Swastika

For other uses, see Swastika (disambiguation).

The swastika (also known as the gammadion cross, cross cramponnée, or manji) (as a Chinese character: 十 or 卍) is a symbol that generally takes the form of an equilateral cross, with its four legs bent at 90 degrees.[1][2] It is considered to be a sacred and auspicious symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.[3]

It has been used as a decorative element in various cultures since at least the Neolithic, and is found on a man's tunic depicted in a Roman mosaic at the Villa Romana del Casale in Sicily. It is known most widely as an important symbol long used in Indian religions, denoting "auspiciousness." It was adopted as such in pre-World War I-Europe and later, and most notably, by the Nazi Party and Nazi Germany prior to World War II. In many Western countries the swastika has been stigmatized because of its use in Nazism.[4] It continues to be commonly used as a religious symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism.[3]

The word swastika derives from the Sanskrit svastika (Devanagari: स्वस्तिक) "lucky or auspicious object". The older term gammadion cross in Western literature derives mainly from its appearance, which is identical to four Greek gamma letters affixed to each other.[5]

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Names

The word swastika has been in use in English since the 1870s, replacing gammadion (from Greek γαμμαδίον). It was loaned from the Sanskrit term svastika (Devanagari: स्वस्तिक), meaning any lucky or auspicious object, and in particular a mark made on persons and things to denote auspiciousness, or any piece of luck or well-being. It is composed of su- meaning "good, well" and asti "being"; the suffix -ka either forms a diminutive or intensifies the verbal meaning, and svastika might thus be translated literally as "that which is associated with well-being," corresponding to "lucky charm" or "thing that is auspicious."[6] The word finds its origin in Vedic Sanskrit. As noted by Monier-Williams in his Sanskrit-English dictionary, according to Alexander Cunningham, its shape represents a monogram formed by interlacing of the letters of the auspicious words su-asti (svasti) written in Ashokan characters.[8]

Other names for the symbol include:

- hook cross (German: Hakenkreuz), angled cross (German: Winkelkreuz) or crooked cross (German: Krummkreuz).
- cross cramponned, cramponnée, or cramponny, in heraldry, as each arm resembles a Cramp or angle-iron (German: Winkelmaßkreuz).
- fyfot, chiefly in heraldry and architecture. The term was coined in the 19th century based on a misunderstanding of a Renaissance manuscript.
- gammadion, tetragammadion (Greek: τετραγάμμιδιον), or cross gammadion (Latin: crux gammata; French: croix gammée), as each arm resembles the Greek letter Gamma (

Symbol in various scripts

The swastika has been a standardized Chinese character 卍 (pinyin: wàn) and as such entered various other East Asian languages such as Japanese where the symbol is called "卍" ( Hepburn: manji or 卍卍 (manji). The swastika is included as part of the Chinese script and has Unicode encodings U+534D 卐 (left-facing) and U+5350 卐 (right-facing);[9] the latter has a mapping in the original Big5 character set,[10] but the former does not (although it is in Big5+).[11] In Unicode 5.2, four swastika symbols were added to the Tibetan block: U+0FD5 卍 right-facing svasti sign, U+0FD6 卍 left-facing svasti sign, U+0FD7 卍 right-facing svasti sign with dots and U+0FD8 卍 left-facing svasti sign with dots.

Geometry

Geometrically, the swastika can be regarded as an irregular icosagon or 20-sided polygon. The proportions of the Nazi swastika were fixed based on a 5 × 5 diagonal grid.[12]

Characteristic is the 90° rotational symmetry and chirality, hence the absence of reflexional symmetry, and the existence of two versions of swastikas that are each other's mirror image.

A right-facing swastika might be described as "clockwise" or "counter-clockwise".

The mirror-image forms are often described as:

- counterclockwise (ToLeft) and clockwise (ToRight);
- left-facing (ToLeft) and right-facing (ToRight);
- left-hand (ToLeft) and right-hand (ToRight).

Origin hypotheses

The earliest known object with swastika-motifs is a bird from the tusk of a mammoth from the paleolithic settlement of Mezine, Ukraine dated to 10,000 BCE.[13]

Among the earliest cultures utilizing swastika is the neolithic Vinča culture of South-East Europe (see Vinča symbols). More extensive use of the Swastika can be traced to Ancient India, during the Indus Valley Civilization.

The swastika is a repeating design, created by the edges of the reeds in a square basket-weave. Other theories attempt to establish a connection via cultural diffusion or an explanation along the lines of Carl Jung's collective unconscious.

The genesis of the swastika symbol is often treated in conjunction with cross symbols in general, such as the sun cross of pagan Bronze Age religion. Beyond its certain presence in the "proto-writing" symbol systems emerging in the Neolithic,[14] nothing certain is known about the symbol's origin. There are nevertheless a number of speculative hypotheses. One hypothesis is that the cross symbols and the swastika share a common origin in simply symbolizing the sun. Another hypothesis is that the 4 arms of the cross represent 4 aspects of nature - the sun, wind, water, soil. Some have said the 4 arms of cross are four seasons, where the division for 90-degree sections correspond to the solstices and equinoxes. The Hindus represent it as the Universe in our own spiral galaxy in the forefinger of Lord Vishnu. This carries most significance in establishing the creation of the Universe and the arms as 'kal' or time, a calendar that is seen to be more advanced than the lunar calendar where the seasons drift from calendar year to calendar year. The luni-solar solution for correcting season drift was to intercalate an extra month in certain years to restore the lunar cycle to the solar-season cycle. The Star of David is thought to originate as a symbol of that calendar system, where the two overlapping triangles are seen to form a partition of 12 sections around the perimeter with a 13th section in the middle, representing the 12 and sometimes 13 months to a year. As such, the Christian cross, Jewish hexagram star and the Muslim crescent moon are seen to have their origins in different views regarding which calendar system is preferred for marking holy days.

Groups in higher latitudes experience the seasons more strongly, offering more advantage to the calendar represented by the swastika/cross. (Note relation to the sun cross.)
According to Reza Assasi, Swastika is a geometric pattern in the sky representing the north ecliptic pole centred to Zeta Draconis. He argues that this primitive astrological symbol was later called the four-horse chariot of Mithra in ancient Iran and represented the centre of Ecliptic in the star map and also demonstrates that in Iranian mythology, the cosmos was believed to be pulled by four heavenly horses revolving around a fixed centre on clockwise direction possibly because of a geocentric understanding of an astronomical phenomenon called axial precession. He suggests that this notion was transmitted to the west and flourished in Roman mithraism in which this symbol appears in Mithraic iconography and astrological representations.

Carl Sagan in his book Comet (1985) reproduces Han period Chinese manuscript (the Book of Silk, 2nd century BC) that shows comet tail varieties: most are variations on simple comet tails, but the last shows the comet nucleus with four bent arms extending from it, recalling a swastika. Sagan suggests that in antiquity a comet could have approached so close to Earth that the jets of gas streaming from it, bent by the comet's rotation, became visible, leading to the adoption of the swastika as a symbol across the world.[16] Bob Kobres in Comets and the Bronze Age Collapse (1992) contends that the swastika like comet on the Han Dynasty silk comet atlas was labeled a "long tailed pheasant star" (Di-Xing) because of its resemblance to a bird's foot or track. Kobres goes on to suggest an association of mythological birds and comets also outside China.

In Life's Other Secret (1999), Ian Stewart suggests the ubiquitous swastika pattern arises when parallel waves of neural activity sweep across the visual cortex during states of altered consciousness, producing a swirling swastika-like image, due to the way quadrants in the field of vision are mapped to opposite areas in the brain.[17]

Alexander Cunningham suggested that the Buddhist use of the shape arose from a combination of Brahmi characters abbreviating the words su asti.[18]

In his book The Apocryphal Unsealed (1981), Robert F. Riggs lists the swastika as one of several variations of the quadratura circuli, other examples being oriental mandalas and the Latin cross with the circle of eternity (i.e. the Celtic cross). He notes that the Tetrad 4 (square, cross, or cube) symbolizes the world of man, and a circle (or sphere) symbolizes heaven, the realm of the spirit, and heavenly virtues. As such, the combination of circles, crosses, spheres, and cubes, as found in various forms of the quadratura circuli, symbolize the union of heaven and earth.[19]

Archeological record

The earliest swastika known has been found in Mezine, Ukraine. It is carved on late paleolithic figurine of mammoth ivory, being dated as early as about 10,000 BC. It has been suggested this swastika may be a stylized picture of a stork in flight and not the true swastika that is in use today.[20]

In England, neolithic or Bronze Age stone carvings of the symbol have been found on Ilkley Moor.

Mirror-image swastikas (clockwise and anti-clockwise) have been found on ceramic pottery in the Devetashka cave, Bulgaria, dated 6,000 B.C.[21]

Some of the earliest archaeological evidences of Swastika in the Indian subcontinent can be dated to 3,000 BCE.[22] Swastikas have also been found on pottery in archaeological digs in Africa, in the area of Kush and on pottery at the Jebel Barkal temples,[23] in Iron Age designs of the northern Caucasus (Koban culture), and in Neolithic China in the Majiabang,[24] Dawenkou and Xiaoheyan cultures.[25] Other Iron Age attestations of the swastika can be associated with Indo-European cultures such as the Indo-Iranians, Celts, Greeks, Germanic peoples and Slavs.

The swastika is also seen in Egypt during the Coptic period. Textile number T.231-1923 held at the V&A Museum in London includes small swastikas in its design. This piece was found at Gau-el-Kebr, near Asyut, and is dated between AD300-600.

The Tierwirbel (the German for "animal whirl" or "whirl of animals") is a characteristic motif in Bronze Age Central Asia, the Eurasian Steppe, and later also in Iron Age Scythian and European (Baltic[27] and Germanic) culture, showing rotational symmetric arrangement of an animal motif, often four birds' heads. Even wider diffusion of this "Asiatic" theme has been proposed, to the Pacific and even North America (especially Moundville).[28]

Worldwide use

Asia

In Asia, the swastika symbol first appears in the archaeological record around[22] 3000 BC in the Indus Valley Civilization.[29][30] It also appears in the Bronze and Iron Age cultures around the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. In all these cultures the swastika symbol does not appear to occupy any marked position or significance, but appears as just one form of a series of similar symbols of varying complexity. In the Zoroastrian religion of Persia, the swastika was a symbol of the revolving sun, infinity, or continuing creation.[31][32]

It rose to importance in Buddhism during the Mauryan Empire and in Hinduism: with the decline of Buddhism in India during the Gupta Empire, with the spread of Buddhism, the Buddhist swastika reached Tibet and China. The symbol was also introduced to Balinese Hinduism by Hindu kings. The use of the swastika by the Bön faith of Tibet, as well as Chinese Taoism, can also be traced to Buddhist influence. In Thailand, the word "Sawaddi" is normally used as a greeting which simply means "hello"; Sawaddi-ka (feminine) and Sawaddi-krup (masculine). "Sawaddi" derives from the Sanskrit word "swasti" and its meaning is a combination of the words: prosperity, luck, security, glory, and good.

Hinduism

The swastika is an important Hindu symbol. It is traced with the finger with sindoor on the head or body during Hindu religious rites, and on doors on festival days - notably on diwali, or deepavalli. It is painted on many, if not most, three-wheel auto-rikshas and trucks. In all these uses it is a lucky charm protecting from evil and attracting good.

It is also said to represents God (the Brahman) in his universal manifestation, and energy (Shakti). It represents the four directions of the world (the four faces of Brahma). It also represents the Purusharthas: Dharma (natural order), Artha (wealth), Kama (desire), and Moksha (liberation).

Among the Hindus of Bengal, it is common to see the name "swastika" (Bengali: স্বাস্তিক) applied to a slightly different symbol, which has the same significance as the common swastika, that looks like a stick figure of a human being.[33] Right-facing swastika in the decorative Hindu form is used to evoke the Shakti.

Buddhism
Buddhism originated in the 5th century BC and spread throughout the Indian subcontinent. In the 3rd century BC (Maurya Empire). Known as a “yungdrung”[34] in ancient Tibet, it was a graphical representation of eternity. [35]

Jainism

Jainism gives even more prominence to the swastika as a tantra than Hinduism does. It is a symbol of the seventh Tirthankara, Suparśvanātha. In the Śvētāmbara tradition, it is also one of the aśtaṃgala. All Jain temples and holy books must contain the swastika and ceremonies typically begin and end with creating a swastika mark several times with rice around the altar. Jains use rice to make a swastika in front of statues and then put an offering on it, usually a ripe or dried fruit, a sweet (Hindi: रस मिठाई), or a coin or currency note. The four arms of the swastika symbolize the four places where a soul could be reborn in the cycle of birth and death - svarga “heaven”, naraka “hell”, manushya “humanity” or tiyancha “as flora or fauna” - before the soul attains mokaña “salvation” as a siddha, having ended the cycle of birth and death and become free and omniscient.

Other East Asian traditions

The paired swastika symbols are included, at least since the Liao Dynasty (AD 907–1125), as part of the Chinese writing system (卐 and 卐) and are variant characters for 十 or 十 (wàn in Mandarin, man in Korean, Cantonese and Japanese, vàn in Vietnamese) meaning “all” or “eternity” (lit. myriads). The swastika marks the beginning of many Buddhist scriptures. In East Asian countries, the left-facing character is often used as symbol for “eternity” and marks the site of a Buddhist temple on maps. In Chinese, Japanese, and Korean the swastika is also a homonym of the number 10,000, and is commonly used to represent the whole of Creation, e.g. ‘the myriad things' in the Dao De Jing. During the Chinese Tang Dynasty, Empress Wu Zetian (684–704) decreed that the swastika would also be used as an alternative symbol of the Sun.

When the Chinese writing system was introduced to Japan in the 8th century, the swastika was adopted into the Japanese language and culture, with the meaning remained unchanged but slight change on its pronunciation. It is commonly referred as the manji (lit. Man-character). Since the Middle Ages, it has been used as a mon by various Japanese families such as Tsugaru clan, Hachisuka clan or around 60 clans that belong to Tokugawa clan.[36] On Japanese maps, a swastika (left-facing and horizontal) is used to mark the location of a Buddhist temple. The right-facing manji is often referred to as the gyaku manji (逆字, lit. “reverse manji”) or migi manji (右字, lit. “right manji”), and can also be called kagi jiji (鉤十字, literally “hook cross”).

In Chinese and Japanese art, the swastika is often found as part of a repeating pattern. One common pattern, called sayagata in Japanese, comprises left- and right-facing swastikas joined by lines.[37] As the negative space of the swastika pattern is sometimes called the “key fret” motif in English.

As a pottery gadget of unknown provision and meaning the swastika-like sign is known in Chinese Neolithic culture (2400–2000 BCE, Liu wan 龙湾, Qinghai province).

Armenia

In Armenia swastika is called "arevakhach" and "kerkhach" (Armenian: արևախաչ) and is the ancient symbol of eternity and eternal light (i.e. God). Swastikas in Armenia were founded on petroglyphs. During the bronze age it was depicted on caudrons, belts, medallions and other items.[39] Among the oldest petroglyphs is the seventh letter of the Armenian alphabet - "E" (which means "is" or "to be") - depicted as half-swastika.

Swastikas can also be seen on early Medieval churches and castles, including the principal tower in Armenia's historical capital city of Ani.[38] The same symbol can be found on Armenian carpets, cross-stones (khachkar) and in medieval manuscripts, as well as on modern monuments (symbol of eternity).[40]

Europe

In Bronze Age Europe, the "Sun cross" (a three- or four-armed hooked cross in a circle) appears frequently, often interpreted as a solar symbol. Swastika shapes have been found on numerous artifacts from Iron Age Europe - Armenian Arevakhach (Armenian: Արևախաչ)[41] – and have been used as part of his ceremony.

Greco-Roman antiquity

Ancient Greek architectural, clothing and coin designs are replete with single or interlinking swastika motifs. There are also gold plate fibulae from the 8th century BC decorated with an engraved swastika.[43] Related symbols in classical Western architecture include the cross, the three-legged triskele or triskelion and the rounded lauburu. The swastika symbol is also known in these contexts by a number of names, especially gammadion,[44] or rather the tetra-gammadion. The name gammadion comes from the fact that it can be seen as being made up of four Greek gamma (Γ) letters. Ancient Greek priestesses would tattoo the symbol, along with the tetraskelion, on their bodies. Ancient Greek architectural designs are replete with the interlinking symbol.

In Greco-Roman art and architecture, and in Romanesque and Gothic art in the West, isolated swastikas are relatively rare, and the swastika is more commonly found as a repeated element in a border or tessellation. The swastika often represented perpetual motion, reflecting the design of a rotating windmill or watermill. A meander of connected swastikas makes up the large band that surrounds the Augustan Ara Pacis. A design of interlocking swastikas is one of several tessellations on the floor of the cathedral of Amiens, France.[45] A border of linked swastikas was a common Roman architectural motif,[46] and can be seen in more recent buildings as a neoclassical element. A swastika border is one form of border, and the individual swastikas in such a border are sometimes called Greek keys. There have also been swastikas found on the floors of Pompeii.[47]

Celts

The bronze frontispiece of a ritual pre-Christian (c. 350-50 BC) shield found in the River Thames near Battersea Bridge (hence "Battersea Shield") is embossed with 27 swastikas in bronze and red enamel.[48] An Ogham stone found in Angel, Co Kerry, Ireland (CIIC 141) was modified into an early Christian gravestone, and was decorated with a cross pattée and two swastikas.[49] The Book of Kells (ca. 800) contains swastika-shaped ornamentation. At the Northern edge of Ilkley Moor in West Yorkshire, there is a swastika-shaped pattern engraved in a stone known as the Swastika Stone.[50] The figure in the foreground of the picture is a 20th-century replica; the original carving can be seen a little farther away, at left of center.
Germanic Iron Age

Main article: Swastika (Germanic Iron Age)

The swastika shape (also called a Ꞩ Ɦ) appears on various Germanic Migration Period and Viking Age artifacts, such as the 3rd century Værlæse Fibula from Zealand, Denmark, the Gothic spearhead from Brest-Litovsk, today in Belarus, the 9th century Snoldelev Stone from Rømø, Denmark, and numerous Migration Period bracteates drawn left-facing or right-facing.[51]

The pagan Anglo-Saxon ship burial at Sutton Hoo, England, contained numerous items bearing the swastika, now housed in the collection of the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.[52] The Swastika is clearly marked on a hilt and sword belt found at Bifrons in Kent, in a grave of about the 6th century.

Hilda Ellis Davidson theorized that the swastika symbol was associated with Thor, possibly representing his hammer Mjölnir - symbolic of thunder - and possibly being connected to the Bronze-Age sun cross.[53] Davidson cites "many examples" of the swastika symbol from Anglo-Saxon graves of the pagan period, with particular prominence on cremation urns from the cemeteries of East Anglia.[54] Some of the swastikas on the items, on display at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, are depicted with such care and art that, according to Davidson, it must have possessed special significance as a funerary symbol.[55] The runic inscription on the 8th-century Sæbe sword has been taken as evidence of the swastika as a symbol of Thor in Norse paganism.

Illyrians

Swastika was widespread among the Illyrians, symbolizing the Sun. The Sun cult was the main Illyrian cult, and the Sun was represented by a swastika in clockwise motion, and it stood for the movement of the Sun.[56]

Slavic

The Sloneczko (lit. "little sun") is an Early Slavic pagan symbol of the sun. It was engraved on wooden monuments built near the final resting places of fallen Slavs to represent eternal life.[57] The symbol was first seen in a collection of Early Slavic symbols and architectural features drawn and compiled by Polish painter Stanisław Jakubowski, which he named Przestawiarzkie motywy witektoniczne (Polish: Early Slavic Architectural Motifs).[58] His work of art was published in 1923, by a publishing house that was then based in the Dębniki district of Kraków.[59] Symbol can also be found on embroidery and pottery in most Slavic countries.

In contemporary times, Sloneczko has become known in Russia as Konopar (Kolovrat - lit. "spinning wheel"). Russian neopagans have adopted it as a traditional symbol of the pre-Christian Slavic faith. The neopagans say that Konopar is a native Russian name for the swastika as a solar symbol. However, according to the historian and theologian Roman Bagdasarav (Roman Bagdasarov), no known historical sources referring to the swastika as "Kolovrat" have been discovered in Russia.

Konopar has also been appropriated by nationalist organizations and Neo-Nazis in Russia, who claim it is an ancient symbol that is exclusive to the East Slavs.

Similar words to Konopar in other Slavic languages include the Polish Kolokrót and the Slovak Kolovrotok, both of which are used solely to describe the wheel and axle and usually have no connotations with the symbol originally known in Polish as Sloneczko.

Sami

An object very much like a hammer or a double axe is depicted among the magical symbols on the drums of the Sami shamans, used in their religious ceremonies before Christianity was established. The name of the Sami thunder god was Ḧággali, thought to be derived from "Old Man Thor" (Ðór karl). Sometimes on the drums, a male figure with a hammer-like object in either hand is shown, and sometimes it is more like a cross with crooked ends, or a swastika.[52]

Medieval and early modern Europe

In Christianity, the swastika is used as a hooked version of the Christian Cross, the symbol of Christ's victory over death. Some Christian churches built in the Romanesque and Gothic eras are decorated with swastikas, carrying over earlier Roman designs. Swastikas are prominently displayed in a mosaic in the St. Sophia church of Kiev, Ukraine dating from the 12th century. They also appear as a repeating ornamental motif on a tomb in the Basilica of St. Ambrose in Milan.

A ceiling painted in 1910 in the church of St Laurent in Grenoble has many swastikas. It can be visited today because the church became the archaeological museum of the city. A proposed direct link between it and a swastika floor mosaic in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Amiens, which was built on top of a pagan site at Amiens, France in the 13th century, is considered unlikely. The stole worn by a priest in the 1445 painting of the Seven Sacraments by Rogier van der Weyden presents the swastika form simply as one way of depicting the cross. Swastikas also appear on the vestments on the effigy of Bishop William Edington (d. 1366) in Winchester Cathedral, as can be seen at File:Winchestercathedralheadonwilliamedingtontomb.jpg.

In the Polish First Republic the symbol of the swastika was also popular with the nobility. According to chronicles, the Rus' prince Oleg, who in the 9th century attacked Constantinople, nailed his shield (which had a large red swastika painted on it) to the city's gates. Several noble houses, e.g. Boreyko, Borzym, and Radziechowski from Ruthenia, also had Swastikas as their coat of arms. The family reached its greatness in the 14th and 15th centuries and its crest can be seen in many heraldry books produced at that time. The Swastika was also a heraldic symbol, for example on the Boreyko coat of arms, used by noblemen in Poland and Ukraine. In the 19th century the swastika was one of the Russian empire's symbols; it was even placed in coins as a background to the Russian eagle.[56][57]

Freemasons also gave the swastika symbol importance. In medieval Northern European Runic Script, a counter-clockwise swastika denotes the letter 'G', and could stand for the important Freemason terms God, Great Architect of the Universe, or Geometry.[58]

A swastika can be seen on stonework at Valle Crucis Abbey, near Llangollen.

Early 20th-century Europe

Main article: Western use of the swastika in the early 20th century

The large letter 'G,' and could stand for the important Freemason terms God, Great Architect of the Universe, or Geometry. The swastika was also a heraldic symbol, for example on the Boreyko coat of arms, used by noblemen in Poland and Ukraine. In the 19th century the swastika was one of the Russian empire's symbols; it was even placed in coins as a background to the Russian eagle. Freemasons also gave the swastika symbol importance. In medieval Northern European Runic Script, a counter-clockwise swastika denotes the letter 'G,' and could stand for the important Freemason terms God, Great Architect of the Universe, or Geometry.
Swastikas on the wedding dress as symbols of luck, British colony, 1910

In the Western world, the symbol experienced a resurgence following the archaeological work in the late 19th century of Heinrich Schliemann, who discovered the symbol in the site of ancient Troy and associated it with the ancient migrations of Proto-Indo-Europeans, whose proto-language was not incidentally termed "Proto-Indo-Germanisch" by German language historians. He connected it with similar shapes found on ancient pots in Germany, and theorized that the swastika was a "significant religious symbol of our remote ancestors", linking Germanic, Greek and Indo-Iranian cultures.[59][60] By the early 20th century, it was used worldwide and was regarded as a symbol of good luck and success.

The work of Schliemann soon became intertwined with the völkisch movements, for which the swastika was a symbol of the "Aryan race", a concept that came to be equated by theorists such as Alfred Rosenberg with a Nordic master race originating in northern Europe. Since its adoption by the Nazi Party of Adolf Hitler, the swastika has been associated with Nazism, fascism, racism in its (white supremacy) form, the Axis powers in World War II, and the Holocaust in much of the West. The swastika remains a core symbol of Neo-Nazi groups, and is used regularly by activist groups.

The Benedictine choir school at Lambach Abbey, Upper Austria, which Hitler attended for several months as a boy, had a swastika chiseled into the monastery portal and also the wall above the spring grotto in the courtyard by 1868. Their origin was the personal coat of arms of Abbot Theoderich Hagn of the monastery in Lambach, which bore a golden swastika with slanted points on a blue field.[61] The Lambach swastika is probably of Medieval origin.

**Denmark**

The Danish brewery company Carlsberg Group used the swastika as a logo[62] from the 19th Century until the middle of the 1930s when it was discontinued because of association with the Nazi Party in neighbouring Germany. The swastika carved on elephants at the entrance of the factory was a laundry founded in 1912, located on Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, a district of Dublin, Ireland. In the fifties Heinrich Böll came across a van belonging to the company while he was staying in Ireland, leading to some awkward moments before he realized the company was older than Nazism and totally unrelated to it. The chimney of the boiler-house of the laundry still stands, but the laundry has been redeveloped.[64][65]

**Ireland**

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**Swedish folklore**

In Finland the swastika was often used in traditional folk art products, as a decoration or magical symbol on textiles and wood. The swastika was also used by the Finnish Air Force until 1945, and is still used in air force flags.

The tursaansydän is used by scouts in some instances[66] and a student organization.[67] The village of Tursa uses the tursaansydän as a kind of a certificate of authenticity on products made there.[68] Traditional textiles are still being made with swastikas as parts of traditional ornaments.

**Swastika in Finnish military**

The Finnish Air Force uses the swastika as an emblem, introduced in 1918. The type of swastika adopted by the air-force was the symbol of luck for the Swedish count Eric von Rosen, who donated one of its earliest aircraft; he later became a prominent figure in the Swedish nazi-movement.

The swastika was also used by the women's paramilitary organization Lotta Svärd, which was banned in 1944 in accordance with the Moscow Armistice between Finland and the allied Soviet Union and Britain.

The President of Finland is the grand master of the Order of the White Rose. According to the protocol, the president shall wear the Grand Cross of the White Rose with collar on formal occasions. The original design of the collar, decorated with 9 swastikas, dates from 1918, and was designed by the artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela. The Grand Cross with the swastika collar has been awarded 41 times to foreign heads of state. To avoid misunderstandings, the swastika decorations were replaced by fr crosses at the decision of president Urho Kekkonen in 1963 after it became known that the President of France Charles De Gaulle was uncomfortable with the swastika collar.

Also a design by Gallen-Kallela from 1918, the Cross of Liberty has a swastika pattern in its arms. The Cross of Liberty is depicted in the upper left corner of the standard of the President of Finland.[69]

In December 2007, a silver replica of the WWII period Finnish air defence's relief ring decorated with a swastika became available as a part of a charity campaign.[70]

The original war time idea was that the public swap their precious metal rings for the State air defence's relief ring, made of iron.

**Latvia**

Latvia adopted the swastika, called the Ugunskrusta ("fire cross"), for its air force in 1918/1919 and continued its use until 1940. The cross itself was maroon on a white background, mirroring the colors of the Latvian flag. Earlier versions pointed counter-clockwise, while later versions pointed clockwise and eliminated the white background.[71][72]
North America

The swastika motif is found in some traditional Native American art and iconography. Historically, the design has been found in excavations of Mississippian-era sites in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, and on objects associated with the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (S.E.C.C.). It is also widely used by a number of southwestern tribes, most notably the Navajo, and plains nations such as the Dakota. Among various tribes, the swastika carries different meanings. To the Hopi it represents the wandering Hopi clan; to the Navajo it is one symbol for the whirling log (tai nöölii), a sacred image representing a legend that is used in healing rituals.\[^{[77]}\] A brightly colored First Nations saddle featuring swastika designs is on display at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum in Canada.\[^{[74]}\]

A swastika shape is a symbol in the culture of the Kuna people of Kuna Yala, Panama. In Kuna tradition it symbolizes the octopus that created the world, its tentacles pointing to the four cardinal points.\[^{[75]}\]

In February 1925 the Kuna revolted vigorously against Panamanian suppression of their culture, and in 1930 they assumed autonomy. The flag they adopted at that time is based on the swastika shape, and remains the official flag of Kuna Yala. A number of variations on the flag have been used over the years: red top and bottom bands instead of orange were previously used, and in 1942 a ring (representing the traditional Kuna nose-ring) was added to the center of the flag to distance it from the symbol of the Nazi party.\[^{[76]}\]

The symbol for the 45th Infantry Division of the United States Army, before the 1930s, was a red square with a yellow swastika, a tribute to the large Native American population in the southwestern United States.

The town of Swastika, Ontario, Canada is named after the symbol.

### As the symbol of Nazism

Further information: Nordic symbolism

In the wake of widespread popular usage, the Nazi Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei or NSDAP) formally adopted the swastika (in German: Hakenkreuz [hook-cross]) in 1920. This was used on the party's flag, badge, and armband.

In his 1925 work Mein Kampf, Adolf Hitler writes that: "I myself, meanwhile, after innumerable attempts, had laid down a final form; a flag with a red background, a white disk, and a black swastika in the middle. After long trials I also found a definite proportion between the size of the flag and the size of the white disk, as well as the shape and thickness of the swastika."

When Hitler created a flag for the Nazi Party, he sought to incorporate both the swastika and "those revered colors expressive of our homage to the glorious past and which once brought so much honor to the German nation." (Red, white, and black were the colors of the flag of the old German Empire.) He also stated: "As National Socialists, we see our program in our flag. In red, we see the social idea of the movement; in white, the nationalistic idea; in the swastika, the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man, and, by the same token, the victory of the idea of creative work."\[^{[77]}\]

The swastika was also understood as "the symbol of the creating, effecting life" (das Symbol des schaffenden, wirkenden Lebens) and as "race emblem of Germanism" (Rasseabzeichen des Germanentums).\[^{[78]}\]

The use of the swastika was incorporated by Nazi theorists with their conjecture of Aryan cultural descent of the German people. Following the Nordicist version of the Aryan invasion theory, the Nazis claimed that the early Aryans of India, from whose Vedic tradition the swastika sprang, were the proto-Caucasian white invaders. The concept of racial hygiene was an ideology central to Nazism, though it is now considered unsound.\[^{[79]}\][^80] For Alfred Rosenberg, the Aryans of India were both a model to be imitated and a warning of the dangers of the spiritual and racial "confusion" that, he believed, arose from the close proximity of races. Thus, they saw fit to co-opt the sign as a symbol of the Aryan master race. The use of the swastika as a symbol of the Aryan race dates back to writings of Emilie Burnouf. Following many other writers, the German nationalist poet Guido von List believed it to be a uniquely Aryan symbol.

Before the Nazis, the swastika was already in use as a symbol of German völkisch nationalist movements (Völkische Bewegung). In Deutschland Erwache (ISBN 0-912138-69-6), Ulric of England says:

> [...] what inspired Hitler to use the swastika as a symbol for the NSDAP was its use by the Thule Society (German: Thule-Gesellschaft) since there were many connections between them and the DAP, from 1910 until the summer of 1921 Hitler used the special Nationalsozialistische library of Dr. Friedrich Krohn, a very active member of the Thule-Gesellschaft. Dr. Krohn was also the dentist from Stenlenberg who was named by Hitler in Mein Kampf as the designer of a flag very similar to one that Hitler designed in 1920 ... during the summer of 1920, the first party flag was shown at Lake Tegemsee ... these home-made ... early flags were not preserved, the Ortsgruppe München (Munich Local Group) flag was generally regarded as the first flag of the Party.

José Manuel Erbez says:

> The first time the swastika was used with an Aryan meaning was on December 25, 1907, when the self-named Order of the New Templars, a secret society founded by [Adolf Joseph] Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, hoisted at Werfenstein Castle (Austria) a yellow flag with a swastika and four fleurs-de-lys.\[^{[81]}\]

However, Liebenfels was drawing on an already established use of the symbol. On March 14, 1933, shortly after Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany, the NSDAP flag was hoisted alongside Germany's national colors. It was adopted as the sole national flag on September 15, 1935 (see Nazi Germany).

The swastika was used for badges and flags throughout Nazi Germany, particularly for government and military organizations, but also for "popular" organizations such as the Reichsbund Deutsche Jägerschaft (German Hunting Society).\[^{[82]}\]

While the DAP and the NSDAP had used both right-facing and left-facing swastikas, the right-facing swastika was used consistently from 1920 onwards. Ralf Stelter notes that the swastika flag used on land had a right-facing swastika on both sides, while the ensign (naval flag) had it printed through so that a left-facing swastika would be seen when looking at the ensign with the flagpole to the right.\[^{[83]}\] Nazi ensigns had a through and through image, so both versions were present, one on each side, but the Nazi flag on land was right-facing on both sides and at a 45° rotation.\[^{[84]}\]
Several variants are found:

- a 45° black swastika on a white disc as in the NSDAP and national flags;
- a 45° black swastika on a white lozenge (e.g., Hitler Youth);
- a 45° black swastika with a white outline was painted on the tail of aircraft of the Luftwaffe, and usually using a design based on a 25-small-square subdivided square template (width of "strokes" in each of its arms, equalling the width of the space between the strokes);
- a 45° black swastika outlined by thin white and black lines on a white disc (e.g., the German War Ensign);
- an upright black swastika outlined by thin white and black lines on a white disc (e.g., Personal standard of Adolf Hitler in which a gold wreath encircles the swastika; the Schutzstaffel; and the Reichsadler, and in which a black circle encircles the swastika);
- a small, gold, silver, black, or white 45° swastikas, often lying on or being held by an eagle, on many badges and flags.
- a swastika with curved outer arms forming a broken circle, as worn by the SS Nordland Division.

There were attempts to amalgamate Nazi and Hindu use of the swastika, notably by the French writer Savitri Devi who declared Hitler an Avatar of Vishnu (see Nazi mysticism).

Post-WWII stigmatization

Origins

Because of its use by Nazi Germany, the swastika since the 1930s has been largely associated with Nazism and white supremacy in most Western countries. As a result, all of its use, or its use as a Nazi or hate symbol is prohibited in some countries, including Germany. Because of the stigma attached to the symbol, many buildings that have contained the symbol as decoration have had the symbol removed.

Germany

Further information: Strafgesetzbuch § 86a

The German and Austrian postwar criminal code makes the public showing of the Hakenkreuz (the swastika), the sigrune, the Celtic cross (specifically the variations used by the White-Power-Activists), the wolfsangel, the oval rune and the SS skull illegal, except for scholarly reasons (and - in the case of the oval rune - as the insignia of the rank of sergeant major, Hauptfeldwebel, in the modern German Bundeswehr). It is also censored from the reprints of 1930s railway timetables published by the Reichsbahn. The eagle remains, but appears to be holding a solid black circle between its talons. The swastikas on Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples are exempt, as religious symbols cannot be banned in Germany.

A German fashion company was investigated for using traditional British-made folded leather buttons after complaints that they resembled swastikas. In response, Esprit destroyed two hundred thousand catalogues.

A controversy was stirred by the decision of several police departments to begin inquires against anti-fascists. In late 2005 police raided the offices of the punk rock label and mail order store "Nix Gut Records" and confiscated merchandise depicting crossed-out swastikas and fists smashing swastikas. In 2006 the Stade police department started an inquiry against anti-fascist youths using a placard depicting a person dumping a swastika into a trashcan. The placard was displayed in opposition to the campaign of right-wing nationalist parties for local elections.

On Friday, March 17, 2006, a member of the Bundestag, Claudia Roth reported herself to the German police for displaying a crossed-out swastika in multiple demonstrations against Neo-Nazis, and subsequently got the Bundestag to suspend her immunity from prosecution. She intended to show the absurdity of charging anti-fascists with using fascist symbols. "We don't need prosecution of non-violent young people engaging against right-wing extremism." On March 15, 2007, the Federal Court of Justice of Germany (Bundesgerichtshof) held that the crossed-out symbols were "clearly directed against a revival of national-socialist endeavors", thereby settling the dispute for the future.

Legislation in other European countries

- In Hungary, it is a criminal misdemeanour to publicly display "totalitarian symbols", including the swastika, the SS insignia and the Arrow Cross, punishable by fine.
- Display for academic, educational, artistic or journalistic reasons is allowed. The communist symbols of hammer and sickle and the red star are also regarded as totalitarian symbols and have the same restriction by Hungarian criminal law.
- In Lithuania public display of Nazi and Soviet symbols, including swastika, is an administrative offence, punishable by fine from 150 to 300 euros.
- In Poland, public display of Nazi symbols, including the Nazi swastika, is a criminal offence punishable by up to eight years of imprisonment. The use of the swastika as a religious symbol is legal.

Attempt to ban in the European Union

The European Union's Executive Commission proposed a European Union-wide anti-racism law in 2001, but European Union states failed to agree on the balance between prohibiting racism and freedom of expression. An attempt to ban the swastika across the EU in early 2005 failed after objections from the British Government and others. In early 2007, while Germany held the European Union presidency, Berlin proposed that the European Union should follow German Criminal Law and criminalize the denial of the Holocaust and the display of Nazi symbols including the swastika, which is based on the Ban on the Symbols of Unconstitutional Organisations Act. This led to an opposition campaign by Hindu groups across Europe against a ban on the swastika. They pointed out that the swastika has been around for 5,000 years as a symbol of peace.

The proposal to ban the swastika was dropped by Berlin from the proposed European Union wide anti-racism laws on January 29, 2007.

Latin America

- The manufacture, distribution or broadcasting of the swastika, with the intent to propagate Nazism, is a crime in Brazil as dictated by article 20, paragraph 1, of federal statute 7,716, passed in 1989. The penalty is a two to five years prison term and a fine.
- The flag of the Guna Yala autonomous territory of Panama is based on a swastika design. In 1942 a ring was added to the centre of the flag to differentiate it from the symbol of the Nazi Party (this version subsequently fell into disuse).

Media
In 2010, Microsoft officially spoke out against the use of the swastika in the first-person shooter Call of Duty: Black Ops. In Black Ops, players are allowed to customize their name tags to represent, essentially, whatever they want. The swastika can be created and used, but Stephen Toulouse, director of Xbox Live policy and enforcement, stated that players with the symbol on their name tag will be banned (if someone reports as inappropriate) from Xbox Live.[103]

In the Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular in Disney Hollywood Studios in Orlando, Florida, the swastikas on German trucks, aircraft and actor uniforms in the reenactment of a scene from Raiders of the Lost Ark were removed in 2004. The swastika has been replaced by a stylized Greek Cross.[104] Sin City character Miho occasionally uses shurikens shaped like a swastika as assassinatium tools.

Satirical use

A book featuring “120 Funny Swastika Cartoons” was published in 2008 by New York Cartoonist Sam Gross. The author said he created the cartoons in response to excessive news coverage given to Swastika vandals, that his intent “…is to reduce the Swastika to something humorous.”[105]

The powerful symbolism acquired by the swastika has often been used in graphic design and propaganda as a means of drawing Nazi comparisons; examples include the cover of Stuart Eizenstat’s 2003 book Imperfect Justice,[106] publicity materials for Constantin Costa-Gavras’s 2002 film Amen.[107] and a billboard that was erected opposite the United States Interests Section in Havana in Havana, Cuba, in 2004, which juxtaposed images of the Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse pictures with a swastika.

Misinterpretation over imported Asian products in Western countries

At the end of 20th century, and early 21st century, confusion and controversy has occurred when consumer goods bearing the Buddhist symbol have been exported to North America, and mistakenly interpreted by Western consumers as a Nazi symbol.

When a ten-year-old boy in Lynbrook, New York, bought a set of Pokémon cards imported from Japan in 1999, two of the cards contained the left-facing Buddhist Marji symbol. The boy’s parents misinterpreted the symbol as a Nazi swastika, which is right-facing with 45 degree rotation, and filed a complaint to the manufacturer. It also caused a lot of concern amongst fans from Jewish communities. Nintendo of America announced that the cards would be discontinued, explaining that what was acceptable in one culture was not necessarily so in another; their action was welcomed by the Anti-Defamation League who recognised that there was no intention to be offensive but said that international commerce meant that "isolating [the Swastika] in Asia would just create more problems."[108]

In 2002, Christmas crackers containing plastic toy red pandas sporting swastikas were pulled from shelves after complaints from consumers in Canada. The manufacturer, based in China, explained the symbol was presented in a traditional sense and not as a reference to the Nazis, and apologized to the customers for the cross-cultural mixup.[109] In 2007, Spanish fashion chain Zara withdrew a handbag from its stores after a customer in Britain complained swastikas were embroidered on it. The bags were made by a supplier in India and inspired by commonly used Hindu symbols, which include the swastika.[110]

Contemporary use in Asia

South Asia

In South Asia, the swastika is omnipresent as a symbol of wealth and good fortune. In India and Nepal, electoral ballot papers are stamped with a round swastika-like pattern (to ensure that the accidental ink imprint on the other side of a folded ballot paper can be correctly identified as such).[111] Many businesses and other organisations, such as the Ahmedabad Stock Exchange and the Nepal Chamber of Commerce,[112] use the swastika in their logos. The red swastika was suggested as an emblem of International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in India and Sri Lanka, but the idea was not implemented.[113] Swastikas are fairly ubiquitous in Indian and Nepalese cities, located on buses, buildings, auto-rickshaws, and clothing. The swastika continues to be prominently used in Hindu religious ceremonies and temples, and is recognised as a Hindu religious symbol, sometimes used to evoke the Shakti in tantric rituals.

In India, Swastik and Swastika, with their spelling variants, are common first names for males and females respectively, e.g. Swastika Mukherjee. Also, the Seal of Bihar contains two swastikas.

East Asia

In the Sinosphere, countries and regions that were historically influenced by the culture of China, such as Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and China itself, the symbol is most commonly associated with Buddhism. They are commonly found in Buddhist temples, religious artifacts, texts related to Buddhism and schools founded by Buddhist religious groups.

The Red Swastika Society, a syncretic religious group that aspires to unify Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, runs two schools in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Red Swastika Society Tai Po Secondary School and Hong Kong Red Swastika Society Tuen Mun Primary School) and one in Singapore (Red Swastika School). All of them incorporated the Swastika in their school logo to signify the society’s aspiration with philthropy and moral education.

The swastika is also used in maps to denote a temple. For example, the symbol is designated by the Survey Act and related Japanese governmental rules to denote a Buddhist temple on Japanese maps.[114]

Hirosaki City in Aomori Prefecture designates this symbol as its official flag, which stemmed from its use in the emblem of Tsugaru clan, the lord of Hirosaki Domain in Edo era. See also the section East Asian traditions in this article.

Central Asia

In 2005, authorities in Tajikistan called for the widespread adoption of the swastika as a national symbol. President Emomali Rahmonov declared the swastika an Aryan symbol and 2006 to be "the year of Aryan culture," which would be a time to "study and popularize Aryan contributions to the history of the world civilization, raise a new generation (of Tajiks) with the spirit of national self-determination, and develop deeper ties with other ethnicities and cultures."[115]

New religious movements

Besides the use as a religious symbol in Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism, which can be traced to pre-modern traditions, the swastika is also used by a number of new religious movements established in the modern period.

- The Theosophical Society uses a swastika as part of its seal, along with an Om, a hexagram or star of David, an Ankh and an Ouroboros. Unlike the much more recent
Raelian movement (see below), the Theosophical Society symbol has been free from controversy, and the seal is still used. The current seal also includes the text "There is no religion higher than truth."[10]

- The Raelian Movement, who believe that Extra-Terrestrials originally created all life on earth, use a symbol that is often the source of considerable controversy: an interlaced star of David and a swastika. The Raelians state that the Star of David represents infinity in space whereas the swastika represents infinity in time i.e. there being no beginning and no end in time, and everything being cyclic.[117] In 1991, the symbol was changed to remove the swastika, out of respect to the victims of the Holocaust, but as of 2007 has been restored to its original form.[118]

- The Tantrabased new religious movement Ananda Marga (Devanagari: अनंद मार्ग, meaning Path of Bliss) uses a motif similar to the Raelians, but in their case the apparent star of David is defined as intersecting triangles with no specific reference to Jewish culture.

- The Falun Gong gong movement uses a symbol that features a large swastika surrounded by four smaller (and rounded) ones, interspersed with yin-and-yang symbols. The usage is taken from traditional Chinese symbolism, and here alludes to a chakra-like portion of the esoteric human anatomy, located in the stomach.

- The Odinic Rite claims the fylfot as a holy symbol of Odinism, citing the pre-Christian Germanic use of the symbol.

See also

- Armenian eternity sign
- Borjgali
- Brigid's cross
- Camunian rose
- Confederate flag controversy
- Fascist symbolism
- The Red Swastika Society
- Nazi symbolism
- Solar symbols
- Swastika curve
- Swastika Stone
- Western use of the swastika in the early 20th century
- Tursaansydän

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Look up 卐 or swastika in Wiktionary, the free dictionary.

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- *The variants of the NS-swastika flag*
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