goddess, known in Greece as Tyche. The idea of deifying and giving human form to abstract concepts was taken up in Rome where, from the time of Augustus, Peace, Health and Providence looked after the welfare of the emperors. Medieval and Renaissance Europe created a huge family of symbolic figures of this kind, which still populate our cathedrals, palaces and public gardens. There we find numberless virtues and vices, the seasons of the year, parts of the world, ages of man and much more besides.

But the gods were not always portrayed as human beings. People once believed that natural phenomena – the course of the sun across the sky, rainfall, the fertility of beasts and crops, pregnancy and childbirth – were all controlled by unseen powers. Since one’s very existence depended on their favourable behaviour they were propitiated with sacrifice and prayer. These mysterious forces were not at first thought of as having human form, so when an artist made an image of the sun, the moon, or a thunderbolt, it was the god himself that he was portraying. In a sense, therefore, this kind of image goes beyond symbolism: it is a literal representation of a deity.

Animals, too, were endowed with the same mysterious power, or mana, that pervaded the natural world. Birds not merely foretold the weather, they somehow created it. They were worshipped as bringers of sunshine and storm. The leader of the primitive tribe, its priest, or ‘medicine-man’, dressed in the masks and skins of animals to acquire their mana for himself and gain control over nature. The half-human, half-animal gods we see in the art of Egypt, Mesopotamia and India are the ‘medicine-man’s’ descendents.

When gods and goddesses began to assume the shapes of men and women the old, primordial images were not abandoned. The human deity was depicted standing above, or seated on, his older animal form, as if it were his mount, or ‘vehicle’. The solar disk and crescent moon became part of his crown or head-dress. Finally, having fully evolved into human form, as they did so splendidly in ancient Greece, they retained their previous, non-figurative selves as attributes. We may note, in passing, a similar, though unrelated evolution that took place in early Christian art when Christ and the apostles are initially represented as sheep. When they become men they retain the sheep as attributes. This extremely useful convention, the attribute, which gives identity to an otherwise anonymous figure, later permeated western Christian art and was widely adopted in Hindu and Buddhist art. Indeed, the gods of esoteric, Tantric Buddhism have so many and share them so readily that they are sometimes not much help in identification.

There are many instances when an object is both symbol and attribute. Thus, two keys identify St Peter and at the same time symbolize the founding of the Christian Church. A thunderbolt, the attribute
of numerous sky-gods, became for some Buddhists a symbol of the very heart of their philosophy, the state of Enlightenment. On the other hand a swan beside a bishop tells us he is St Hugh of Lincoln, for the simple reason that he kept a tame swan as a pet.

Finally, another word about art and magic. We have seen how they were closely related from very early times, and it is strange to observe that civilized peoples retained beliefs similar to their primitive ancestors. Inert matter, whether clay, metal, stone, or pigment, once it has been shaped by the artist’s imagination, seems to vibrate with a numinous power that can influence people and events. Thus, a god’s image would be carried into battle in the expectation that it would bring victory. In the city it received oblations in order to protect the citizens from harm. Some, it is claimed, have even been known to nod their head or shed tears. Similarly, snakes, scorpions and suchlike creatures that in real life are dangerous and to be avoided acquired beneficial, magical properties as images. As sculptures or paintings they functioned as symbolic guardians at the gates of temples, palaces and tombs. The lion, which is unlikely to guard anything except its cubs or the next meal, was an especially popular choice. The magical influence emanating from the stone kept evil spirits at bay. Much of Tantric Buddhist art works at this mystical level. The painted mandala, an elaborate symbol of the universe, is felt to have the power to conjure the very presence of a god, when subjected to intense, concentrated meditation. Other Tantric images, either purely abstract or consisting of a written word or even a single character, are felt to produce the same effect.

In geographical scope this book takes in the art of Christian and classical Europe, Egypt, the ancient Near East, India and the Far East—not exhaustively, it need hardly be said, but, I hope, in its more important and more widely depicted aspects. It is a region that I think can be shown to have acquired over the course of very many centuries many points of contact (perhaps network is not too strong a word) connecting its different cultures. It was a process that was unhindered (except in Indonesia and Japan) by the ‘estranging sea’.

Some five thousand years ago this great region was the birthplace of the world’s first civilizations, centred on four river valleys: the Nile, Euphrates/Tigris, Indus and Huang-Ho. From the beginning each had some kind of representational art, much of it consisting of religious symbols that reflected very varied forms of worship. The diffusion of their cultures came about in several ways: invading armies who brought their gods with them; growth of trade (which first brought China into contact with the West) and the accompanying exchange of coinage, a rich and varied source of imagery; and the expansion of religion through missions and pilgrimage, especially Buddhism and Christianity.

Buddhist art travelled from India through South-East Asia, Indonesia, Tibet, China and Japan, taking in local cults on the way and adapting their imagery to its own ends. Christianity, born in the Near East, absorbed some of the religious imagery of the region through
the Old Testament. Persian textiles, which found their way to the West, have motifs that reappear in Byzantine church art. Others came from as far away as China. In the West the Church absorbed imagery from the pagan cults it replaced and gave it a fresh, Christian meaning.

We see how easily symbolic images can mean different things to different peoples; how seldom, at least in art, are they endowed with a fixed, immutable core of meaning that transcends different social and religious milieus. This is not to deny the existence of unconscious archetypes as a source of symbolism, but simply to keep them in perspective and be aware of their limited importance in relation to the visual arts.
1. Abstract Signs

A. The first letter of Sanskrit, Greek and Roman alphabets. Vishnu, one of the supreme Hindu gods, said 'I am the beginning, the middle, the end of all creation; of letters I am the A.'

The letter A is one of a series of usually five mystical characters (Sk. siddham) uttered as syllables by Vajrayana Buddhists, especially the Shingon sect of Japan, in their devotions. Its magical power will conjure up the deity. Each letter denotes one of the five Dhyani-Buddhas, 'A', denoting the supreme Adi-Buddha, VAIROCANA. The written character, on a lotus throne, is also an object of contemplation. On Roman funerary monuments the letter A indicates that the deceased was an only child. See also WORD; BUDDHA.

A and ω (or Ω). The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet are a Christian symbol of God as the beginning and end of all things. It is found in early funerary inscriptions in the Roman catacombs and occasionally in Renaissance and later painting, where the letters may be inscribed on the facing pages of an open book held by God the Father, particularly in representations of the TRINITY.

Ankh. Egyptian hieroglyph for life, possibly originally a representation of a sandal strap. As a symbol it denotes eternal life and when held to the nose of a dead pharaoh ensures his everlasting existence. It is held by many deities, in particular Atum, the sun-god of Heliopolis, and (when seated) Sekhmet, the lion-headed war-goddess of Memphis. A was sceptre combining the djed column and ankh is the attribute of Ptah. On the walls of temples it gives divine protection to the deceased. The Coptic Church adopted it as a form of the cross, called ansate (having a handle).

Circle (the pure form; see also RING for the annular form). Like the sphere, a symbol of the cosmos, the heavens, and the supreme deity, in East and West. Renaissance humanists likened it to God from its perfect shape. It formed the ground-plan of churches, especially from the 16th cent. [iv: dome, St Peter's, Rome]. Choirs of angels, representing heaven, may have a circular or hemispherical configuration. As a Taoist and Buddhist symbol, heaven and earth may be represented respectively by a circle enclosed in a square. Taoism also taught that the circle, divided into two in a certain way, symbolized the creative principle of the universe, the two parts being its female and male elements (see YIN AND YANG). Having no end or beginning a circle may denote eternity, sometimes depicted in the West as a...
SNAKE biting its own tail, an image of Egyptian origin where it represented the boundlessness of the ocean. For the circle as a Buddhist symbol, see MANDALA. See also COINS; DISK; HALO; SUN; WHEEL.

Cross. The familiar Christian symbol has other, older associations. The equilateral cross [i] was once widely used to denote the four cardinal directions, or winds, that brought rain. It therefore became a symbol of sky- and weather-gods like the Mesopotamian sun-god, SHAMASH, and the sky-god, ANU. The cross of the latter may have a solar disk in the centre. See also ANKH; SWASTIKA; T (tau); THUNDERBOLT.

The earliest Christian cross was the chi-rho monogram (see LABARUM). From the 4th cent. when Christians were first allowed to worship freely in the Roman Empire the cross itself began, slowly, to be represented on sarcophagi and other artefacts as a symbol of their religion and of Christ himself. In the Middle Ages it was used on church vestments as a symbol of priestly authority and was borne by orders of chivalry and on banners of guilds. It formed the ground-plan of churches: the Greek, or equilateral, cross for the Byzantine cross-in-square church; the Latin cross [ii] typically for western churches and cathedrals (see MAN). The Christian cross has other forms: the saltire, or St Andrew's cross [iii], on which the saint was said to have been crucified; the double cross, or cross of Lorraine [iv], carried before the bishops, or patriarchs, of the five principal sees of medieval Christendom; with a triple transom it is reserved exclusively for the Pope, e.g. the APOSTLE Peter, and Gregory the Great, one of the FOUR LATIN FATHERS. A cross is the attribute of many Christian saints, too numerous to help identify them. Of the apostles a cross or cross-staff is the attribute of Philip; the saltire, of Andrew. JOHN THE BAPTIST has a reed cross. In Renaissance allegory a cross is an attribute of FAITH personified, who also holds a chalice; of Jeremiah, one of the FOUR PROPHETS; and of three SIBYLS (Helle- spontic, Phrygian, Cimmerian). It is one of the INSTRUMENTS OF THE PASSION.

Cube. Symbol of stability. In western art FAITH personified rests her foot on it, in contrast to the unstable sphere of Fortune. It is also the foot-rest of History. It is occasionally represented as a polyhedron with more than six sides, as in Dürer's Melancolia [v] where it symbolizes the Pythagorean doctrine that number and form are the basis of the universe.

Fu. One of the TWELVE ORNAMENTS embroidered on Chinese imperial robes [vi: Chinese silk, 17th cent.]. Its origin is uncertain. The two signs were ancienly called 'symbols of the discernment we ought to have of good and evil', and may have been intended to represent the upper garment hanging down back to front, or archers' bows. See also DRESS.

Fungus (Ch. ling-chih; Jap. reishi). According to a popular su-
perstition dating from the Han dynasty there existed a sacred fungus which bestowed immortality when eaten. It was said to flourish in the ‘three isles of the blest’ in the Western Sea (Japan?) and was especially sought by Taoists whose philosophy held out the promise of eternal life. It is generally represented as the fungus *polyporus lucidus* [vii]. In ceramic decoration it can take a highly stylized form [viii] which is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the cloud pattern. It may accompany the bat of Longevity or the three friends. It is seen in the mouth of a deer, reputed to be long lived and the only creature able to find it. It is sometimes seen in the hand of Taoist eight immortals and Lao-tzu himself. See also ju-1 sceptre.

**IHS.** The contraction of the name Jesus in Greek. Other forms are IHC and IC. It is widely seen in the decoration of Greek and Latin churches, on tombs [ix: Roncevaux, 13th cent.], vestments and in heraldry. It is the attribute of Bernardino of Siena, of Ansanus when inscribed on a heart, and of the Society of Jesus.

**Labarum.** Roman military standard emblazoned with the chi-rho monogram by Constantine the Great. It is a combination of the Greek letters *chi* and *rho* (X and P). As an abbreviation of chrestos, ‘auspicious’, it had previously been in use as a symbol of good omen, and it is not certain whether the emperor intended it in this sense or as a Christian symbol. A similar motif occurs in Mesopotamia as an Assyrian military ensign and the symbol of a Chaldean sun-god, either of which could be its prototype. As an abbreviation of Christ’s name it appears in Roman catacomb art of the 4th cent. or possibly earlier. As a Christian symbol it is often combined with the letters *alpha* and *omega* (see *A* and *Ω*) [x: Ravenna, 5th cent.].

**Lozenge, Rhomb.** A Mesopotamian motif, seen at all periods until the fall of the Assyrian Empire, particularly on 9th – 8th cent. BC cylinder seals and, earlier, on gaming boards from Ur. Its meaning is uncertain but most likely to be an ‘all-seeing eye’, an apotropaic talisman to ward off the evil eye. In Chinese ceramic decoration a lozenge (*ling ching*) entwined with a red fillet is one of the eight treasures [xi]. It is thought to be a symbol of victory. A pair of lozenges, joined end to end or interlocking (*fang cheng*), sometimes seen on the walls of houses, are believed to ward off evil spirits.

**Mandala,** from the Sanskrit, meaning circle. A complex image, generally painted on a banner, or *tanka*, the object of meditation by Tantric Buddhists. It is found in India, China, Indonesia and Japan but made its true home among Tibetan Lamaists. Its essential feature is a circle, which usually encloses a square with four ‘doors’ in the middle of each side facing the four cardinal points [xii]. The ground-plan of the stupa or pagoda may follow the same geometric pattern. At the centre of the mandala there is
usually a sacred figure, a **Buddha** or **Bodhisattva**, typically the Adi-Buddha **Vairocana** who may be surrounded by the four Dhyani-Buddhas, each enclosed in his own circle. Alternatively, the central figure may be a demonic ‘tutelary deity’ embracing his **shakti**. The image probably originated in early Hindu devotional practice. Its characteristic form is a visual metaphor for the structure of the universe as it would be perceived in the act of meditation. It therefore became, magically, the literal dwelling-place of the deity whom the worshipper is invoking in his quest for Enlightenment. There is a 12th cent. record of mandalas having been produced in large numbers between the 6th and 12th cents., an artistic tradition that has continued to the present day. The term is also used of Japanese art to denote a devotional image of a Buddhist deity surrounded by lesser figures, not necessarily embodying the circle (see **Bodhisattva**; **Kshitigarbha**: see also **A**).

**Meander.** A repetitive pattern, having more than one form [i], found on sacred bronze vessels of the Chou dynasty in China (c. 1050–221 bc). It was derived from pictographs of the previous Shang period representing clouds and rolling thunder and was hence called the ‘cloud and thunder pattern’ (yun wen and lei-wen). The pattern symbolized life-giving rain and the abundance it brought to farming peoples. It reached the West and was the prototype of the Greek fret or key-pattern which decorates classical architecture. It has survived, together with more complicated variants, to the present day. As a continuous border it may frame Chinese symbols of longevity.

**Mirror** (Ch. *ching*; Jap. *kagami*). It was widely believed, especially in the Far East, that a mirror had magical properties and this is borne out by the motifs and inscriptions on its back. In a mirror one could glimpse all knowledge and see into one’s own soul; it warded off evil in this life and the next and was therefore buried with the dead. To protect its owner a Chinese bronze mirror could be decorated with dragons and tigresses. In China the art of decorating mirrors underwent great developments in the Han dynasty. They began to replicate the designs on parasols and canopies that were used ritually. These designs represented the ‘canopy of heaven’, a system of cosmology with appropriate symbols. The ‘TLV’ mirror, so-called from the decorative motifs on its back, was introduced in the middle of the 2nd cent. bc, and was widely popular. The example shown is only one of several decorative schemes that came to include animals, immortals and other spirits, besides abstract signs [ii]. The small bosses inside the square represent the twelve ‘earthly branches’ of the Chinese **calendar**. Outside the square there may be animals denoting the **five elements**, four quadrants of the heavens, the seasons, etc. From the 3rd or 4th cents. **ad** mirrors increasingly depict Taoist and Buddhist motifs, and flora and fauna that symbolize good fortune, marital happiness, and so on. A mirror en-
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twined with ribbon is one of the Chinese EIGHT TREASURES. See also MAGPIE.

A mirror is one of the THREE SACRED RELICS of the Japanese imperial regalia. It is the repository of the spirit, or shintai, of the sun-goddess AMATERASU, ancestress of the imperial family, and features widely in the rites of Shintoism. Since a mirror can reveal the innermost soul of the living and the dead, it is therefore an attribute of Emma-O, the Judge of the Dead (see YAMA). Mirrors, often of Chinese origin, have been found in many Japanese tombs.

In Christian art a ‘flawless mirror’, speculum sine macula,4 is an attribute of the VIRGIN MARY of the Immaculate Conception. The Virgin’s reflection in a mirror held by a bishop identifies Geminianus of Modena (d.? 348). In Renaissance allegory a mirror is an attribute of Prudence, one of the CARDINAL VIRTUES, and Truth; of the vices Pride, Vanity and Lust (the latter derived from the classical Venus) (see SEVEN DEADLY SINS); and of Sight, one of the FIVE SENSES. See also CIRCLE.

Pentacle, Pentagram. Five-pointed figure first seen in Sumerian royal inscriptions of the late 4th–early 3rd mill. BC, where it appears to symbolize the extent of the king’s authority, reaching to the farthest corners of the earth. It was used as a mystic symbol of the Pythagoreans and, later, by medieval astrologers and necromancers. As a good luck charm it was placed at doorways to keep off harmful spirits. As a Christian symbol it stands for the five wounds of Christ [iii].

Shou. Chinese character denoting longevity or immortality, ideals that were popularized by Taoist philosophy and very widely represented as a result of Taoist influence. Over 100 variants are known [iv], [v]. They are seen on ceramics, textiles, medals and elsewhere. The shou character is often associated with other symbols of longevity such as the BAT, CRANE, SACRED FUNGUS, PINE, TORTOISE, etc. Two together on a wedding gift signify ‘May you have many years of married life.’ See also PEACH.

Spiral. Mainly associated with fertility and birth. The walls of the entrance to megalithic burial chambers in many parts of Europe are covered with so-called spiral patterns, probably denoting the journey of the soul into the chamber itself [vi]. Religion was then devoted to the cult of the Mother-Goddess, and the tomb chamber is thought to have symbolized her womb wherein the soul was reborn. Early votive figurines of the goddess have similar spirals in the genital area. Well-defined spiral patterns occur on Chinese funerary vases of the Neolithic period. (See also VASE as a symbol of the womb.) A double spiral, known to represent a bovine womb, is an attribute of the Egyptian goddess of childbirth, Meskhenet, and of an unnamed female thought to be her Syrian counterpart [vii]. The spiral also denoted WATER as an agent of fertility. It is a very common mo-
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It became the principal motif on Cretan jars (1700–1400 BC), often in the form of a 'running spiral' (i), which is also found on drinking vessels from Byblos, Mycenae and, intermittently, in Egypt. See also octopus.

Swastika (Sk. ‘well-being’). An ancient and very widespread symbol, believed by many authorities to have been originally a representation of the sun, indicating its course through the heavens. According to some it represents a wheel of the sun-god’s chariot. Hence it shares some of the sun’s symbolism: light, fertility and, particularly, good fortune. It was found at Troy, and was a popular motif on Greek coinage, which contributed to its wide circulation. It was virtually unknown in Assyria and Babylon and appeared in Egypt only from the Ptolemaic period. In India the swastika was known to the Indus Valley peoples and was subsequently associated with Vishnu and Shiva. It is seen in the sculpture of Jain temples, dating from 2nd–1st cents. BC, and is an attribute of Suparshva, one of the twenty-four founding teachers of the sect. In China the swastika (wan) was originally a Taoist emblem and may be seen in the hand of Lao-tzu, founder of Taoism, and of other Taoist immortals, symbolizing their divine power. A swastika is one of the ‘auspicious signs’ on the Buddha’s foot and, when represented on the breast of Shakymuni, symbolizes his heart, which holds all his thinking. It was introduced into Japan probably through Buddhism and is seen on numerous Chinese and Japanese deities, as well as those of Tibetan Lamaism. As an auspicious sign swastikas are used for ornamental borders on eastern carpets, silks and woodwork. On Chinese ceramics, with a ju-i sceptre it expresses the wish for a long and happy life. The Chinese character wan later denoted the number 10,000.

The swastika has two forms. The end-stroke may turn either clockwise, like the Greek gamma (Γ), when it is called a gammadion, or anticlockwise [ii]. They can denote respectively male and female, yang and yin, sun and moon. The anticlockwise version is the Buddhist and Taoist form and was sometimes associated with the Greek goddesses Artemis, Demeter and Hera. The same form sometimes accompanies early Christian inscriptions, as a version of the cross.

T. Ancient symbol of life, called tau (Greek T). For Teutonic peoples it represented the double mallet or hammer of Thor and symbolized the lightning that heralded fertilizing rain. In the Christian catacombs it symbolized the promise of eternal life. The ‘mark’ put on the foreheads of the righteous Israelites of Jerusalem to save them from destruction was a tau (Vulg. signa thau). It was adopted by Christians in Egypt as a form of the cross of Christ and is an attribute of Antony the Great, the Egyptian hermit. [iii: after Grünewald]. When given a handle it becomes an ankh, the Egyptian symbol of life.
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Triangle. The symbol of a three-fold nature. The Christian trinity may be represented as a triangle, sometimes framing an eye, the symbol of God the Father. His halo is sometimes triangular. The equilateral triangle is a Hindu symbol of gender: with apex up, it is male, the lingam, which is Shiva; apex down is female, yoni, his shakti. (For the Greeks, the delta (apex up) was a female symbol, eidolon gynaikeion, the image of woman.) The combination of male and female symbols, called Shri yantra, is an object of contemplation in Tantric Buddhism. It is intended to release psychic energy and heighten consciousness. As a musical instrument the triangle is sometimes an attribute of Erato, Greek muse of love poetry. See also lotus.

Trigram (Ch. pa kua). The origin of the eight ancient Chinese divinatory trigrams is unknown. It is said they were revealed to a legendary emperor, Fu Hsi (c. 2852 BC), while he was contemplating the patterns on the shell of a tortoise. Each trigram consists of a different combination of three lines. The line may be broken in the middle (yin) or unbroken (yang). Later interpreters attributed to each sign a natural element, quality of mind, compass point, etc, which became the basis of a philosophical and divinatory system that had universal application. When used for divination the trigrams are arranged in a circle with the yin and yang motif in the centre. The trigrams were formerly found on the garments of military and religious leaders and were worn as an amulet to ensure good fortune. They are frequently seen in ceramic decoration.

Triskele. A disk enclosing three legs, joined at the hip and bent, as if running, or three radiating crescents or ogees. The former was originally a solar symbol, the latter lunar, and was meant to portray the movement of sun and moon across the heavens. The solar symbol, like the swastika, also came to mean good fortune. It is found frequently on early coinage of Asia Minor and on the shield of the Greek hero, Achilles. It may be seen in conjunction with a solar animal such as the lion, eagle, dragon or cock. This may indicate a connection with the three-legged raven in a solar disk, one of the twelve ornaments on Chinese imperial robes. The triskele when seen on Celtic crosses may symbolize the Christian Trinity. It is the emblem of the isles of Man and Sicily.

Word. Primitive peoples worldwide once believed in the magical power of the spoken word. A person's name was an intrinsic part of his being and must therefore be kept secret lest his enemies use it to cause him harm. The power of the word entered the religious beliefs of ancient civilizations where it had more than symbolic force. The Egyptians inscribed the names of enemies on clay tablets, which they then smashed to pieces. (See also water.) The word was also creative. The Egyptian creator-god, Pтах, brought everything to life through his heart and...
tongue’, in other words, spoke the universe into existence. In the *Rig-Veda*, the oldest of Hindu scriptures, *brahman* denoted the creative power of the spoken word (see *brahma*). Greeks and Romans believed in the magical power of names. Thus it was an offence to pronounce the names of priests who celebrated the Eleusinian mysteries, while priests in Rome kept secret the name of the city’s guardian deity for fear that enemies might lure him away. The ritual of pronouncing magical formulae, or *mantras* [i: ‘om mani padme hum’, ‘Ranja characters’, 7th cent. AD], by followers of the Vajrayana sect of Buddhism, was intended to force the gods to comply with the devotee’s will and grant his desires. (See further *jewel; A.*) The Hebrew name of God, Yahveh, ‘I am that I am’, became the symbol of monotheism for the Israelites and is so sacred it is not uttered (is ‘ineffable’) except on the Day of Atonement. The word of the Hebrews’ God had, like Ptah’s, the power to create: ‘The Lord’s word made the heavens ... Let the whole world fear the Lord ... for he spoke and it was’. In Christian theology the ‘Word’ (Gk. *logos*) is a metaphysical concept developed from Greek speculative thought and only remotely descended from primitive magic. It came to denote the Second Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, which is generally represented in Christian art as a *dove*.

**Yin and Yang** (Jap. *In, Yo*). Ancient Chinese cosmology, later transmitted to Japan, postulated a dualistic universe based on negative and positive principles, *yin* and *yang*, which pervade all things. The words originally meant the contrasting shaded and sunlit slopes of mountain or valley. *Yin* is female, the earth, darkness, the moon, passivity; *yang* is male, heaven, light, the sun, the active principle in nature, etc. *Yin* and *yang* feature in two of the oldest Chinese classics, the *I Ching* (*Book of Changes*, c. 10th cent. BC, with later accretions) and the *Shih Ching* (*Book of Songs*, or *Book of Odes*, c. 6th cent. BC). They are represented by the *T’ai chi*, a diagram of an egg in which dark and light stand for yolk and white [ii]. It symbolizes the origin of all creation. From the egg was hatched the first man, P’an Ku (Jap. Hanko). For more about him, see *hammer*. See also *trigram*.

### 2. Animals

**Ant.** Symbol of industry and an example to the sluggard. When contrasted with a large animal, especially a camel, it has since antiquity symbolized the inequality of the human condition. It also illustrates a classical saying, ‘Through concord small things may grow greater, through discord the greatest are destroyed’ which was made into a rebus in the Renaissance that depicted an ant devouring an elephant and vice versa [iii].

**Antelope.** A typical attribute of *Shiva*, held in one of his left hands
## Notes and References

**AITEM: Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology**  
**SBE: Sacred Books of the East**  

### 1: Abstract Signs

2. Rev. 22:13, etc.

### 2: Animals

   *Achilleid*, 2.381–452.
18. Diodorus Siculus, 5.72.
19. Pausanias, 2.17.4.
23. Isa. 11.1–2.
25. Sometimes called a serpent or snake, but usually represented as a typical Chinese dragon. See Davis, F. Hadland, 1913, pp. 28–30.
33. Alternatively, the son of the goddess Bhadravana, see van Buiten, J.A.B., 1973, 1.(7).60.
34. See Zimmer, W., 1946, pp. 103–4.
42. *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, 218–38.
43. Exod. 10.1–20.
49. Exod. 34.29.
50. Gen. 22.1–19.
53. *Jataka*, Bk. 11, no. 460. (transl.) Cowell (note 45 above).
54. Or, in some versions a well of sea water, thus *Apollodorus*, 3.14.1.
55. 2 Tim. 4.6–8.
56. Rev. 6. 1–8.
57. Gen. 4. 4–5.
58. Rev. 7. 9–17.
60. Rev. 5.5.
61. 1 Pet. 5.8.
68. 1 Kings 17.1–6.

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71 Homer, Ody., 12.39ff, 158ff.
72 Faulkner, R.O., 1973, vol. 1, p. 72 (Spell 75) and note 9, p. 77 (Spell 76), p. 81 (Spell 78), etc. See also Hart, G., 1990, pp. 19-22.
73 Ibid.
74 Faulkner, R.O., 1985, ch. 87.
76 Rig-Veda, Griffith, R.T.H., 1920, 1.32.1-15, pp. 43-5.
78 Vishnu Purana, 1.4. (transl.) Macfie, J.M., 1926.
81 Gen. 3.1-7.
82 Matt. 10.16.
83 Liber de Infancia ("Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew"), N.T. Apocrypha, ch. 27.
84 Apollodorus, (transl.) Frazer, J.G., 1921: 3.5.8. According to Apollodorus the sphinx has ‘a face of a woman, beast, feet and tail of a lion, and the wings of a bird’.
85 Ovid, Met., 6.129-45.
87 Matt. 27.48, etc.
88 Faulkner, R.O., 1985, ch. 86.
89 Hyginus, Fabula, 77.
90 Ovid, Met., 2.367ff.
93 Song of Songs, 4.15.
95 Homer, Ody., 11.576ff.
96 Virgil, Aeneid, 6.595.
97 Jonah 1.15ff.
99 Ezek. 1.5-11.
100 Livy (op. cit.), 1.4.

3: Artefacts
1 Heb. 6.18-19.
2 Nut is invoked throughout the Pyramid Texts; her heavenly arch protects the king. See Faulkner, R.O., 1969, no. 782, etc.
3 Lev. 8:2, 26, 31; Deut 26:2, 4, 10, etc.
4 John 6.1-13, etc.
5 Exod. 28.31-55.
7 Rev. 5.1ff.
8 Homer, Ody., Bk 21, passim.
10 Mahabharata, 8.24.3-44 etc. See also O’Flaherty, W.D., 1975, p. 126ff.
11 The Kinward (or Kinwar) bridge, which miraculously widened to allow the righteous to cross it; described in a Pahlavi text, the Dina-i Mainoq-i Khirad, ‘Opinions of the Spirit of Wisdom’. See SBE, vol. 24, (transl.) West, E.W., Oxford, 1885, 2.115-26, pp. 17-19.
12 The Islamic equivalent of the Kinward bridge was called Al Sirat.
14 Ps. 141.2.
15 Mark 14.23.
16 See note 10.
17 Mark 12.13-17.
18 Matt. 17.24-7.
19 Matt. 27.3-5.
20 Exod. 2.3.
21 Apollodorus, 2.6.3.
22 Portraits of Ch’in Ch’iuang (6th-7th cents. AD) and Wei-ch’ih Kung, or Yu (AD 585-638), are sometimes painted on the entrance doors of official residences as symbolic guardians.
24 Tertullian, de Baptismo (Patrologia Latina), 1. col. 1198.
25 Rev. 22.1-2.
27 Rev. 5.8.
28 Gen. 3.8-4.
30 Matt. 16.18-19.
31 Rev. 20.1-3.
32 Gen. 22.1-19.
33 Ovid, Met., 8.169-73; Plutarch, Parallel Lives, 1.19.
34 Faulkner, R.O., 1969, nos. 389, 468, 472, 479, 971-80, etc.
35 Gen. 28.10-22.
37 John 19.34.
38 Diodorus Siculus, 3.58-9.
39 Hyginus, Fabula, 165.
40 Exod. 37.17-24.
42 Homer, Ody., 8.266-365.
44 Rev. 5.8.
46 Bhagavata Purana. For the pastoral Krishna see Tagare, G.V., 1978, Sk. 10, ch. 21, passim.
48 Homer, Ody., 10.1ff.
50 Ascension of Isaiah (N.T. Apocrypha), ch. 1-5.
51 Rev. 1.1-11.
52 Hesiod, Theog., 147-92.
53 Rev. 7.2ff.
54 Acts of Thomas (N.T. Apocrypha), ch. 17.
55 Hesiod, Theog., 147-92.
57 Gen. 3.23.
58 John 20.15.
61 The Seven Sorrowes are: 1) The prophecy of Simeon, Luke 2.34-5; 2) The Flight into Egypt, Matt. 2.13-15; 3) Dispute with the Doctors,
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Luke 2.41–51; 4) Road to Calvary, Matt. 27.32, etc.; 5) Crucifixion, Matt. 27.33–56, etc.; 6) Descent from the Cross, Matt. 27.57–8; 7) Ascension, Acts 1.9–12.

62 Rev. 1.16.
63 John 18.10–11.
64 Exod. 32.15–16.
66 John 18.3.
67 1 Sam. 2.12–14.
68 Rev. 8.1ff.
69 Faulkner, R.O., 1985, ch. 156.
70 Tacitus, Annales, 3.1–2.
71 Exod. 2.1–10.
72 Matt. 3.13–17.
73 Mahabharata, see van Buitenen, J.A.B., 1973: 1(5).10ff.
75 Mark 16.1.
76 Ovid, Met., 4.765–86.
77 Hyginus, Fabulae, 33, 52.
78 Ezek. 1.16.
80 Coomaraswamy, A.K., 1972, p. 27.
81 Herodotus, 1.199.
82 Ripa, C., 1970, s.v. Obedienza. Suave = sweet, the quality of Obedience.
83 Gen. 11.1–9.

4: Earth and Sky
1 Virgil, Aeneid, 2.756–67.
3 Shakespeare, Ant. and Cleop. 4.8.28.
5 Exod. 19.9–16.
7 Rev. 12.1.
8 Judg. 6.36–40.
11 Exod. 3.1–6.
13 Exod. 19.18.
15 Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 2.9.7.
16 Dan. 3.15–27.
17 Apollodorus 2.5.11.
18 Exod. 32.1–20.
20 Faulkner, R.O., 1969, no. 199.
21 Faulkner, R.O., 1985, ch. 149.
22 From the Shuo Wen by Hsu Shen (d. ? AD 120). See Giles, H.A., 1898, no. 787.
23 Acts 1.9–11.
25 Strabo, Geographica, 9.3.
26 Gen. 9.13–14.
27 Gen. 2.10–14.
29 Hyginus, Fabula, 107.
31 Dante, Divine Comedy – Hell, canto 14, 115–20; also Milton, Paradise Lost, 2.575–81.
32 Faulkner, R.O., 1973: see note 10 above.
33 Exod. 17.1–7.
34 Acts 5.14–16.
35 Matt. 2.2–9.
36 Rev. 22.16.
37 Faulkner, R.O., 1969, no. 341 (and note 6), 929, 935.
38 Werner, E.T.C., 1922, pp. 73–4 (Chih Nu).
39 See MacDonell, A.A., 1905, p. 77.
40 Rig-Veda, Griffith, R.T.H., 1926, 1.154.1–6, p. 207.
41 Mal. 4.2.
42 Rev. 12.1.
43 Rig-Veda, Griffith, R.T.H., 1926, 10.129.1–3, p. 575.
48 Gen. 1: 2–14.
49 Faulkner, R.O., 1969, no. 199.
51 Gen. 7: 8–19.
52 Pliny, Nat. Hist., 4.35; and 8.
53 Homer, Iliad, 14.201.

5: Human Body and Dress
1 Herodotus, 4.189.
2 Ezek. 1.15–28.
3 Rig-Veda, passim. On Agni as the first Angiras, see 1.1.6 and 1.31.1–2; also Griffith, R. T. H., 1920: vol. 1, pp. 1 and 40. See also O'Flaherty, W.O., 1975, p. 26.
5 Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 2.9.7.
6 See SBE, vol. 5, a Pahlavi text, the Bundahi, ('original creation'), (transl.) West, E.W., Oxford 1880, 1.1–28 (pp. 3–10), 3.1–27 (pp. 15–20), 6–9, passim (pp. 25–31), etc.
7 Vishnu Purana, 1.4. See Wilson, H.H., 1961, p. 36.
8 Vishnu Purana, 1.20. See Wilson, H.H., 1961, p. 119.
9 John 18.10.
10 Graves, R., 1955, no. 56.
11 Rig-Veda, Griffith, R.T.H., 1920, 1.154.1–6, p. 207.
12 Acts 1.9–12.
14 Taittiriya Samhita, 7.4.9., (transl.) Keith, A.B., 1914.
15 Matt. 27.25–6, etc.
18 Mahabharata, see van Buitenen, J.A.B., 1973: 3(37)213:1ff.
19 Mark 6.28.
20 Matt. 2.16.
23 Mahabharata, see van Buitenen, J.A.B., 1973: 1(5)5.10ff.
24 Exod. 34.29.
25 Job 41.1ff.
28 Ps. 85.10.
29 Exod. 3.5–6.
31 Matt. 27.57–60.
32 For the legend of Psyche, see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, or *The Golden Ass*. (transl.) Danthine, H., 1937, passim.
34 Faulkner, R.O., 1969, no. 1652.
37 Gen. 24.65.
38 Gen. 32.22–32.

6: Plants
1 Num. 17.1–8.
3 Song of Songs 5.15.
5 See Graves, R., 1955, no. 7b.
7 One of the ‘bitter herbs’: Exod. 12.8.
9 Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.251ff.
10 Song of Songs 4.12.
11 Jonah 4.6–11.
14 Matt. 3.4.
16 Ps. 51.7.
18 Rig-Veda, 6.16.13; 7.33.11, Griffith, R.T.H., 1920, p. 571; 1926, p. 36.
19 See ‘Earth and Sky’ note 45, above.
21 Zech. 1.8–11.
24 1 Sam. 16.1–13.
29 Ovid, *Met.*, 1.689–713.
30 Theophrastus, *Inquiry into Plants*, 4.2.1–3.
32 Gen. 3.18.
33 Summa Theologica, 2.2.q.164.2.0.
34 Exod. 3.1–10.
36 Song of Songs 2.2.
37 Mark 15.16–20.
38 Faulkner, R.O., 1985, p. 70 and ch. 63A.
39 Rig-Veda, Griffith, R.T.H., 1926, 10.81.4, p. 497.
40 Gen. 3.22.
43 Isa. 11.1–3.
44 Exod. 17.1–7.
46 John 11.1–44.
47 Num. 17.1–11.
50 Ps. 137.1–2.
51 Num. 13.17–29; Isa. 63.1–6.

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1 See further Zimmer, H., 1946, p. 13ff.
5 Rig-Veda, Griffith, R.T.H., 1926, 10.51.1–9, pp. 453–4 and notes.
6 Ibid.
8 Ezek. 1.9–10.
9 Rev. 4.6–8.
10 Visser, M. W. de, 1923.
14 Yetts, W.P., 1912, p. 21, Fig. XIII.
15 Matt. 25.35–7.
17 John 15.1–6.
18 Rev. 22.16.
22 1 Sam. 17.34–6.
23 1 Sam. 16.12–13.
24 Hymn to Demeter, 2.
29 Ibid., 1963, pp. 147ff.
30 Ibid., 1963, pp. 120ff.
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35 See The Golden Legend, by Jacob of Voragine (c. 1230–c. 1298).
37 Isæ. 6.6–7.
38 Ezek. 1.16.
39 Dan. ch. 6 and ‘Apocryphal Additions to Dan.’, vv. 23–42.
40 Hesiod, Theog., 901–3.
41 Brihadārāma Purâna, 2.60.1–4, 7–97, 106(b)–8. See also O’Flaherty, W. D., 1975, pp. 262–9.
42 Brahmanda Purâna, 2.3.42.1–5. (transl.)
43 Vayu Purâna, 2.36.74–86. (transl.) Tagare, G. V., 1988.
45 Faulkner, R. O., 1969, passim.
46 Homeric Hymn to Demeter, 40–53.
47 Ovid, Met., 1.658–721.
50 Matt. 3.4.
51 John 1.29.36.
53 Mahabharata, see van Buitenen, J. A. B., 1973, 3(37)213.fff.
54 Bhagavata Purâna, see Tagare, G. V., 1978, Skandha 10, ch. 17.2–12.
55 Ibid., Sk. 10, ch. 8.28–30.
56 Ibid., Sk. 10, ch. 22.1–27.
57 Ibid., Sk. 10, ch. 8.34–45.
58 Ibid., Sk. 12, ch. 11.4–24.
60 Exod. 17.1–7.
61 Exod. 34.29.
63 Hesiod, Theog., 902.
64 Gen. 8.10–11.
65 Ovid, Met. 4.765–86.
66 Ovid, Met. 4.665–739.
67 Mark 14.66–72.
68 Boethius, Consolationes. (transl.) Stewart, H. F., (Loeb), 1918, 1.1, pp. 131–2.
70 Plutarch, De Solertia Animalium, 16.
71 See further Mâle, E., 1984, pp. 79–91.
73 Mahabharata, 8.24.3–44. See Artefacts, note 10, above.
76 1 Cor. 13.13.
77 Hesiod, Theog., 904–6.
78 Ibid., 907–11.
79 Seneca, De Beneficiis, 1.3.2.
82 Vincent of Beauvais, Speculum Doctrinale, 1.9.
84 Xenophon, Mem:rabil:ta, 2.1.22ff.
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89 Matsya Purana, 1.9–33; 2.1–19. (Sacred Books of the Aryans), (transl.) various (ed. Akhtar, J. D.), Delhi, 1972, pp. 4–7.
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94 Ramayana, bk. 6, canto 110. See Griffith, R. T. H., 1915.
95 Vishnu Purana, 3.17. See Wilson H. H., 1961, pp. 269–70; the ‘Deceiver’ is called ‘an illusory form’ by Wilson. See also 3.18, passim, on Buddhism and Jainism as heresies.
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