

Emblem and Symbol

Alas, alas, my son, a day will come when the sacred hieroglyphics will become but idols. *The world will mistake the emblems of science for gods*, and accuse grand Egypt of having worshipped hell-monsters. But those who will calumniate us thus, will themselves worship Death instead of Life, folly in place of wisdom; they will denounce love and fecundity, fill their temples with dead men's bones, as relics, and waste their youth in solitude and tears. Their *virgins will be widows [nuns] before being wives*, and consume themselves in grief; because men will have despised and profaned the sacred mysteries of Isis.

— Hermes Trismegistus¹

THERE is no purely *mythical* element in any of the ancient religious texts; but the mode of thought in which they were originally written has to be found out and closely adhered to during the process of interpretation. For, it is either

- symbolical (archaic mode of thought),
- emblematical (a later, though very ancient mode of thought),
- parabolical (allegory),
- hieroglyphical, or again
- *logogrammatical* — the most difficult method of all,

— as every letter, as in the Chinese language, represents a whole word. Thus, almost every proper name, whether in the *Vedas*, the *Book of the Dead*, or the Bible (to a degree), is composed of such logograms. No one who is not initiated into the mystery of the occult religious logography can presume to know what a name in any ancient fragment means, before he has mastered the meaning of every letter that composes it.²

As a learned Mason and Theosophist, the late Mr. Kenneth Mackenzie, has shown in his *Royal Masonic Cyclopædia*, [s.v. “Emblem”] there is a great difference between *emblem* and *symbol*. The former “comprises a larger series of thoughts than a symbol, which may be said rather to illustrate some single special idea.” Hence, the symbols (say lunar, or solar) of several countries, each illustrating such a special idea, or series of ideas, form collectively an esoteric emblem. The latter is “a concrete visible picture or sign representing principles, or a series of principles, *recognizable by those who have received certain instructions*” (initiates). To put it still plainer, an emblem is *usually a series of graphic pictures* viewed and explained allegorically, and unfolding

¹ The Thrice-Great Hermes on his own country, from Champollion, *Lettres*, “Hermès Trismégiste,” xxvii; quoted in *Isis Unveiled*, II p. 360

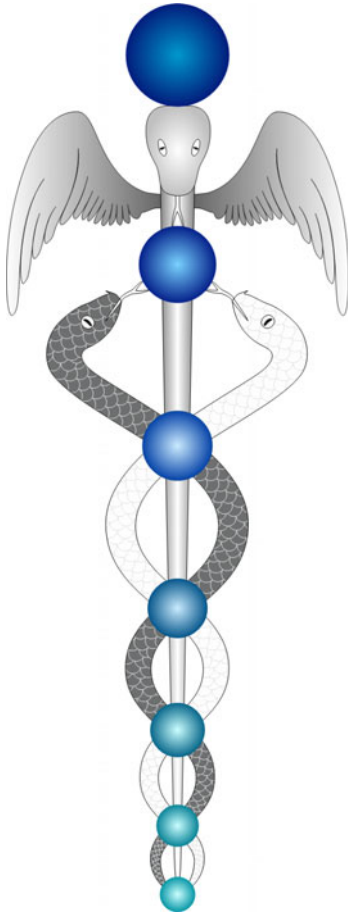
² *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 335



an idea in panoramic views, one after the other. Thus the *Purānas* are written emblems. So are the Mosaic and Christian Testaments, or the Bible, and all other exoteric Scriptures. As the same authority shows:

All esoteric Societies have made use of emblems and symbols, such as the Pythagorean Society, the Eleusinian, the Hermetic Brethren of Egypt, the Rosicrucians, and the Freemasons. Many of these emblems it is not proper to divulge to the general eye, and *a very minute difference may make the emblem or symbol* differ widely in its meaning. The magical sigillæ,³ being founded on certain principles of numbers, partake of this character, and although monstrous or ridiculous in the eyes of the uninstructed, convey a whole body of doctrine to those who have been trained to recognize them.⁴

Emblem



Symbol



³ Sign, word or device held to have occult power in astrology or magic (from L. *sigillum*, seal, signet) — ED. PHIL.

⁴ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 305-6 [Note to Students: see overview of occult symbols in: “Keys to the Mystery Language” in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series.]



Glossary

Allegory (*Gr.* Ἀλληγορία) Veiled language. Figurative or metaphorical speech. Synonymous with parable. Also, a visible symbol representing an abstract idea; an expressive style that uses fictional characters and events to describe some subject by suggestive resemblances; an extended metaphor. (*Word Web*)

Apologue (*Gr.* Απόλογος) I. Story, tale, long and tedious stories. II. Fable, allegory. (*Liddell & Scott*) Allegorical narrative, a short moral story, often with animal characters. (*Word Web*)

Emblem (*Gr.* Ἐμβλημα) Insertion, the shaft fitting into the spear-head, chased or embossed ornament used in decoration of a plate. (*Liddell & Scott*) A visible symbol representing an abstract idea. (*Word Web*)

Hieroglyph (*Gr.* Ἱερόγλυφον) Egyptian sacerdotal symbol or letter from *Gr.* ἱερός (hieros), sacred, and γλύφω (glupho), to carve, chisel, engrave. “. . . every great people had, like the Egyptians, its Demotic and its Hieratic [sacerdotal] writing and language, which had resulted first in a pictorial writing or the hieroglyphics, and later on in a phonetic alphabet.” (*Blavatsky Collected Writings*, V p. 297)

Logogram (*Gr.* Λογόγραμμα) or logograph, a grapheme which represents a word or a morpheme (the smallest meaningful unit of language). This stands in contrast to phonograms, which represent phonemes (speech sounds) or combinations of phonemes, and determinatives, which mark semantic categories. Logograms are commonly known also as “ideograms” or “hieroglyphs.” Strictly speaking, however, ideograms represent ideas directly rather than words and morphemes. (*Wikipedia*)

Metaphor (*Gr.* Μεταφορά) Transference, transport, change, phase of the moon. (*Liddell & Scott*) A figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity. (*Word Web*)

Myth (*Gr.* Μῦθος) I. Word, speech, public speech, conversation mostly in plural, thing thought or said, fact, matter, unspoken word, purpose, design, saying. II. Tale, story, narrative, fiction, children’s story, fable, plot of a comedy or tragedy. (*Liddell & Scott*) A traditional story accepted as history; serves to explain the world view of a people. (*Word Web*)

Parable (*Gr.* Παραβολή) Juxtaposition, comparison, illustration, analogy. Παραβολάνοι (L. parabalani) were persons who risked their lives as sick-nurses. A short moral story, often with animal characters. (*Word Web*)

Senzar “Mystery-speech” of the Initiated Adepts and “hieroglyphic” cipher in Occultism, in which the original Commentaries and Glossaries on the “Book of Dzyan” were written. (*Cf. Secret Doctrine*, I pp. xliii, 23; II p. 439; *Voice of the Silence*, pref. p. vii)

Symbol (*Gr.* Σύμβολον) Tally, *i.e.*, each of two halves or corresponding pieces, typically ασπράγαλος, [one of the vertebrae, ball of ankles or wrist joints] or other object, which two ξένοι, or any two contracting parties, broke between them, — each party keeping one piece, in order to have proof of identity of the presenter of the other. (*Liddell & Scott*) Something visible that, by association or convention, represents something else that is invisible. (*Word Web*)

