

An explanation of the meaning of Celtic knotwork and Celtic symbols.

The Celts left us very little in the way of written records, and most Celtic symbols have been interpreted by archaeologists and other scholars. Some of the ancient Celtic symbols have changed in meaning over time, having been influenced by the introduction of Christianity and the influence of outside cultures.

As a general rule of thumb: the shape of the design determines the "meaning" of the knotwork design.

Triskeles and trefoil shapes should be regarded as triskeles.

Circles represent unity or eternity, spirals evoke reincarnation or cycles of life and rebirth.

Triangles and trefoils represent the threefold dominions of earth, sea, and sky.

Squares or four-fold shapes are shield knots, symbols of protection from spirits or malevolent influence.

Zoomorphic or animal designs represent the attributes of the animal. Hounds-loyalty, Lions-nobility/strength, Snakes (dragons, maybe)-rebirth, Birds-purity/nobility, Bulls-strength, Boar-ferocity, Fish-clairvoyance, Horses-fertility/beauty, Stag-Virility



The **Triquetra** symbol predates Christianity and was likely a Celtic symbol of the Goddess, and in the North, a symbol of the god Odin. The Triquetra is usually associated as a symbol of a tripartite goddess: that is--the three stages of her life--Maiden, Mother and Crone.

Similar symbols do occur in some Norse and Celtic goddess imagery, but most likely represents the divisions of the animal kingdom and the three domains of earth mentioned above. Triplicities, or a group of three signs belonging to the same element, were common symbols in Celtic myth and legend, and one of the possible reasons that Christian beliefs were easily accepted by the Celtic peoples.

The triquetra is also considered to represent the triplicities of mind, body, and soul, as well as the three domains of earth according to Celtic legend- earth, sea, and sky.



The **Triskele** or triple spiral is one of the most common elements of Celtic art.

Triskeles are found in a variety of styles in both ancient and modern Celtic artwork.

Usually the triskeles are used in reference to the Mother Goddess. They also evoke the Celtic concept of the domains of material existence- earth, water, and sky.



The **Shield Knot** is an ancient and nearly universal symbol.

The shield knot has been used for thousands of years by a variety of peoples for protection and warding off evil spirits.



Circle Knots represent unity or eternity, ever-lasting love, happiness, health or prosperity.



The **Celtic Cross** (Ionic cross) has its roots in a pre-Christian variation of the Solar cross.

Examples of the Celtic cross date back as far as 5000 B.C. Its origins are not known, but it was known to be an early symbol of the sun god Taranis.

After the Christian conversion of the Celtic people, the Celtic Cross became an emblem of the Celtic Christian Church. Irish legend tells that the cross was introduced to Ireland by St. Columba, so it is sometimes referred to as Columba's cross, or the Ionic cross, after St. Columba's monastery on the island of Iona.

The circle in the Celtic Cross is sometimes referred to as a halo, or a symbol of eternity.



The Irish **Claddagh** Symbol is named for the Irish coastal town of Claddagh, where the ring design is based on a local legend. According to the tale, a local man kidnapped into slavery, returns home to present a ring to his true love.

Claddagh rings are a traditional token of loyalty and friendship as well as romantic love.

The hands in the design represent friendship, the heart, love, and the crown, loyalty.

By tradition, it is worn as a wedding ring, on the left hand, with the heart pointed inward. As an engagement ring, it is worn on the right hand, with the heart pointing inward; for friendship, it is worn on the right hand, heart turned outward.



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