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CEMETERY ART



What Does That Thing On The Headstone Mean?

(Tombstone Iconography)

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Introduction

- Welcome
- My name is Ellen Miller
- Content of this presentation
 - Brief overview of funerary practices in U.S.
 - Meanings of a variety of headstone carvings
 - Headstone, Footstone or tablet stone



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Brief Overview of Funerary Practices

(see <http://www.funeralwise.com>)

- Practices Differ
 - Country : Country
 - United States : Germany
 - Culture : Culture
 - Native American : European
 - Religion : Religion
 - Jewish : Christian





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Funerary Practices Differ

- Burial or Cremation
 - If burial, fancy casket or simple inexpensive box
 - Open for viewing or closed
 - If cremation, are ashes to be interred or kept by family member on the mantle
 - Cremation before or after memorial service
- Simple memorial service or extravagant funeral
- Church service, memorial chapel service, graveside service or no service at all
- Somber occasion or celebration of life
- Tombstone or flat grave marker






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For Example

- In the Jewish Faith
 - Burial is usually within 24 hours of death
 - Body is not embalmed
 - There is no viewing of the body
 - Cremation is usually not an option
 - Generally speaking, no autopsies are allowed
 - Considered desecration





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Iconography

- Definition- 1: Pictorial material relating to or illustrating a subject 2: the traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject and esp. a religious or legendary subject 3: the imagery or symbolism of a work of art, an artist, or a body of art
(Source: Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th ed.)

It is what we call cemetery art, or tombstone art. These are the pictures and shapes that are carved on tombstones.




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What Do These Symbols Mean?

- There are literally thousands of icons people utilize on tombstones and they don't always mean the same thing.
- Usually they relate in some way to the life of the deceased
 - Occasionally you won't be able to figure it out, but most times you will
- See included lists of icons & their common meanings



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Some Common Christian Symbols

- Crosses, Bibles, Rosaries and Angels are the most common symbols seen on Christian tombstones.



- Angels can also signify innocence, especially when on a child's tombstone.

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Other Religious Symbols

- Fish symbols were used by Christians during times of persecution and are used today by both the Christian and Jewish faiths.
- Other Jewish symbols include the six-pointed Star of David, the Menorah and the Kohanim (sign of priesthood)



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More Religious Symbols

- Other religions use symbols also, but they aren't as common.
- For example Islamic religions might depict The Quran, Arabic writing, prayer beads or possibly a mosque shaped tombstone.



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Many Symbols Represent Death

- Broken columns
- Inverted torches
- Death's Head, Scythe, Hourglass
- Crossed bones, Grim Reaper
- Pick & Shovel
- Coffin



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Symbols Used For Children

- Angels, Cherubs and Lambs are used commonly on the tombstones of children. They all represent the innocence of a child's life.
- Toys, Empty chairs, Clothing and even Pictures of the child also adorn tombstones.



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Other Symbols Seen on Children's Graves

- Dead or sleeping birds, budding plants, empty bed or crib, carriage or boat shaped like a swan are all things that are found on a child's tombstone.



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ICONS REPRESENTING:

- HOPE**
 - Anchor or anchor and chain
 - Ferns
- FAITH**
 - Doves
 - Wheat or grain
- LOVE**
 - Rose
 - Heart



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PATRIOTISM

- Eagle**
 - With or without holding things in foot
- Flags**
- Seals**
- Crests**







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ABOUT TIME

- Urgency
 - Hourglass
 - With or without wings
- Time
 - Hourglass
 - Clock face
- Eternity
 - Circle
 - Infinity symbol
 - Snake swallowing tail



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RESURRECTION

- Willow tree drooping over an urn
- Urn flanked by trees
- Nesting bird(s) with eggs
- Cocooning moth or butterfly
- Flowers and vines; grape vines




Tree of Life

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SYMBOLS OF STRENGTH

- Oak leaves
- Acorns
- Ivy



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VICTORY

- Knight
- Trumpets
- Palm Fronds
- Crown of Glory
- Heavenly Mansions
- Wreath or Laurel



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PEACE and REST

- PEACE
 - Olive Branch
- REST
 - Shrouded Urn
 - Cannon
 - Spheres
 - Chairs
 - Poppy



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ICONS REPRESENTING THE HUMAN SOUL

- Butterflies
- Candles
- Winged Images
 - Faces
 - Skulls
 - Angels
- Flying Birds
- Stars
 - Rising or Falling



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Immortality

- Pyramid
- Scarab
- Sphinx
- Lotus Blossom
- Hieroglyphs
- Obelisk




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GRIEF

- You might think that a tombstone in and of itself is representational of grief, but there are some symbols that bring the point home.
- Spilled potted plants
- Surrogate mourners
- Sorrowful angels, maidens or cherubs
- Animals shown as crying mourners




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MISCELLANEOUS

- Owls frequently represent Messengers
- Lilies mean Purity
- Blooming flowers, setting suns and changing seasons are symbols for the natural process of things



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SYMBOLS OF FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Between 1800-1900 over 600 "secret societies" in U.S.
 - Masons
 - Shriners
 - IOOF
 - Elks
 - WOW
- There are many different symbols used, and sometimes shared by Fraternal Organizations
 - All-seeing eye
 - Hourglass
 - Beehive
 - Bible



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INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF THE ODD FELLOWS

- The Letters F-L-T (which stand for friendship, love and truth) inside of 3 links of chain. Also known by the abbreviation IOOF



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MORE FOR THE INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODDFELLOWS

- Eye
- Beehive
- Bible
- Hourglass
- Three (3) links of chain
- Axe and chain
- Clasped Hands



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WOODMEN OF THE WORLD

- The Woodmen (and Women) of the World often use sawed off tree trunks or branches. You will also frequently see the initials W O W. They also use anchors, lilies, vines or broken branches.



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FREEMASONS (AKA MASONS)

- Square and Compass
- All-seeing Eye
- Beehive
- Bible
- Hourglass
- Chisel, Hammer, Trowel or other tools
- Star



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BENEVOLENT PROTECTIVE ORDER OF ELKS

- Letters B.P.O.E
- With or without an Elk head symbol
- Clock Face



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"SHRINERS"

Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine
(AAONMS)

Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of the
Nobles of the Mystic Shrine
(AEAONS)



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ORDER OF THE EASTERN STAR

A point-down pentagram (5-pointed star)
Points are sometimes colored red,
blue, yellow, white and green
Sometime shown with a pentagon inside
the star



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CENOTAPH

- A Cenotaph is a monument erected to honor a person or group of people who died and were buried somewhere else.
- Many cenotaphs are military monuments like the Vietnam memorial on the plaza.



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HEADSTONE, FOOTSTONE, TABLET OR TABLE STONE

- A headstone sits at the head of a grave
 - This is what is usually referred to as a Tombstone or gravestone.
- A footstone sits at the foot of a grave
 - Not as common today as in the past
 - Usually has minimal information



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Tablet (or Table) Stone (cont)

- A tablet stone or a table stone is placed over the grave
 - Sometimes flat on the ground
 - Other times they may be raised, like a table.



This began as a practice to keep animals or humans from digging up the remains. Perhaps these types of stones are still used for the same reasons; or perhaps to keep the deceased person from getting out!

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Cemeteries

- Not all alike.
 - Memorial Gardens
 - Private cemeteries
 - Military cemeteries
 - Family cemeteries
 - Old abandoned cemeteries



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TYPES OF MONUMENTS

- Generally a cemetery will have rules governing what type of monument can be placed on a grave. Some will allow the largest of monuments, others will allow only a 4"x6" plaque set flush with the ground. Still others will have a mix of styles perhaps varying with the times.

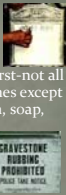


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GOING TO VISIT A CITY OF THE DEAD

- Be respectful. Remember where you are.
- If you plan to do rubbings, get permission first-not all cemeteries allow it. Put nothing on the stones except water if it is really necessary. Shaving cream, soap, powder etc. cause damage to the stone.
- It is better to take digital photos.
- Get permission if a private cemetery.
- Keep in mind that what looks like an abandoned cemetery might not be abandoned, just unkempt and it also might lie on private property. Be careful not to trespass



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