

# Importance of Symbols

## Egyptian Symbols

- Symbols in a largely illiterate society serve the vital purpose of relaying the important values of the culture to the people generation after generation, and so it was in ancient Egypt.
- The peasant farmer would not have been able to read the literature, poetry, or hymns which told the stories of his gods, kings, and history but could look at an obelisk or a relief on a temple wall and read them there through the symbols used.

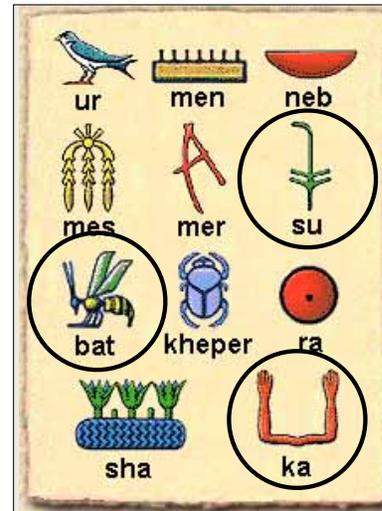
## Egyptian Symbols



Image source: <https://soundcloud.com/whencyclopedia/ancient-egyptian-symbols>

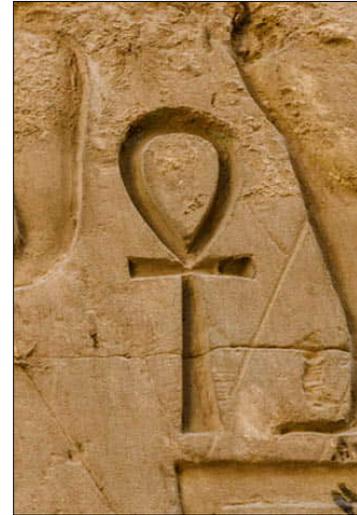
- Symbols appeared in all manner of artwork from amulets to architecture.
- Symbols can represent concepts. For example:
  - the ankh represented life
  - the djed represented stability
  - the was-scepter represented power

## Egyptian Symbols



- Hieroglyphics used conceptual symbols for entire words and individual sounds. For example, the "Ka," while representing the life of the soul, also was used for the sound.
- The sedge (papyrus) symbol, while symbolizing Upper Egypt, also represented the sound "su".
- The bee symbol, while symbolizing Lower Egypt also represented the sound "bat".

# Sacred Symbols



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## Ankh

- The Egyptian word 'ankh' means 'life'. As the symbol of life, it appears regularly in Egyptian art.
- The hieroglyph with which this word is written, a cross with a loop on top, perhaps depicts a stylized sandal strap, with the loop being the ankle strap.
- In numerous reliefs, the king is being given (the symbol of) life by a god. An unusual and intimate way of depicting this may be seen in Amarna art – hands at the end of the Aten's rays are holding the sign to the noses of the king and his family.
- The sign was common as an amulet and sometimes combined with a djed-pillar and/or a was-scepter.

<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=64>



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## Tyet

- Known as the knot of Isis or the blood of Isis, it is similar to the ankh in shape but with the arms turned downward.
- As pictured, it was used as a funerary amulet made of red stone or glass. It was thought to bind magic.
- It was mentioned in the book of the dead as being buried with the mummy to keep him strong and to protect from whatever could harm him.
- It represents Isis in her role as the a universal mother so it might also act a symbol of family.

Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyet>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4c6K54hNul8&t=66s>



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## Djed

- The djed symbol consisted of a wide column with three or four horizontal crossbars at the top.
- It is still not precisely known what the djed-pillar portrays. Among other things, the djed has been considered to be a tree with no branches or a column made of a bundle of reeds. It has also been suggested that it is a pole with grain tied around it.
- A text in the Book of the Dead explains that the djed-pillar is the backbone of Osiris. It was a symbol of endurance and stability. It was used as an amulet and in engravings.

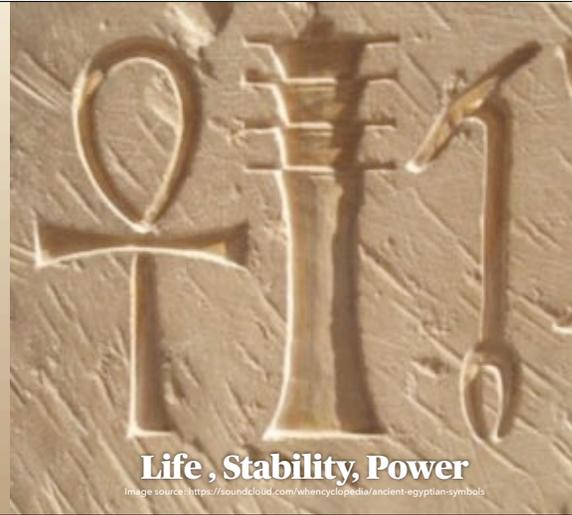
<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=134>

<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=134>

## Was Scepter

- The was-scepter was a staff with a stylized animal head on top and a forked end. It symbolized power. It was carried by many of the gods, who pass it on to the king, often with other emblems such as the ankh and the djed-pillar.
- In a funerary context the was-scepter was responsible for the well-being of the deceased, sometimes included in the tomb equipment or decorations of the tomb or coffin.
- The scepter was used as an amulet. The Egyptians perceived the sky as supported on four pillars, often shaped as was-scepters.
- The scepter also symbolized of the fourth Upper Egyptian nome, the nome of Thebes, "waset" in Egyptian.

<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=397>



Life, Stability, Power

Image source: <https://soundcloud.com/wiencyclopedia/ancient-egyptian-symbols>

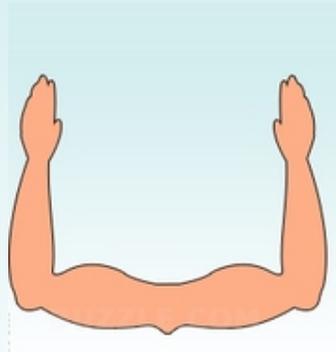
## Ka

- Egyptians believed that everyone had a soul that survived after death, composed of two parts: the physical soul "Ka" and the nonphysical "Ba" (also the conscience).
- Believed to be a spiritual twin born with every person that lived on after he died, it was represented as a second image of the person with two upraised arms on his head.
- It was believed to be independent of the earthly body so it could move, eat and drink at will. For this reason food offerings were buried with the dead.
- he Ka needed the body after death. If the body decomposed, the person's spiritual twin would die and the deceased would lose their chance for eternal life.

Image source:

<https://www.mosaicfreeschool.com/mosaic-minutes/category/all/23>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNvq4anb7-M>



## Ba

- The Ba was represented by a man-headed hawk often depicted as hovering over the bodies of kings and commoners alike.
- The most important function of the Ba during a person's life was to guide them to follow conscience, virtue, kindness, compassion and honor.
- After death the Ba made it possible for the deceased person to leave his tomb and rejoin his Ka.
- Then the Ba and Ka would fly together into the next step of the person's journey in afterlife.

Image source: <https://www.mosaicfreeschool.com/mosaic-minutes/category/all/23>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNvq4anb7-M>



## Sedge plant (Upper Egypt)

- Upper Egypt used the sedge plant hieroglyph, which is called "nesu" or "nsw" which also meant king.
- It is also visible in Sma hieroglyph as half of the union.

<https://ofartandwine.com/straight-out-of-the-nile-valley-cheeky-harrys-golden-bee/>



Image source: <https://papyrus-stories.com/2018/06/25/bee-stories/>

## Bee (Lower Egypt)

- The hieroglyphs in the shape of a bee is called "bity", meaning "king".
- Originally this bee hieroglyph was used to represent the King of Lower Egypt.
- It is often pictured with the sedge plant which represented Upper Egypt.

<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=397>



## Upper and Lower Egypt

Image source: <https://ofartandwine.com/straight-out-of-the-nile-valley-cheeky-harrys-golden-bee/>

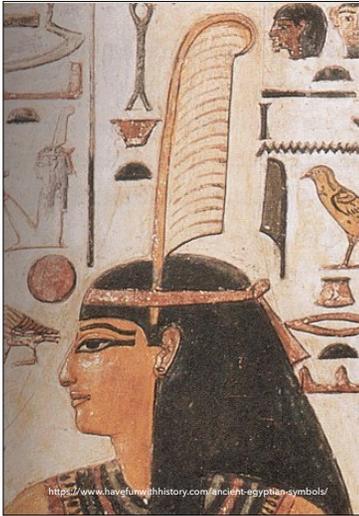
## Leb

- The Leb represents the heart. Medical texts reveal that the Egyptians knew that the beating ("speaking") of the heart could be felt at various places in the body.
- Egyptians thought that the heart was the seat of wisdom, memory and emotions: the most important organ. Because it was so important, the heart was the only organ left in the body during mummification.
- As seen previously, in the Hall of Judgment, the heart was weighed against the feather of Ma'at to determine a person's afterlife destiny.

<https://www.egypttourportal.com/ancient-egyptian-symbols/#section7>

<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=175>





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## Feather of Ma'at

- The Feather of Ma'at represented notions such as order, justice and truth: the opposite of chaos, evil and lies.
- The goddess Ma'at came into being when creation and cosmic order banished chaos.
- Ma'at was considered to be the most important principle of the world. It was the king's duty to maintain this order. Based on his knowledge of Ma'at, he issued laws.
- In the Hall of Judgment a person's heart was weighed against this feather to determine their destiny in the afterlife.

<http://www.havetunehistory.com/ancient-egyptian-symbols/>

<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=228>



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## Scarab Beetle

- The Scarab Beetle lays its eggs in a ball of dung from which its offspring emerge. The Egyptians regarded it as the personification of spontaneous life springing out of the earth.
- The way the beetle pushed the dung ball along was seen as a parallel of the way the sun disk crossed the sky. Egyptians connected this with Khepri, who rolled the disc of the sun over the eastern horizon at daybreak.
- The common term used to refer to a beetle in Egypt, *scarabaeus sacer*, called *kheper* by the Egyptians also means 'to become'.

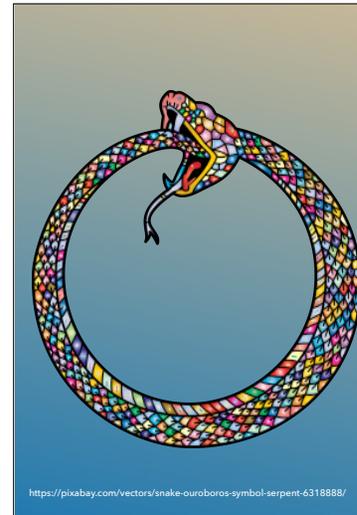
<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=330>

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- From the Middle Kingdom on scarabs were used as seals with the flat underside being carved with decorative motifs or texts. Many texts on scarabs contain the name of a king, but as it was common to choose the name of a famous king from the distant past,.
- As early as the Old Kingdom, representations of scarabs were also used as amulets.
- A special type of scarab is the so-called heart scarab, an amulet that was often shaped like a scarab on one side and a heart on the other. This object was placed between the mummy bandages or hung around the neck on a chain and was meant to prevent the heart testifying against the deceased during the final judgement.



<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=330>



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## Ouroboros (Sedmra)

- Known as the infinity symbol, the ouroboros is one of the most unique and significant Egyptian symbols.
- The name was *Sedmra* which means "tail in the mouth." It depicts a serpent with a tail in its mouth continually devouring itself and being reborn from itself.
- It first appeared in the tomb of King Tutankhamun who was buried in the 14th century BCE.
- In the Book of the Dead it is closely associated with Atum, the first god to be born from the chaotic waters of the Nun who was born from these waters in the form of a serpent that was renewed every morning.

<https://pixabay.com/vectors/snake-ouroboros-symbol-serpent-6318888/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73uOstucLl4>

## Lotus Flower (Sesan)



- The lotus flower is an ancient Egyptian symbol called *Sesan* in the Egyptian language. It had the sound *sšn*.
- As the flower detracts into the water at night and emerges the next day it is a symbol of rebirth and regeneration.
- The Egyptians believed the lotus had curative properties so they used it to make ointments, remedies, healing infections, perfumes, and even as an aphrodisiac. Egyptian lovers gave it to each other as a token of their love.
- It was used to decorate utensils, and many cups and bowls are lotus-shaped. As a symbol of rebirth, the lotus is a fixed part of tomb and coffin decoration, often in combination with the scarab, which has similar symbolism.

<https://www.havefunwithhistory.com/ancient-egyptian-symbols/>

<https://www.pyramidland.com/blog/ancient-egyptian-symbols>

## Eye of Horus (Wedjat)



- The Eye of Horus is an iconic symbol resembling an eye with distinctive markings. It represents protection, good health, and healing.
- The Egyptians considered the sun and the moon to be the eyes of Horus. Sometimes the moon was called the eye of Horus and the sun the eye of Ra.
- During his fight with Seth, Horus lost his eye, but later regained it, so it becomes associated with healing. For this reason it was one of the most common amulets.
- The eye of Horus had the sound *wꜥt*

<http://www.globeegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=150>

## The Eye of Horus (Wedjat)

- Some Egyptologists think that the Eye of Horus was used as a mathematical symbol. Each of the six parts of the eye represents a measurement unit and is associated with one of the human senses.
- The right side representing smell equals half.
- The pupil representing sight equals one quarter.
- The eyebrow representing thought equals one eighth.
- The left side representing hearing equals one sixteenth.
- The curved tail that looks like a tongue representing taste equals one thirty-second.
- The teardrop representing touch equals one sixty-fourth
- Surprisingly if we impose these parts over the image of the human brain, each portions corresponds to anatomical features.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73u0stacL4>

## Falcon (Horus)



- Horus is one of the most significant ancient Egyptian deities who served many functions, most notably as god of kingship, healing, protection, the sun and the sky.
- He was most often depicted as a falcon, most likely a lanner falcon or peregrine falcon, or as a man with a falcon head.
- The falcon represented the sound *ḥrw*

Image source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwZ80M6XCjQ>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horus>



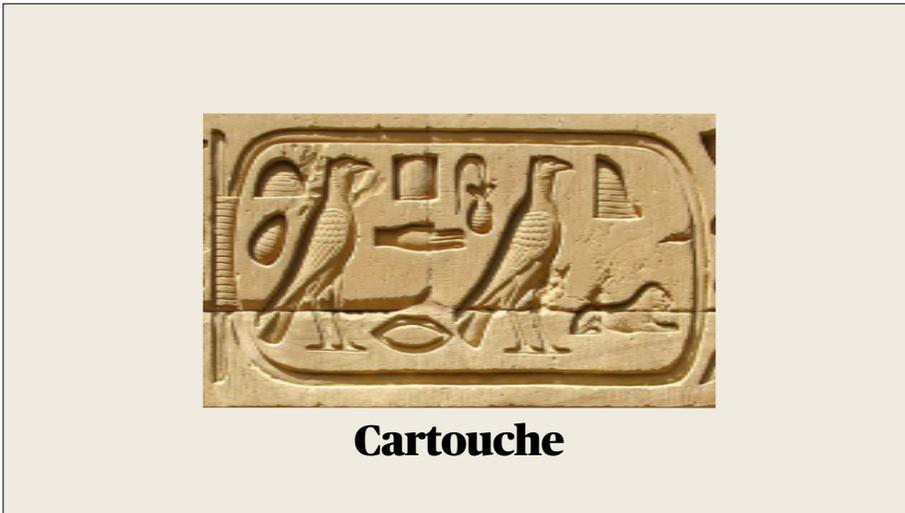
<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=348>

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## Shen

- The shen-ring is represented as a double strand of rope, with a knot on the underside.
- Its circular shape symbolized infinity and its encircling function the idea of protection. Royal names were written in an elongated version of the ring, called the cartouche.
- The shen-ring appears as a hieroglyph, as a protective sign on stelae or in tombs, and as an amulet.
- Pharaohs wore it for protection and it was often shown with Horus the falcon or Nekhbet the vulture holding the circle above the king to offer him eternal protection.
- The symbol had the sound *snw* or *shenu*.

<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=348>



## Cartouche



<https://www.amazon.com/Uraeus-Egyptian-Cobra-God-Notebook/dp/1675557322>

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## Uraeus

- Uraeus is the Greek name for the cobra on the foreheads of kings and gods. The cobra personified Wadjet, the protective goddess of Lower Egypt. Many goddesses were associated with the uraeus, including Hathor, Bastet, Sakhmet and Tefnut.
- According to Egyptian mythology, the cobra was given to the Egyptians by Geb (god of the earth) as a sign of kingship. So the uraeus was attached to the front of the pharaoh's crown to declare the legitimacy of the pharaoh.
- In addition the uraeus was used as an ornament for statuary and as jewelry and amulets.

<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=389>