

**Circle** A universal symbol. Totality; wholeness; simultaneity; original perfection; roundness is sacred as the most natural shape; the self-contained; the Self; the unmanifest; the infinite; eternity; time enclosing space, but also timelessness as having no beginning or end, and spacelessness as having no above or below; as circular and spherical it is the abolition of time and space, but also signifies recurrence. It is celestial unity; solar cycles; all cyclic movement; dynamism; endless movement; completion; fulfilment; God: 'God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and circumference is nowhere' (Hermes Trismegistus). As the sun it is masculine power, but as the soul or psyche and as the encircling waters it is the feminine maternal principle; also the circular or 'infinite' symbolizes the feminine as opposed to the 'bound', straight, masculine, paternal creative power. The circle also depicts the Precious Pearl, or the Pearl of Great Price (see PEARL). Small circles on sacrificial vessels often represent the sacrificial wafer, cake or bread. The circle is

typified by the number 10 (see NUMBERS) which has one as the centre and nine as the number of the circumference. The circle is the formation of nomadic tents and encampments, symbolizing the dynamic and endlessly moving as opposed to the square of houses, plots and cities of agricultural and sedentary people. Certain flowers, notably the lotus, lily and rose, are associated with the circle and share much of its meaning.

A circle with a dot at its centre depicts a complete cycle and cyclic perfection, the resolution of all possibilities in existence; in Astrology it portrays the sun; in Alchemy it is the sun and gold; it is also a symbol of all sun gods. Concentric circles are both solar and lunar; the sky; the heavens; different states or degrees in manifest existence. Three concentric circles signify past, present and future, the three spheres of earth, air and water, the worlds of heaven, earth and hell, the phases of the moon, the rising, noon and setting sun; also the dynamics of the reconciliation of opposites. The circle with the square is heaven and earth; integration; the *conjunctio*; they presuppose each other as time and space. Squaring the circle is the transformation of the spherical form of the sky and the heavens into the rectangular form of the earth in a sacred building, temple or church, bringing heaven down to earth, uniting the four elements and returning to primordial simplicity in unity; the octagon is the halfway stage in squaring the circle. The lower half of the semi-circle is the Lower Waters and the ark and the upper half is the Upper Waters and the rainbow. Together they are completion; the Cosmic Egg; the completion of a cycle of manifestation.

The winged circle represents the Primordial Cosmic Pair, the creative sky and the fertile earth; power from heaven; the sun god and solar power (see also DISK). Twin circles are the male and female; love and knowledge; the Dioscuri. Triple circles and three interlocking circles depict the Triad; the indissoluble unity of the three persons of a trinity; life, movement, the dynamic in tension. Four circles as a cross, linked by a central circle, are wisdom, fear, knowledge, hope. The sevenfold solar circle symbolizes the All-Knower; perfection; the seven heavens. *Alchemic*: Circle with a dot in the centre is the sun; gold. *Amerindian*: The circle radiating outward and inward, as the

FEATHERED SUN (q.v.) is a symbol of the universe. Camp circles and the circular teepees are a pattern of the cosmos with the North side as the heavens and the South side as the earth. *Astrology*: Circle with central point is the sun symbol. *Buddhist*: The circle is the ROUND OF EXISTENCE (q.v.), enclosing all in the phenomenal world. Three circles in triangular form are the Three Jewels. In Zen the empty circle is enlightenment. *Chinese*: The circle is the heavens with the square as the earth, as in the old cash; the circle with the square at the centre depicts the union of heaven and earth, yin and

yang and, by analogy, the perfect man. The circle is also the moving heavens which revolve round the unmoving square of the earth. *Christian*: The Church Universal. Three concentric or interlocking circles depict the Trinity. Two concentric circles signify intellect and will, according to Dante. Twin circles, as love and knowledge, represent Christ, also his dual nature. *Egyptian*: The winged circle is the rising sun, Ra, and resurrection (see DISK). *Greek*: (Orphism) The circle of Ouroboros round the Cosmic Egg was called Cronos and was defined by Pythagoras as the psyche of the universe. Cronos was mated to Necessity, also circling the universe, hence Time and Fate were both circles. *Hindu*: The Round of Existence in the phenomenal world. The flaming circle is a symbol of Prakriti, 'that which evolves, produces, brings forth'. *Islamic*: The dome; the vault of heaven; divine light. *Platonic*: 'The moving image of an unmoving eternity'. *Sumerian-Semitic*: The winged circle is an aniconic symbol of solar gods; divinity; solar power. *Taoist*: A circle with a point at the centre represents the supreme power, the Tao; the circle is also the Precious Pearl (see PEARL).

The circle enclosing the cross denoted Paradise and its four rivers rising from the centre, the Tree of Life, and flowing in the four cardinal directions; enclosing the double cross it is the 'Rose of the Winds', the four cardinal and four intermediate directions. It is also the Cosmic Solar Wheel, 'the vivifying principle that animates the universe' (Proclus); the four quarters of the earth; the four divisions of the cosmic cycle; the four seasons of the year and the ages of man, etc. The solar wheel-cross is always a symbol of good fortune and of change. The circle surmounting the cross is the union of male and female principles of life, both human and divine; is found in Egypt (as the Ankh), Syria, Phoenicia, in temples of Serapis, in China and Tibet, Lapland, Sweden and Denmark; it is also a symbol of Venus in astrology. The North American Indian lodge cross inscribed in the circle symbolizes sacred space and is a Cosmic Centre. The four directions of space in the celestial circle are the totality comprising the Great Spirit. In Mexican symbolism the peyotl, the cactus which gives the draught of immortality, grows at the point of intersection of the cross and the circle. Some Byzantine churches are based on five circles, or glories, placed in the form of a cross and surmounted by the circles of corresponding domes. A Christian church frequently forms a cross inside the circle of the churchyard.

**Square** The earth, as opposed to the circle of the heavens; earthly existence; static perfection; immutability; integration; the quaternary under its static aspect; God manifest in creation; the totality of the Godhead, the three sides being its threefold aspect and the fourth totality. It also denotes honesty; straightforwardness; integrity; morality. It is the fixation of death as opposed to the dynamic circle of life and movement, while in architectural symbolism it represents the fixation of the buildings of agricultural and sedentary peoples in opposition to the dynamic and endlessly moving circular formation of nomadic tents and encampments. It represents limitation and therefore form. The square is the perfect type of

enclosure, e.g. gardens, cloisters, courtyards, etc., symbolizing permanence and stability. In sacred architecture it signifies transcendent knowledge; the archetype controlling all works. Four-square is a talismanic assurance of permanence and stability. Squaring the circle, or circling the square, is the transformation of spherical form, the sky, the heavens, into the rectangular form of the earth, and vice versa, in a sacred building, temple or church; it is the mystical union of the four elements; the attainment of unity in the return to primordial simplicity, the octagon, which often joins the square of the tower to the circle of the dome, being the halfway stage in squaring the circle. *Buddhist*: The square, or cube, at the base of a chörten, represents the earth level in the planes of existence. *Chinese*: The earth, the immovable, combined with the circle of heaven which revolves, the square and circle together (as in the old Chinese cash) are the union of yin and yang, earth and heaven, also symbolizing the perfectly balanced man. To 'act on the square' is the Confucian maxim: 'Do not unto others what you would not wish done to you.' The square with compass signifies order; propriety; the laws of virtue; paths of wisdom; the true guide. The square is the attribute of Niu-kua, whose brother holds the compass as depicting the female and male principles. *Graeco-Roman*: The square is a symbol of Aphrodite/Venus as the feminine reproductive power. *Hermetic*: A square standing on its base is stability, on its point movement, with the circle in the middle it is the *anima mundi*. *Hindu*: Foremost among the symbols of India, the square is the archetype and pattern of order in the universe, the standard of proportion and the perfect measure for man. It is the basis of the temple or any sacred centre and is balanced perfection of form; Purusha; essence; space; also the pairs of opposites; the four directions; the four castes, etc. The square and the circle are both ornaments of the dharma, the order of things in the cosmos and the world of man. The square at the base of a Stupa represents the earth plane. *Pythagorean*: The square symbolizes the soul.

**Triangle** The threefold nature of the universe; heaven, earth, man; father, mother, child; man as body, soul and spirit; the mystic number three; the ternary; the first plane figure, hence the fundamental representation of surface; 'Surface is composed of triangles' (Plato); the equilateral triangle depicts completion.

The upward-pointing triangle is solar and symbolizes life, fire, flame, heat (here the

horizontal line represents air), the masculine principle, the linga, the shakta, the spiritual world; it is also the trinity of love, truth and wisdom; it denotes royal splendour and is depicted as the colour red.

The downward-pointing triangle is lunar, the feminine principle, the matrix; the waters, cold, the natural world, the body, the yoni, the shakti; it symbolizes the Great Mother as genetrix. The horizontal line is the earth and its colour white. In mountain and cave symbolism the mountain is the masculine, upward-pointing triangle and the cave the feminine, downward-pointing.

The triangle in a circle depicts the plane of forms held within the circle of eternity. 'The area within this triangle is the common hearth of them all and is named "the Plain of Truth", in which the Reason, the forms and patterns of all things that have been, and that shall be, are stored up not to be disturbed; and Eternity dwells round them, from whence time, like a stream from a fountain, flows down upon the worlds' (Plutarch).

Three interlaced triangles denote the indissoluble unity of the three persons of the Trinity. The double triangle, the six-pointed star, the Seal of Solomon, the Mogun David, indicates that 'every true analogy must be applied inversely', 'as above so below'; it is the union of opposites, male and female, positive and negative, the upper triangle being white and the lower black; fire and water; evolution and involution; interpenetration, each being the image of the other; the hermaphrodite; the perfect balance of complementary forces; the androgynous aspect of the deity; man looking into his own nature; the twin forces of creativity; the synthesis of all elements with the upright triangle as the celestial nature and the inverted as the terrestrial, the whole representing universal man uniting the two as mediator. As the Seal of Solomon it is also the figure of the Preserver and gives spirit power over matter and is a ruler of genii. Two triangles lying horizontally and touching apex to apex are lunar, the waxing and waning moon; eternal return; death and life; dying and resurrecting. The point of touching is the dark of the moon and death. *Alchemy*: The two triangles are essence and substance, *forma* and *materia*, spirit and soul, sulphur and quicksilver, the stable and the volatile, spiritual power and bodily existence. Triangles depict the elements as: fire  $\Delta$ ; water  $\nabla$ ; air  $\triangle$ ; earth  $\nabla$ . The two interlocking triangles are the union of the opposites which become 'fluid fire' or 'fiery water'. *Buddhist*: The pure flame and the Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. *Chinese*: The triangle with suspended swords signifies regeneration. *Christian*: The equilateral triangle, or the triangle formed by three interlacing circles, depicts the Trinity in unity and the equality of the three persons. The triangular halo is an attribute of God the Father. *Egyptian*: Represents the Triad. 'They

compare the perpendicular [of a right-angle triangle] side to the male, the base to the female and the hypotenuse to the offspring of the two: Osiris as the beginning, Isis as the medium or receptacle, and Horus as the accomplishing' (Plutarch). The Hand of the Egyptians is the union of fire and water, male and female. A figure of three double triangles surrounded by concentric circles depicts the Khui, the Land of Spirits. *Greek*: The delta symbolizes the door of life, the feminine principle, fertility. *Hindu*: The upward and downward triangles are the shakta and shakti, the linga and yoni, or Siva and his shakti. *Pythagorean*: The equilateral triangle represents Athene as goddess of wisdom.