

## Witch's Knot

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<http://nordicwiccan.blogspot.nl/2014/01/witchs-knot.html>



There are many different types of magic knots, all of which have their own uses and their own history. In Pagan Roman times, couples would tie a knot while make solemn vows to each other and their gods during their wedding ceremony, which is where we get the phrase 'tying the knot'. The Witch's Knot, also known as the Witch's Charm or Magic Knot, is comprised of four interlocking vesica piscis-shapes. The knot can also be found with a central circle.

The *vesica piscis* is a shape that is the intersection of two circles with the same radius, intersecting in such a way that the center of each circle lies on the perimeter of the other. The name literally means the "bladder of a fish" in Latin. The shape is also called mandorla (almond in Italian).

The pointed oval sign, the vesica piscis, has also been called the Vessel of the Fish. "Fish" and "womb" were synonymous terms in ancient Greek delphos. Its link to fertility, birth, feminine sexuality and the natural force of women was acknowledged also by the Celts, as well as pagan cultures throughout northern Europe. The Great Goddess was portrayed elsewhere with pendulous breasts, accentuated buttocks and a conspicuous vaginal orifice, the upright vesica piscis. Christians later adapted the symbol as their own for Ichthys, fish.

A *circle* is a simple shape of geometry that is the set of all points in a plane that are at a given distance from a given point, the centre. A circle is a simple closed curve. The word "circle" derives from the Greek *κίρκος*, meaning "hoop" or "ring".

The circle has been known since before the beginning of recorded history. Natural circles would have been observed, such as the Moon, Sun, and a short plant stalk blowing in the wind on sand, which forms a circle shape in the sand. Early science, particularly geometry and astrology and astronomy, was connected to the divine for most medieval scholars, and many believed that there was something intrinsically "divine" or "perfect" that could be found in circles.



Around Europe, there are the scattered remains of stone and wooden circles, aligned with specific stellar or solar rises and settings, many of which themselves contain smaller inner circles. In Wicca, most of our ritual and spell-work is within a circle, cast by a practitioner in order to define the boundaries of the place where we come face to face with our deities, where we work magic and enter meditation.

The *Witch's Knot* can be drawn in one continuous line, meaning that one can draw the Witch Knot without ever having to pick up the pen off the paper. This makes it symbol of protection. In history, witches used knotted cords to 'tie up' the weather, to create circles of protection and to bind things magically. Men of the Middle Ages believed women could immobilize their sexual functioning using female knot magic.

Many people back in the Middle Ages use to scratch the Witch's Knot over the doorways to their homes and stables to protect them from negativity entering it. It can also be tied into a horse bridle or wire wrapped into jewelry for protection.

Today many modern witches have chosen this symbol as their symbol of choice. Looking for a way to protect yourself from evil of any type, consider using this chant as you draw the Witch Knot. The knot can be drawn on the back of a picture of yourself or on the body. It is best that while you do this chant you are focused on the drawing of the symbol and the positive protective energy you want to raise.

*"By the dragon's light, on this night... I call to thee to give me your might. By the power I conjure thee, to protect all that surrounds me. As above, so below. So mote it be!"*



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This symbol can be drawn in one continuous line, meaning that one can draw the Witch Knot without ever having to pick up the pen off the paper. This makes it symbol of protection. Few people may know that this symbol was often used during the Middle Ages to protect a person from a witch. Witches also used the symbol in spells to control the weather or in love spells. These uses indicate that in general the Magic Knot was used homeopathically.

Generally many symbols used in witchcraft or wicca deal with the feminine power, this symbol however does not. Actually it represents the inversion of those powers, the the four radiating half circles represent or are indicative of malefic winds.

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Looking for a way to protect yourself from evil of any type, considering using this chant as you draw the Witch Knot. The knot can be drawn on the back of a picture of yourself or on the body. It is best that while you do this chant you are focused on the drawing of the symbol and the positive protective energy you want to raise.

"By the dragon's light, on this (month) night... I call to thee to give me your might. By the power of three I conjure thee, to protect all that surrounds me. So mote it be. So mote it be!"

It is important to note that there are many different types of magic knots, all of which have their own uses and their own history.

**Jennifer Shakeel**

# Bulfinch's Mythology

## *The Witch's Knot*

From [About.com](#):

The Witch's knot is a common symbol in folk magic. The witch's knot is a symbolic representation of the knot magic practiced by witches in the middle ages, and was used as a sympathetic charm against witchcraft, and usually scratched over doorways of homes and stables. One aspect of its efficacy as a protective charm lay in the ability to draw the complicated symbol in one continuous motion.

While the symbol appears to be made up of intertwined vesica pisces, it does not represent "feminine powers" as is sometimes claimed, but the inversion of those powers- the four radiating half circles symbolically reflect malefic winds.

Ironically, this is a popular emblem of choice for modern witches.

*From Knots, Splices and Rope Work, by A. Hyatt Verrill:*

History abounds with mention of knots, and in the eighth book of "Odyssey" Ulysses is represented as securing various articles of raiment by a rope fastened in a "knot closed with Circean art"; and as further proof of the prominence the ancients gave to knots the famous Gordian Knot may be mentioned. Probably no one will ever learn just how this fabulous knot was tied, and like many modern knots it was doubtless far easier for Alexander to cut it than to untie it.

The old sorcerers used knots in various ways, and the witches of Lapland sold sailors so-called "Wind Knots," which were untied by the sailors when they desired a particular wind. Even modern conjurers and wizards use knots extensively in their exhibitions and upon the accuracy and manner in which their knots are tied depends the success of their tricks.

In heraldry many knots have been used as symbols and badges and many old Coats of Arms bear intricate and handsome knots, or entwined ropes, emblazoned upon them.

*From Bulfinch's The Age Of Fable Chapter 6*



From "Alexander cuts the Gordian Knot", by Jean-Simon Berthélemy

Midas was king of Phrygia. He was the son of Gordius, a poor countryman, who was taken by the people and made king, in obedience to the command of the oracle, which had said that their future king should come in a wagon. While the people were deliberating, Gordius with his wife and son came driving his wagon into the public square.

Gordius, being made king, dedicated his wagon to the deity of the oracle, and tied it up in its place with a fast knot. This was the celebrated Gordian knot, which, in after times it was said, whoever should untie should become lord of all Asia.

Many tried to untie it, but none succeeded, till Alexander the Great, in his career of conquest, came to Phrygia.

He tried his skill with as ill success as others, till growing impatient he drew his sword and cut the knot. When he afterwards succeeded in subjecting all Asia to his sway, people began to think that he had complied with the terms of the oracle according to its true meaning.



# Historical Spells: Cords, Knots and Magic

Posted on February 4, 2014 by Lady Zinzara

Have you ever wondered where the word “spellbinding” came from?



Braid your own cord

Today I'm going to take a look at a particular type of Magic – Cord and Knot magic. It's a type of spell-work that is intrinsically tied to witchcraft throughout the ages. Classically, it is a simple, yet profoundly far-reaching magic utilizing the focus, intent, will, and action all play an integral role in Cord and Knot magic – as with any good spell. I present to you, then, an exploration of one of the oldest types of magic spells handed down through the ages, one that niggles at us and somehow 'makes sense' to us instinctively, is rich in imagery and historical reference.

## The Magic Cord

First, a little history about the Witch's Cords. There is much debate about what and what types of magical groups operated in the past. Certainly, Wicca, a very popular type of modern Paganism is only a little over half a century old, a completely modern construction. However, there are some historical sources for traditional witchcraft, rare as they might be, and there is a great deal of folklore tradition that continues to demonstrate the antiquity and wide-ranging nature of cord and knot magic.

### *Cords in Modern Witchcraft*

Gerald Gardner writes in "The Meaning of Witchcraft" (1959), about cords, or 'girdles':

Returning to the subject of "Cords." The Inquisition originally charged witches with "Raising Storms, Human Sacrifice, and Wearing Girdles," which has always seemed to me to be a curious combination especially at a time when girdles were an ordinary article of attire.

Now, the Inquisition may have been composed of sadistic scoundrels; they were, however, certainly not fools. When they made this charge, it had a real meaning to them.

It must be remembered that the same charge was made against the Templars. The *Chronicle of St. Denis* states emphatically: "In their girdles was their mahommerie," i.e. their magic. Some witches believe that this means that the Inquisition knew that both Templars and witches used them to work magic.

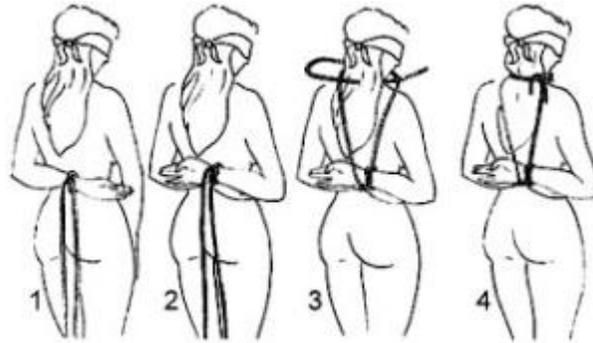
In the *Chronicle of Cyprus*, it is mentioned as a curious fact that a Templar's servant removed (stole?) his master's girdle; as soon as he knew, the Templar killed him with his sword. It also tells that an eavesdropper heard a Knight Templar instructing some novices, telling them to guard these cords well, wearing them concealed beneath their clothing as through them they might attain great prosperity. I cannot imagine anything that could be done with a cord, to gain great prosperity except to use it in the witches' way to "work magic."

A Cingulum, or consecrated witch’s cord, is traditionally either nine feet long or its length is based upon the measurements of the Witch’s own body. It is often used within hierarchical Witchcraft Traditions to indicate the rank of initiation of the individual witch – often these are worn around the waist as a magical tool when performing any magical act or attending ritual. Other traditions involving the cord have been known throughout the past. Some traditions have it that that when a Seeker become a Student, their measure is taken and held on to by the teacher. This measure is kept by the teacher until such time as the student initiates into the group or tradition. At that time the cord would either be held on to by the group, returned to the Initiate or destroyed ritually, by burning or burying the cord. There is some tradition to magical working groups and covens “taking the measure” of a new member – quite literally: an exact measure of the new initiate is taken and the cord is then magically linked to him or her. Often, spells are utilized involving the initiate’s blood, hair, nail clippings or some personal talisman tied up in the cord, and commonly the ritual involves the cord and initiate being bound magically to each other, the cord being charged magically, and the initiate making some sort of pledge.

The cord may be held on to by the Coven, a form of ‘insurance’, that could be used magically against him or her in the case of any betrayal of the Coven. These days, covens that hold onto the “measures” generally do so as a sign of unity, but more often than not, the cord remains in the possession of it’s owner.

Cords used as Cingulum are considered a magical tool and can be used in any number of different ways; to help alter consciousness, to bind an object ritually, to draw out the magic circle, to bind ritually (as often seen in initiation rites), they can be charged in any number of ways, or used for any other magical purpose the owner requires.

In the Gardnerian Book of Shadows (1957), the First Degree Initiation ritual includes a detailed ritual involving the cord and binding the postulant, illustrated in the following diagram.



However it is used, a Cingulum is a powerful tool and should be administered with care to avoid causing undue damage or harm.

Cords can also be used as a meditation or trance tool in much the same way as a Catholic rosary. Because they are usually braided and knotted, often with multi-coloured threads, they bind together symbols and imagery that is individually significant or important to the Witch who wears them. Meditating on a particular knot, strand, or other element of the cord will produce a focused experience on the symbol set contained therein, while working through all the knots (climbing the ladder) can produce an altered state.

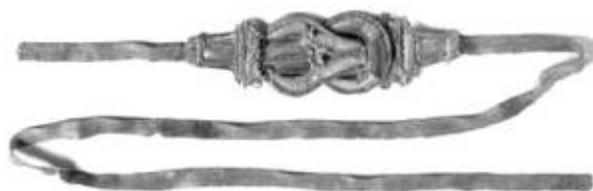
### ***Knots in the Magical Cord***

The tying or untying of knots is used to bind and release energy, and this type of spell has been used throughout history, and all over the world.

There are many historical references to this type of working. From ancient times, cords, threads or clews have been mentioned as being used by witches, for evil or good, and often they are described as being of particular colours. Greek witches are always described as using coloured cords.

It is said that Babylonian witches snared people's souls by tying knots in a cord saying a spell at each knot. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians tied knots in cords for love spells. The marriage-knot or knot of Hercules, a strong knot created by two intertwined ropes, originated as a healing charm in ancient Egypt, but is best known for its use in ancient Greece and Rome as a protective amulet, most notably as a wedding symbol, incorporated into the protective girdles worn by brides, which were ceremonially untied by the new groom. This custom is the likely origin of the phrase "tying the knot." Modern day Pagan Handfastings also incorporate cords to bind together the hands of the participants, in a symbolic knot that reinforces the commitment being made.

According to Roman lore, the knot symbolized the legendary fertility of the God Hercules; it probably relates to the legendary Girdle of Diana captured from the Amazon Queen Hippolyta. In this, the marriage-knot was probably a representation of the virginity of the bride.



Greek girdle, 3rd cent. BCE

The symbolism of the knot survived well beyond its religious use, and was a very common symbol in medieval and Renaissance love tokens.



Classic Isis Knot (Tyet) Amulet

The “Knot of Isis” was a well-known symbol in ancient Egypt. It was a red jasper amulet wound in the shroud of Egyptian mummies and was used to summon the protection of the Goddess Isis and her son Horus for the deceased into the next world. The origins of the amulet are unknown. As a knot, however, its symbolism revolves around the idea of binding and releasing, the joining of opposites, and, since a knot secures things, protection. Knot magic was well known in Egypt from an early period; an inscription in one of the pyramids states, “Isis and Nephthys work magic on Thee [Osiris] with knotted cords.”

The ancient Romans believed that knots could cause impotency, particularly when three different coloured cords were tied in three knots.

The Celtic practice of binding the dead, used now as a devotional or ritual practice by some modern groups, was originally an indication that the dead person had undergone the necessary stages and purification towards the final judgement and redemption.

The actual pattern of the knotting was considered to be the important thing; the pattern formed by the lines of the binding being a symbol of secondary importance.

In Europe, in the middle ages, knotting and wearing of cords was a common accusation of witchcraft, the belief being that it could bring ruin to individuals.

The Inquisition initially charged witches with “Raising Storms, Human Sacrifice, and Wearing Girdles”. This seems a little strange, given the fact that at this time in history, a girdle was a normal article of clothing. Although the inquisitors were fond of accusing just about anyone, a girdle would have been something that could have had any woman, and most men, accused of the charge – so what did they actually mean by ‘girdle’?

In literature, girdles are often portrayed as magical, giving power and strength if worn by men, and protection if worn by women. Several scriptures in the Bible make use of the girdle as a symbol for readiness and preparation. Ishtar, a Babylonian Goddess, wore a fertility girdle, which, when it was removed, rendered the universe barren. Hercules wrestled with the Amazon queen for her girdle in his Greek myth. Aphrodite (or Venus in Roman mythology), also wore girdles.

For men a girdle was often used to hold weapons. It also gave them freedom to move in a fight, unlike other types of clothing. Both of these are thought to carry the connection of power to the man’s girdle in literature. For example, Odysseus wears a girdle which allows him to swim for three days straight, and a girdle worn by Thor doubles his strength. Later on, for women, the girdle became a sign of virginity, and was often considered to have magical properties. Monsters and all types of evil are recorded as being subdued by girdles, a famous one being the dragon slain by Saint George. Marriage ceremonies continued this tradition of girdles symbolizing virginity

by having the husband take the wife's girdle, and prostitutes were forbidden to wear them by law in historic France.

Many other old beliefs were held about knots. Some examples include the belief that the tying of knots could prevent pregnancy in a woman, and that the untying of them facilitates conception and childbirth. In Abrahamic religion, knotted fringe is believed to entangle evil spirits – this being one of the reasons that priests wear collars with no ties, for evil spirits caught in them would disrupt religious services. The prophet Mohammed was said to have been ensorcelled by an evil man and his daughters who tied 11 knots in a cord, which they then hid in a well. The spell made Mohammed ill, and he wasted away nearly to the point of death. It was only after God sent the angel Gabriel to him, that the hiding place of the cord was revealed. Mohammed recited 11 verses from the Koran over the cord, and as he spoke each one a knot loosened itself, until all were undone and the spell broken. Mohammed calls magicians' work “the evil of [women who] are blowers of knots.”

One interesting power that was attributed to witches and sorcerers was the ability to control the wind by tying 3 knots into a cord or handkerchief. When the three knots were tied in the proper magical way, the wind was bound up in them. In many locations, such as the Isle of Man, these cords were prized by sailors, the belief being that loosening one knot would bring a South-Westerly wind, two knots a strong North wind, and 3 knots a tempest. In the folklore of Scandinavia and the Shetland Islands of Scotland, some fishermen are said to command the wind this way.



Simple Knot

The belief in controlling wind by tying it up harkens back to ancient Greece, where Odysseus received a bag of winds to help him on his journey.

In West African witchcraft, the uttering of a person's name while tying a knot gives the person tying it power over the person named. This power is retained as long as the knot remains tied. In Ireland, an old method for healing sick cattle was to use a worm-knot. This was a piece of twine with certain knots tied in it. It would be dragged over the animal's back. If the twine went smoothly, the animal would recover – however, if it hitched or caught, the animal would die.

Magically, knots can be used to bind and loosen deities and powers, as tools to attack and defend psychically, and as magic snares. Magic knots were also believed to have the power to kill. According to a medieval manuscript, a Witch's Ladder made of a string with nine knots, when hidden, causes a victim to die a slow death.



Witches ladder found in Wellington, Somerset

A Witch's Ladder is a string of 40 beads or a cord with 40 knots used in magic. The beads or knots are used by the witch to count out repetitive chants or incantations, or as components of a specific spell. These cords can also be used in healing work, for both the self and others.

In contemporary Witchcraft, knots and cord magic are used for many purposes, in many different ways, and using many methods.

One classic way in which the knotting of cord is used in spell-work is The Spell of Nine Knots.

### *Spell of Nine Knots*

This is one of the oldest forms of cord magic and is used to store energy for use later (such as storing full moon energy, sun, water or wind energy), or to permanently bind undesired energy or influences (binding the power of a bad habit or the power of an “enemy” to harm you). It is also used to bind up an illness, to keep emotions in check, to manifest something to you, or to bind energy for release at a later time or in another

location (such as full moon energy, or the energy raised by a group) for a particular purpose.

Although there are many varieties of knot spells utilizing different numbers of knots, the traditional knot spell has nine knots. (Three: the Goddess' sacred number, times three.) You can also choose the number of knots needed to match your purpose using numerology.

There are a number of important factors in formulating your spell.

- First is intent. What is your purpose in binding this energy, or doing this work? Is your intent to harm? It should never be – even when binding someone or their ability act.
- Secondly, one must determine the type of binding that is to be done; is it temporary or permanent? Is this your true will? Have you considered the effect this binding will have?
- If it is meant to be released, some consideration will need to be given to the marking of one end of the rope, as the knots are usually untied in the opposite order that they are tied into the cord. This can be easily accomplished by making a mark or tying a string on one end.
- If you are doing a *permanent* binding there should be nothing to distinguish one end from the other when you are finished. For a permanent binding, it is most desirable to bury the cord somewhere where it will not be found, preferably an isolated spot, or to burn it.
- A third option involves a binding that may be intended to be permanent, but some time may be needed to determine if the binding needs a permanent measure – as often circumstances and events change, altering the required

spell. In this case, the cord can be tied in a temporary way, and if it is later decided that the binding needs to become permanent, the end-marker can be removed and the cord buried or burned.

- As with all spells, colour magic can be an important component. When choosing the colour of the cord for the purpose of storing energy for later use, a colour should be chosen that corresponds to the specific energy type being stored or the intended use of the energy (ie, blue for healing, yellow for thought or mental activities, etc.) If you are doing a binding of any sort, it is generally best to use black, and white is a basic all-purpose cord for whatever purpose you designate it.
- Colour correspondences vary by tradition, and often have different meanings to different individuals as well. Colour correspondences for Ceremonial Magic are different than they are in Wicca and so-forth. Additionally, colour correspondences exist for the days of the week, the months of the year, for seasons, Zodiac signs, etc.
- Remember, that while colour co-ordination is helpful, as one of the many layers in a spell, it is your intent, and will that are most important in the strength and effectiveness of your working.
- When performing the spell, concentrate on the type of energy being stored, and the purpose for it (eg.– I bind you, (specific person, habit or situation), and your power to harm (etc.) me!). If storing energy from some source (i.e., sun, moon, wind, ocean, etc.) for later use, visualize a stream of energy flowing from that source to fill the cord. When harnessing energy from a group, have the energy focused directly on the cord itself.

Starting at the left side of the cord, tie the first knot. Repeat the visualization in between the tying of the subsequent knots in the order shown. As each knot is tied, say the indicated incantation.

(– 1 — 6 — 4 — 7 — 3 — 8 — 5 — 9 — 2 –)

By knot of **one**, the spell's begun,  
By knot of **two**, it cometh true,  
By knot of **three**, thus shall it be,  
By knot of **four**, 'tis strengthened more,  
By knot of **five**, so may it thrive,  
By knot of **six**, the spell we fix,  
By knot of **seven**, the Stars of heaven,  
By knot of **eight**, the hand of Fate,  
By knot of **nine**, the thing is mine!

If your binding involves a more complicated set of circumstances, you may want to add layers of correspondence to each individual knot. For each knot, concentrate on the corresponding qualities as listed below (any that apply), as these qualities apply to the particular spell you are working. Do this in a focused way before tying the knot in the cord, and speaking the corresponding line of the spell – in this way, your full intent for each knot can best be realised. The individual knots correspond as follows:

- 1 – Unity, wholeness, healing, sun magic
- 2 – Duality, choice, emotions, moon magic
- 3 – Creativity, production, action, Mars magic
- 4 – Foundation, wealth, communication, Mercury magic
- 5 – Expansion, growth, joyfulness, Jupiter magic
- 6 – Love, beauty, harmony, Venus magic
- 7 – Limitation, ending, binding, Saturn magic
- 8 – Dissolution, endings, beginnings, balance, Pluto magic
- 9 – Three times Three – the number of the Goddess

Once all the knots are tied, put the cord away in a safe place until you need to release the stored energy. In the case of a binding it should be put away until you are absolutely sure that the binding is permanent. In the case of the binding of a bad habit or something similar, the cord should be burned or buried as soon as possible.

According to some of the magical formulas, the spell is released by untying the knots, one at a time, over the course of 9 days; while according to others, the cord is tied into a circle to enact the full spell.

This is a flexible spell that can be used by individuals, individuals in a group setting, or groups towards a common purpose. It can be used as part of a ritual, or as a complete ritual of its own.

For group ritual, energy can be raised in any of the usual ways, and imbued into the cord. Slip knots can be tied into cords in group ritual for immediate release within the circle, either for a particular directed purpose, or at a particular time within the ritual itself – or even later, or at another group function.

If you have never created a spell of nine knots, or done cord magic, I encourage you to give it a try. If you are interested in making yourself a magical cord (if you belong to a group, there are likely rules and dictates surrounding the wearing of cords and what type, materials etc.) but you can always make cords for your own private magical workings whether you belong to a group, coven or tradition, or whether you are a solitary practitioner.

I hope I have inspired you to try something simple, perhaps encouraging some of you  
knotty, knotty, witches. © 2014 Pixie Zinzara

# Witches Of The Craft®

"Witchcraft For The 21st Century"



**Welcome  
To  
Witches Of The Craft®**

We are honored that you have found your way to our door. Please come on in have a cup of freshly brewed tea and sit with us for a spell.

We welcome you our new friend to our online home. Our site is a place of peace and refuge from the outside world filled with the Love and Presence of Our Goddess. You will not be judged for you are amongst friends. We offer friendship, fellowship and most of all knowledge. With knowledge the truth and beauty about our Religion can be spread. Witchcraft can then take its rightful place back into today's mainstream Religions. This is our dream, this is our home, this is what we offer to you. We hope you find everything you seek amongst our walls. Safe journey on your Path, my dear brother or sister!



In the course of your lifetime, you will hear of many different types of witches and practitioners. A White Witch, A Gray Witch, A Black Witch, A Celtic Practitioner, A Dianic Practitioner, these are just to name a few. But we often overlook other types of Witches or Practitioners, these are the Elemental Witches. I thought we would take a moment to get you a quick overview of these sometimes and most often type of Witches. Who knows perhaps you might identify with one of these Elementals....

The Elemental Witches include: Sea Witches, Water Witches, Fire Witches, Air Witches and last but definitely not last the Earth Witches. These witches are witches with a magickal twist. They work directly with a preferred element. Their world is a magickal mix of folklore and truths, and their magick is beautiful and fantastic. Watching these witches perform their magick is a very beautiful and moving experience. For example, you can almost see the Sea Witch become the

mermaid. You can envision smiling dolphins jumping out of the surf, as to say hello. The Sea Witch is an expert on the magick and wisdom of water. She can tell you all you want to know about wishing wells, fountains, and tidal waves. The Elemental Witches bond so closely with their element that they carry the characteristics of it.

Now days, choosing a elemental specialty is becoming a common practice in Witchcraft. It helps the practitioner personalize their paths and define their goals, while giving them an edge when it come to magickal work. It gives them a specialized area of knowledge. Choosing to add an elemental affinity can be a way to further develop your unique Path.

Today, the practice of Elemental Witchcraft need not be solitary. There are whole covens being formed by those with the same elemental affinity. Sometimes they include within their ranks those of a differing element, to maintain balance within the group environment. You know they say, “variety is the spice of life.”

The Elemental Witches use meditation, vision questing and soul-searching techniques to determine an affinity or element that they are drawn too. It is possible to have more than one affinity or element, although rarely will the two be tied for first place. You do not have to choose just one, although you will more than likely wish to work with one at a time.

Astrology, your birth chart, your zodiac sign can play a major part in your elemental preference. In some case, the sign/element combination may not fit at all as a Taurus (earth sign) person might have a distinct preference for fire. In other cases, they follow their birth chart exactly, such as a person with a Libra Sun (air sign) and a Pisces Moon (water sign). Might consider air to be their predominant element, followed by water. But affinities come from a deeper source within the subconscious of the seeker. There are those that gravitate to their birth element (Sun sign). Often, they have thing to overcome first. There may be a strength issue. A person can feel a definite pull toward fire, but might feel strong enough to work with it. Fire might have always made them nervous, excited too. Then the practitioner could begin with the earth inside and from there progress to water and air, saving fire for last. By the time the practitioner go to fire, they would be ready to handle it and would have an amazing kinship with the Fire element.

Keep in mind that it is possible to outgrow an elemental connection over time and move onto a new elemental preference entirely. Some witches choose to work with elemental combinations, such as storms. Still others specialize in alternate elements. Your specialty should be unique to you.

Keep in mind that Elemental Witchcraft works in different ways for different people. It all depends on what you want from it. It can either define your path or sub-define it. In other words, it can be an added personalization or it can be the path you choose. However, accepting an elemental affinity as the main focus of your path can make way for some magick that those of us striving for balance may not achieve. Giving yourself over to an element does indeed open new doorway, although that is not always such a beneficial thing. We are human and live on Earth; therefore, we must accept our limits. Knowledge is key and no element will allow itself to be used in a way that does not fit with its attributes. If an element decided to work with you, you must always be respectful. When embracing your personal element to such an extent, the gains could be magnificent but the price too high for a human. Set your limits, even with your preferred element.

With that said, let's take a quick look at these Four Elemental Witches....



## **The Earth Witch**

The path of the Earth Witch most closely resembles that of a Kitchen Witch or a Green Witch. It is grounded in the home and family. Whether gardening, cooking, or cleaning, the Earth Witch brings magick into her life at its simplest level. She becomes one with the Earth. The Earth Witch accepts that everything she does is a reflection of the cycle in nature. She fully understands the mysteries of the Earth.

The Witch who follows the element of Earth is similar to the Kitchen Witch in her use of herbs and magick in the kitchen as well as her affinity for “home-grown” magick and simple folk magick. The Earth Witch incorporates magick into the spice additions and stirring patterns of the majority of meals she prepares in her home. The Earth Witch also related to the path of the Green Witch in that both often are gardeners. It is not unusual to find Earth Witches with statues and beautiful rock formations in their gardens. They decorate them in much the same manner as they

do in their homes. They tend their edible gardens the closest, while courting the favors of the gnomes to watch over their more delicate plants.

The Earth Witch views her home as an extension of the Earth in every way. Her practices include protection magick, past-life discovery, prosperity and fertility. She trains to hold herself closely to the honors of the Earth. She is very frugal and prefers to make the things that she can rather than buy them. She usually makes her own cleaning products, candles and all types of herbal remedies. The Earth Witch understands that the magick is with the Earth itself and within her.



## **The Water Witches**

Water Witches are sometimes referred to as Sea Witches, but many of them find a calling with inland creeks, rivers and lakes. It is rare for them to limit themselves to any one type of body of water. They generally align with all forms, including rain. Since water reflects; the Water Witch does the same. If you yell at her, she will yell back. If you are kind to her and treat her well, she will be kind to you in return. She is very fair. She shares many qualities with her sister Earth Witch, as the Earth is 90 percent water. Among those qualities is the core belief of taking complete responsibility for her actions. The Water Witch accepts that every move she makes can cause ripples across the surface of the water, and moves accordingly.

Water is considered a feminine force, and the Water Witch may prefer an alliance with the Goddess, all the while recognizing and maintaining that the God is within the Goddess. She can sometimes relate closely to Dianic Witches in this preference.

The Water Witch can see things that those on other paths cannot. In fact, the human sense of sight belongs in her realm. Just as the seas teem with life that we have yet to discover and understand, the Water Witch knows that there is much more to our world than what is within our eyesight. While she can be highly superstitious, for the most part she simply knows that there is more just waiting to be discovered, as well as some things that humanity has known about and

forgotten over the ages. The old phrase “out of the blue” speaks volumes about the ability of the Water Witch to tune in to her intuition. She is often very gifted in divination practices. Tarot is usually her divinatory tool of choice, but she also has a talent for dowsing.

The Water Witch sees little that she considers an obstacle. She understands that her fate is in her hands, and if she cannot flow through something, she will flow around it. Once her mind is made up, very little can stop her from obtaining what she wants. Because water exists in three forms on Earth, the Water Witch can be considered a formidable force. She will not admit to any weaknesses.

The Water Witch specializes in healing, cleansing, beauty, emotions, intuition, and energy. Her magical style is usually based on instinct. If the feeling hits her to perform a cleansing, she will. She does not necessarily worry about correspondences and timing. Her timing is completely her own-she will not be rushed by others into decisions or action.

The Water Witch specializes in healing, cleansing, beauty, emotions, intuition, and energy. Her magickal style is usually base on instinct. Winter is the season when the Water Witch is at her peak. She holds the ability to transform fluidity to solid form during winter, the same way that water turns to ice. During this season, the Water Witch turns her views inward and evaluates her own goals. She often redefines herself through this process. Because of this a Water Witch grows stronger every year.



## **The Air Witch**

The path of the Air Witch is one of constant mental stimulation and expression. As poets, writers, actors, and dreamers, Air Witches walk the line of creativity. The wind is the soliloquy of life; every thought and sound transports itself through the air. The Air Witch is sometimes seen as

flaky and air-headed by some, the strength of the Air Witch lies in her intelligence, not her common sense. She walks around with her head in the clouds. Too often she suffers from “foot in mouth” disease. She seems to have an uncanny knack for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Uncomfortable with silence, the Air Witch is content to chatter on aimlessly. She is well-known for making people laugh and smile, even when she is on their last nerve.

A key strength of the master of the wind is her flexibility. The Air Witch always allows room to change her mind and to bend with the wind. She considers that she is never fully done; she is a work in progress. Just as you cannot capture the wind, you cannot pin down an Air Witch to one viewpoint for too long. She refuses to stagnate by accepting anything to be true all the time. She is inquisitive, bubbly and bright, and can inspire others to reach higher, try harder and give a goal their best shot. Air Witches are wonderful cheerleaders.

On the other hand, the happy-go lucky Air Witch is not one you want to anger. Her fury rouses quickly, and she usually possesses a nasty temper. An Air Witch will not mince words with you—she will cut straight to the bone. Once her outburst is over, she is usually no longer mad. Five minutes after her tantrum, she has no idea why anyone is angry with her.

The Air Witch has a flighty nature and has an easy time of letting go of the past. She can overcome the most tragic of life’s situations. She will be changed, but she will quickly move on. She is truly like the wind. Because of this, she tends to make bad judgments. She does not always think things through fully before taking action. The Air Witch thrives on changes and new beginnings. Her thirst for knowledge is unquenchable and tends to get her in trouble. She keeps an open mind and is willing to see alternative viewpoints. The Air Witch is known to incorporate many different belief systems into her own personal view.

The Air Witch specializes magically in spirits, ghosts, invisible beings, travel, inspiration, dreams, wishes, creativity, and changes. She often has a special affinity for Ouija, pendulums, and storm and weather magic. She tends to be unconventional and does things that are considered taboo among many Witches, such as blowing out her candles, using items that don’t biodegrade, and so on. The Air Witch has a talent for necromancy and clairvoyance. The Air Witch is usually well trained in aromatherapy, meditation, and pain-management breathing techniques.



## The Fire Witch

The path of the Fire Witch is not for the faint of heart. Strong and courageous, these Witches rarely take no for an answer. The Fire Witches are considered to be the rebels of the Elemental Witches. They possess a joy of life that is unequaled. They are extremely sociable creatures.

The Fire Witches are all about individuality. Each one is unique. For the most part, their lives are beautiful and poetic, yet there lurks an underlying current of tragedy. There is no typical personal style to the Fire Witch; it varies, as does each flame. The one thing you can be sure of is that she will shine. In blue jeans or diamonds, you know a Fire Witch by the confident aura that surrounds her. But don't let the confident aura that surrounds her fool you, she can be hot-headed and very temperamental, her iron will usually allows her to maintain control.

Philosophically, the Fire Witch has an open mind. She is the proverbial verbal free thinker. Because of the placement of her element (both above and below the Earth), the Fire Witch has the ability to see all sides of any argument. She values honesty and courage above all else. There is nothing she detests as much as a liar. Fire Witches are usually quick-witted, think-on-their-feet types of folks. There is a reason that smart people are called "bright."

The fire brings the light, and with light there follows shadow. The Fire Witch is complex, passionate, and tumultuous. She is sizzling hot stuff. She has both a light and a dark side, and the two sides work together constantly.

The light side of the Fire Witch keeps her personal practices of spirit informal and fun. But when it comes time for magical work, the shadow side often takes over. The dark side of the Fire Witch holds a vast knowledge edge of the more complex magical applications. Magical equations and

ceremonial practices are second nature to the Fire Witch. She may prefer the drama of a high magic ritual and a more ordered structure to things. However, she often utilizes a simpler style of Witchcraft, too. It depends on the situation.

Magically, the Fire Witch specializes in bonding with divinity, regeneration, generation, energy, truth, manifesting, sex magic, banishing, purification, destruction, negative magic, and defensive magic.

The Fire Witch holds herself to an uncompromising code of honor and ethics. She will bestow justice and be benevolent at the same time. She operates from a basic moral code of what is right and what is wrong and rarely will go against her gut instinct. She naturally projects a warm yet noble aura. If you don't want to hear the truth, don't ask a Fire Witch. She can be both gentle and blunt. The key is to hear her out. Fire Witches seem lit from within and glow with a special radiance.

The role of the Fire Witch is one of independence. She encourages people to stand up for themselves and will not hesitate to stand up for herself. Coming under fire by others does not scare her; it inspires her. She is most comfortable when she is free to express her opinion completely, and she usually detests censorship. The Fire Witch takes an active role in all areas of life.

Exerpts for this article on Elemental Witches from the wonderful book entitled, "Elemental Witch: Fire, Air, Water, Earth; Discover Your Natural Affinity"

By Tammy Sullivan

Ms. Sullivan's book is currently available for sale on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



## Celtic Code of Honor

Honor, Responsibility and Duty Always!

Strength be to me and to thee.”

Blessed be!

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Legend has it that the prophet Muhammad was bewitched by an evil man and his daughters, who tied 11 knots in a cord which they hid in a well. The spell made M ill, and he wasted away nearly to the point of death. To save him, God intervened and sent the archangel Gabriel to reveal where the cord was hidden and how to break the spell. When the cord was brought to him, M recited 11 verses from the Koran. As he spoke each line, a knot loosened itself. When all the knots were undone, the spell was broken. In Sura CXIII in the Koran, M calls magicians' work 'the evil of [women who] are blowers on knots'.

Witches and sorcerers were believed to be able to control wind with three knots tied into a rope, or sometimes a handkerchief. When the three knots were tied in the proper magical way, the wind was bound up in them. Sorcerers and witches sometimes sold their magic knots to sailors. The release of one knot brought a gentle, southwesterly wind, two knots a strong north wind and three knots a tempest. In the folklore of the Shetland Islands and Scandinavia, some fishermen are said to command the wind this way.

**The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca, 2010, p. 194**

Door Rosemary Guiley

## *Witchknots, Knitwits and Knots Intrinsicate*

[Steven Connor](#)

A text written to accompany *Ravelling, Unravelling*, an exhibition of work by [Naheed Raza](#) exploring the theme of entanglement in medicine, art, literature and philosophy, Royal Institution, London, 13-28 May 2009. [[pdf version](#)]

Knots have two strongly contrasting aspects that are, as we might say, knottily intertwined. First of all, and perhaps primarily, the knot is the embodiment of constancy or coherence, of that which holds or binds together against the erosions and mutability of time. Knots are stays against time and forgetfulness. They image the taking up of a stitch in time. Maritime knots are a measure of time projected into space; the number of knots at which a ship is travelling is the number of nautical miles (minutes of the earth's longitude at the equator) a ship is covering per hour. Even more than speech, accounting and mathematical procedures seem to depend upon knots, most systematically in the *quipu* system which flourished under the Incas and remained in use, or at least intelligible in parts of Peru until late into the twentieth century. In the *quipu*, knots are made in a series of coloured cords to record information: this certainly seems to have functioned as a method of mathematical notation and perhaps as a calculation aid too, and some scholars suspect that the knots also encoded much more complex forms of narrative and historical record and thus constituted something like a writing system (Urton 1998).

Knots were thought to encourage the knitting together of wounds. Pliny the Elder reported on the wonderful healing powers in particular of the Hercules knot or 'nodus Herculanus', an expression used by classical authors to refer to a riddle or logical puzzle that was extremely hard to construe. I give his description in Philemon Holland's translation:

As for greene wounds, it is wonderfull how soon they will be healed, in case they be bound up and tied with a Hercules knot [marginal note: Wherein no ends are to be seene, they are so close couched, & therefore hardly to be unloosed]: and verily it is thought, that to knit our girdles which we weare about us every day with such a knot, hath a great vertue in it, by reason that Hercules first devised the same. (Pliny 1634, 2.305)

It may seem odd for knots also to feature in magical remedies where their function may be to ease, or to diffuse pain – for example, in the use of a snakeskin knotted nine times and worn for nine days round the wrist as a charm against rheumatism (Speck 1941, 56). Presumably in this case the function of the knot is to confirm that the power of the remedy continues to be held and concentrated in the curative or prophylactic object, even as it is given out as a kind of unloosing.

There are many examples of knots being used as amulets, to preserve health or fortune, one of the most notable being the *tyet*, or knot of Isis, a three-looped knot which seems to suggest a human figure, and the related ideograph of the *ankh*. It is easy to imagine the origins of beliefs in the magical efficacy of tying, given the obvious, yet still always miraculous strength and efficacy of knots, in sailing, engineering, weaving and mechanical operations of all kinds. The Egyptian Hedjhotep was the god both of weaving and amulets, and knotted cords were known as 'Anubis threads', since Anubis presided over the practice of wrapping the corpse in mummification, the ultimate form of bodily preservation against the dissolutions of time (Pinch 1994, 108). Indeed, the use of knots in spells may well condition the sense of the magical power of writing itself, which is concentrated in its own loopings, and power to turn time back on itself. The knot embodies the most extreme magic of all, namely reversibility, in a temporal world in which in reality nothing ever remains in its place or comes back. In a knot, the top and the bottom, the left and the right change places.

Knottings and crossings feature frequently in heraldry, and survive in badges or emblems of affiliation of many kinds, of companies, guilds and clubs, as well as in ceremonial ties, garters and cravats, all of which signify the close-knit continuity and the unity-in-multitude of the association. Such images or sigla, which are often worn on the body, might actually double and fold back into it a kind of primary magic found in certain parts of the body itself. It has been suggested, for example, that the use of knot amulets in Egyptian magic had a primary reference to the vertebra, as suggested by the ideograph *ts*, which signifies both knot and vertebra, since the vertebrae may be thought of as 'a series of bony ligatures, links, or connected segments comprising the spine, that is, they are the series of "knots" that tie the whole skeleton together' (Gordon and Schwabe 2004, 101).

It is in Kabbalistic mysticism that the body-magic of graphic forms is most extensively developed, for example, in reflections on the mystical form of the letter *bet* which begins the Torah, since, as Rabbi Isaac writes in the *Zohar*, the Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah, 'Torah is entirely the one supernal holy name. And since it is the holy name, it begins with *bet*, for it is the totality of the holy name in three knots of faith' (*Zohar* 3.36a). Knots have a particular centrality in Hebrew religion because of the *tallith*, the prayer shawl, with its eight tassels, each tied with five knots; this adds up to 13, which, added in turn to the number 600, the numerical value in the *gematria* system of the word *tzitzit* (the collective term for the eight tassels) makes 613, the total number of precepts in the Torah (Hastings 2004, 2.69, Gutmann 1983, 16). Thus, whelmed in the *tallith*, the observant Jew is bound into the entire body of the Law. But, if the law is bound up in the form of a knot, there must also be a law that is binding on knots themselves. The Babylonian Talmud contains a chapter explaining in what circumstances one may tie or untie a knot on the Sabbath – according to Rabbi Meir, '[o]ne does not become culpable for any knots that can be untied with one hand' (Rodkinson 1903, 2.230) – as though what were feared were the mimetic knotting of the body involved in the tying of knots.

The power of the knot to countermand time can also take malign forms. A knot is among the most reversible of the magical powers of reversal. Frazer records that a parliament in Bordeaux sentenced some one to be burned alive for bringing systematic ruin to a whole family by means of magical knotted cords (Frazer 1998, 290). There is a tradition in some commentaries on the Koran that the prophet Mohamed was bewitched by a Jewish magician, who tied nine knots in a cord and hid it in a well. It was only when the Angel Gabriel revealed the whereabouts of the cord, and incantations were said over it to cause the knots to loosen, that the Prophet recovered from his sickness.

The ambivalence of the knot is nowhere more manifest than in the sphere of love and sexual association. Tying the knot is, of course a powerful image and metaphorical guarantee of fidelity in love, as is witnessed in the many forms of the true-lover's knot, often woven from hair, which lovers have given to each other as pledges, and in traditions of the intertwining of the red rose and briar springing from the graves of sweethearts, as in the folk song 'Barbara Allen'. In marriage, the *notof* the 'virgin knot' is undone by the 'knotting' that, in popular parlance, once meant copulation (Farmer and Henley 1890-6, 4.130), even as marriage itself can be thought of as a less congenial kind of bondage, as in the popular description of a wedding as 'tying a knot with the tongue that cannot be untied with the teeth' (Farmer and Henley 1890-6, 4.130). For this reason, knots have a central place in many marriage and betrothal ceremonies. But knots, which ought to turn the couple inwards on themselves, can also come between them when others intervene, inhibiting their congress, or preventing its issue. Touching the bridegroom with a handkerchief and then tying a knot in it is one way to go about preventing consummation. Witch's knots were believed to be used for the purpose of creating impotence or barrenness. James I singles out as examples of 'such kinde of Charmes as commonlie dafte wives uses' the practice of 'staying married folkes, to have naturallie adoe with other, (by knitting so manie knottes

upon a poynt at the time of their mariage)' (James I 1597, 11, 12). In the ballad *Willie's Lady* (Child no. 6), a jealous mother casts a spell on her son's new bride that prevents her not from conceiving but from giving birth to her child. The spell is eventually discovered when her son fashions a simulacral child out of a loaf of wax and invites the mother to the christening. When he hears her raging 'Who was it who undid the nine witch-knots/Woven in among this lady's locks?/And who was it who took out the combs of care/Braided in amongst this lady's hair?' he immediately performs the required operations, and his wife is given her relief (Child 1965, 1.83-5). In Ovid's rendering of Alcmena's account of the birth of Hercules, her son by Jupiter, all that is required to hold back parturition is for Lucina, the goddess of childbirth sent by a jealous Juno, to sit with her arms and legs crossed, muttering charms:

As she listened to my groans, she squatted on her altar before the door, and with right knee crossed over left and fingers interlinked in her lap she suspended the birth; quietly she muttered incantations, which held up my deliverance (*Utque meos audit gemitus, subsedit in illa/ante fores ara dextroque a poplite laevum/pressa genu digitis inter se pectine iunctis/sustinuit partus. Tacita quoque carmina voce/dixit, et inceptos tenuerunt carmina partus*). (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 9.297-302)

For this reason, just as wedding ceremonies in different cultures often require the couple to leave buttons undone and shoes unlaced, there are also many beliefs and practices involving the systematic unloosing of knots or the prohibition of braiding, or crossing of legs, at a time of childbirth. These anxieties and prophylactic practices extend to other times of life-passage, as well, including death. J.G. Frazer provides the rationale for this in homeopathic principles: 'Whether you cross threads in tying a knot, or only cross your legs in sitting at your ease, you are equally, on the principles of homeopathic magic, crossing or thwarting the free course of things, and your action cannot but check or impede whatever may be going forward in your neighbourhood' (Frazer 1996, 289). The principle that like affects like, no matter what spatial distance may intervene between the objects bound together, has an odd parallel in the principle of 'quantum entanglement', or the theory that two particles may be able to affect each other even though they are separated. In objecting to this idea as 'spukhafte Fernwirkung' or spooky action-at-a-distance, Einstein saw the link with magical thinking clearly. The knot implicates the far in the ear and the near in the far. We may say therefore, that the very theory of the way in which knots have magical effect involve the conception of a further knotting or implicature.

A knot is the magical image of time turned upon itself. There is an important difference between a knot and a mere loop, bow or circle. For these latter merely mark or suspend time, open up a nook or epoch in time, a passage of time in which time can appear not to pass. But a knot does not merely suspend the onward pressure of time, but rather turns it against or back into itself. A loop slackens the tension of ongoing time, but a knot makes that tension strive against itself, so that, the more one pulls on the two sides of a knot, the tighter it gets, time coagulating into space and space becoming ever more charged with time.

For this reason, knots can also keep time open, by storing up possibility. In this respect, knots are as it were, concretions and concentrations of aperture, holding time proleptically in store, or holding it back from itself. An interesting knot practice is recorded among the Southern African Nandi people; a traveller starting a journey will make a knot in some grass by the side of the road, in the hope thereby of preventing those he is going to visit from having their meal before he arrives, or at least of ensuring that there will be food left over (Garbutt 1909, 532). Probably this is why the tying together of the loose ends at the end of a narrative is also called *adénouement*, or unknitting – for once the knot has been slackened, nothing more can happen. A knot is a prevarication, a provocation and a promise of more to come, of *l'avenir*. John Scheffer reported that in his *History of Lapland* that Finnish sorcerers 'sell winds to those Merchants that trafic with them, when they are at any

time detained by a contrary one. The manner is thus, they deliver a small rope with three knots upon it, with this caution, that when they loose the first, they shall have a good wind, if the second a stronger, if the third, such a storm will arise, that they can neither see how to direct the ship, and avoid rocks, or so much as stand upon the decks, or handle the tackling' (Scheffer 1674, 58). Knots could also be used for divination purposes, presumably on the principle that they knitted together the present and the future that were normally held apart from each other. One such procedure was recorded in the early nineteenth century: 'Whenever I go to lye in a strange bed, I always tye my Garter nine times round the bed-post, and knit nine Knots in it, and say to myself: "This Knot I knit, this Knot I tye, to see my Love as he goes by, in his apparel'd array, as he walks in every day" ' (Brand 1813, 2.41). In Papua New Guinea, knot magic is used to conduct transactions with the dead, and indeed with one's own death. A grieving relative who wishes to have their death hastened will tie some knots in a leaf and throw it to the *yambukei* egret, hoping that it will fly to the land of the dead, who will come in a canoe in the appointed number of days to fetch the spirit of the supplicant (Harrison 2001, 261).

These two meanings, the conservation from time, and the constraining of time, do not neutrally cohabit in the knot. Rather, they engender and impact on each other. The knot concentrates a power of unloosing, disperses a power of retention. The knot is a figure for the logical difficulty of paradox not because it simply makes it plain or lays it open to view, but because it is itself paradoxical and self-confuting. A knot is a figure that pretends to let us think all in one go the idea of a configuration that cannot ever quite pull itself together or apart. The knot is implicated in what it signifies.

The knot is the image of life itself, with man as the anastomosis of spirit and body, in which, as in John Donne's 'The Ecstasy', is 'knit/That subtle knot, which makes us man' (Donne 1996, 55). The dissolution of death is the untying of that knot. Pressing the snake to her bosom, Cleopatra demands 'With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate / Of life at once untie' (V.2, 303-4; Shakespeare 1995, 296). But knots also stand for the impediment of complication, and therefore for secrecy, conspiracy and a kind of perverse proliferation (indeed, the motivation to Cleopatra to seize the writhing asp is that she thinks that if Octavia 'first meet the curled Antony / He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss/Which is my heaven to have' (V.2, 300-2; Shakespeare 1995, 296), where curling may refer both to Antony's coiffure and his coiling betrayal). Discovering the plot against him, Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* howls 'there's a knot, a ging, a pack, a conspiracy against me' (IV.2, 108-9; Shakespeare 1979, 111). Conspiracies are presumably thought of as knots because they are paradoxically fissiparous fusions, conjunctive dissensions, with no basis but their own compacity. Othello thinks with horror of the fountain of his love for Desdemona turned to 'a cistern for foul toads/To knot and gender in' (IV.2, 62-3).

The modern mathematics of knots arises from a similarly self-propagating convolution of next-to-nothingness. Watching his colleague P.G. Tait perform experiments with a device for producing smoke rings, William Thomson proposed in 1867 that the basic constituents of matter might be nothing more than vortices or convolutions in the ether, that ultra-attenuated medium of universal transmission in which occult and scientific traditions come together. Though it has a distant descendant in modern string theory, the theory of 'vortex-atoms', and 'ether-knots' was soon abandoned, but not before it had set in train the still prospering form of mathematics known as knot theory. In a sense, the power of the knot is precisely that it images the empty self-relation of that which comes into being in turning or reflecting on itself, and is thus twin to the self-conjuring *cogito*. Made of nothing but the intrication of their own dissillience, knots thread us through and together with our space and time.

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### § 11. Knots and Rings tabooed

WE have seen that among the many taboos which the Flamen Dialis at Rome had to observe, there was one that forbade him to have a knot on any part of his garments, and another that obliged him to wear no ring unless it were broken. In like manner Moslem pilgrims to Mecca are in a state of sanctity or taboo and may wear on their persons neither knots nor rings. These rules are probably of kindred significance, and may conveniently be considered together. To begin with knots, many people in different parts of the world entertain a strong objection to having any knot about their person at certain critical seasons, particularly childbirth, marriage, and death. Thus among the Saxons of Transylvania, when a woman is in travail all knots on her garments are untied, because it is believed that this will facilitate her delivery, and with the same intention all the locks in the house, whether on doors or boxes, are unlocked. The Lapps think that a lying-in woman should have no knot on her garments, because a knot would have the effect of making the delivery difficult and painful. In the East Indies this superstition is extended to the whole time of pregnancy; the people believe that if a pregnant woman were to tie knots, or braid, or make anything fast, the child would thereby be constricted or the woman would herself be “tied up” when her time came. Nay, some of them enforce the observance of the rule on the father as well as the mother of the unborn child. Among the Sea Dyaks neither of the parents may bind up anything with a string or make anything fast during the wife’s pregnancy. In the Toumbuluh tribe of North Celebes a ceremony is performed in the fourth or fifth month of a woman’s pregnancy, and after it her husband is forbidden, among many other things, to tie any fast knots and to sit with his legs crossed over each other.

In all these cases the idea seems to be that the tying of a knot would, as they say in the East Indies, “tie up” the woman, in other words, impede and perhaps prevent her delivery, or delay her convalescence after the birth. On the principles of homoeopathic or imitative magic the physical obstacle or impediment of a knot on a cord would create a corresponding obstacle or impediment in the body of the woman. That this is really the explanation of the rule appears from a custom observed by the Hos of West Africa at a difficult birth. When a woman is in hard labour and cannot bring forth, they call in a magician to her aid. He looks at her and says, “The child is bound in the womb, that is why she cannot be delivered.” On the entreaties of her female relations he then promises to loosen the bond so that she may bring forth. For that purpose he orders them to fetch a tough creeper from the forest, and with it he binds the hands and feet of the sufferer on her back. Then he takes a knife and calls out the woman’s name, and when she answers he cuts through the creeper with a knife, saying, “I cut through to-day thy bonds and thy child’s bonds.” After that he chops up the creeper small, puts the bits in a vessel of water, and bathes the woman with the water. Here the cutting of the creeper with which the woman’s hands and feet are bound is a simple piece of homoeopathic or imitative magic: by releasing her limbs from their bonds the magician imagines that he simultaneously releases the child in her womb from the trammels which impede its birth. The same train of thought underlies a practice observed by some peoples of opening all locks, doors, and so on, while a birth is taking place in the house. We have seen that at such a time the Germans of Transylvania open all the locks, and the same thing is done also in Voigtland and

Mecklenburg. In North-western Argyllshire superstitious people used to open every lock in the house at childbirth. In the island of Salsette near Bombay, when a woman is in hard labour, all locks of doors or drawers are opened with a key to facilitate her delivery. Among the Mandelings of Sumatra the lids of all chests, boxes, pans, and so forth are opened; and if this does not produce the desired effect, the anxious husband has to strike the projecting ends of some of the house-beams in order to loosen them; for they think that "everything must be open and loose to facilitate the delivery." In Chittagong, when a woman cannot bring her child to the birth, the midwife gives orders to throw all doors and windows wide open, to uncork all bottles, to remove the bungs from all casks, to unloose the cows in the stall, the horses in the stable, the watchdog in his kennel, to set free sheep, fowls, ducks, and so forth. This universal liberty accorded to the animals and even to inanimate things is, according to the people, an infallible means of ensuring the woman's delivery and allowing the babe to be born. In the island of Saghalien, when a woman is in labour, her husband undoes everything that can be undone. He loosens the plaits of his hair and the laces of his shoes. Then he unties whatever is tied in the house or its vicinity. In the courtyard he takes the axe out of the log in which it is stuck; he unfastens the boat, if it is moored to a tree, he withdraws the cartridges from his gun, and the arrows from his crossbow.

Again, we have seen that a Toumbuluh man abstains not only from tying knots, but also from sitting with crossed legs during his wife's pregnancy. The train of thought is the same in both cases. Whether you cross threads in tying a knot, or only cross your legs in sitting at your ease, you are equally, on the principles of homoeopathic magic, crossing or thwarting the free course of things, and your action cannot but check and impede whatever may be going forward in your neighbourhood. Of this important truth the Romans were fully aware. To sit beside a pregnant woman or a patient under medical treatment with clasped hands, says the grave Pliny, is to cast a malignant spell over the person, and it is worse still if you nurse your leg or legs with your clasped hands, or lay one leg over the other. Such postures were regarded by the old Romans as a let and hindrance to business of every sort, and at a council of war or a meeting of magistrates, at prayers and sacrifices, no man was suffered to cross his legs or clasp his hands. The stock instance of the dreadful consequences that might flow from doing one or the other was that of Alcmena, who travailed with Hercules for seven days and seven nights, because the goddess Lucina sat in front of the house with clasped hands and crossed legs, and the child could not be born until the goddess had been beguiled into changing her attitude. It is a Bulgarian superstition that if a pregnant woman is in the habit of sitting with crossed legs, she will suffer much in childbed. In some parts of Bavaria, when conversation comes to a standstill and silence ensues, they say, "Surely somebody has crossed his legs."

The magical effect of knots in trammelling and obstructing human activity was believed to be manifested at marriage not less than at birth. During the Middle Ages, and down to the eighteenth century, it seems to have been commonly held in Europe that the consummation of marriage could be prevented by any one who, while the wedding ceremony was taking place, either locked a lock or tied a knot in a cord, and then threw the lock or the cord away. The lock or the knotted cord had to be flung into water; and until it had been found and unlocked, or untied, no real union of the married pair was possible. Hence it was a grave offence, not only to cast such a spell, but also to steal or make away with the material instrument of it, whether lock or knotted cord. In the year 1718 the parliament of Bordeaux sentenced some one to be burned alive for having spread

desolation through a whole family by means of knotted cords; and in 1705 two persons were condemned to death in Scotland for stealing certain charmed knots which a woman had made, in order thereby to mar the wedded happiness of Spalding of Ashintilly. The belief in the efficacy of these charms appears to have lingered in the Highlands of Perthshire down to the end of the eighteenth century, for at that time it was still customary in the beautiful parish of Logierait, between the river Tummel and the river Tay, to unloose carefully every knot in the clothes of the bride and bridegroom before the celebration of the marriage ceremony. We meet with the same superstition and the same custom at the present day in Syria. The persons who help a Syrian bridegroom to don his wedding garments take care that no knot is tied on them and no button buttoned, for they believe that a button buttoned or a knot tied would put it within the power of his enemies to deprive him of his nuptial rights by magical means. The fear of such charms is diffused all over North Africa at the present day. To render a bridegroom impotent the enchanter has only to tie a knot in a handkerchief which he had previously placed quietly on some part of the bridegroom's body when he was mounted on horseback ready to fetch his bride: so long as the knot in the handkerchief remains tied, so long will the bridegroom remain powerless to consummate the marriage.

The maleficent power of knots may also be manifested in the infliction of sickness, disease, and all kinds of misfortune. Thus among the Hos of West Africa a sorcerer will sometimes curse his enemy and tie a knot in a stalk of grass, saying, "I have tied up So-and-so in this knot. May all evil light upon him! When he goes into the field, may a snake sting him! When he goes to the chase, may a ravaging beast attack him! And when he steps into a river, may the water sweep him away! When it rains, may the lightning strike him! May evil nights be his!" It is believed that in the knot the sorcerer has bound up the life of his enemy. In the Koran there is an allusion to the mischief of "those who puff into the knots," and an Arab commentator on the passage explains that the words refer to women who practise magic by tying knots in cords, and then blowing and spitting upon them. He goes on to relate how, once upon a time, a wicked Jew bewitched the prophet Mohammed himself by tying nine knots on a string, which he then hid in a well. So the prophet fell ill, and nobody knows what might have happened if the archangel Gabriel had not opportunely revealed to the holy man the place where the knotted cord was concealed. The trusty Ali soon fetched the baleful thing from the well; and the prophet recited over it certain charms, which were specially revealed to him for the purpose. At every verse of the charms a knot untied itself, and the prophet experienced a certain relief.

If knots are supposed to kill, they are also supposed to cure. This follows from the belief that to undo the knots which are causing sickness will bring the sufferer relief. But apart from this negative virtue of maleficent knots, there are certain beneficent knots to which a positive power of healing is ascribed. Pliny tells us that some folk cured diseases of the groin by taking a thread from a web, tying seven or nine knots on it, and then fastening it to the patient's groin; but to make the cure effectual it was necessary to name some widow as each knot was tied. O'Donovan describes a remedy for fever employed among the Turcomans. The enchanter takes some camel hair and spins it into a stout thread, droning a spell the while. Next he ties seven knots on the thread, blowing on each knot before he pulls it tight. This knotted thread is then worn as a bracelet on his wrist by the patient. Every day one of the knots is untied and blown upon, and when the seventh knot is undone the whole thread is rolled up into a ball and thrown into a river, bearing away (as they imagine) the fever with it.

7

Again knots may be used by an enchantress to win a lover and attach him firmly to herself. Thus the love-sick maid in Virgil seeks to draw Daphnis to her from the city by spells and by tying three knots on each of three strings of different colours. So an Arab maiden, who had lost her heart to a certain man, tried to gain his love and bind him to herself by tying knots in his whip; but her jealous rival undid the knots. On the same principle magic knots may be employed to stop a runaway. In Swazieland you may often see grass tied in knots at the side of the footpaths. Every one of these knots tells of a domestic tragedy. A wife has run away from her husband, and he and his friends have gone in pursuit, binding up the paths, as they call it, in this fashion to prevent the fugitive from doubling back over them. A net, from its affluence of knots, has always been considered in Russia very efficacious against sorcerers; hence in some places, when a bride is being dressed in her wedding attire, a fishing-net is flung over her to keep her out of harm's way. For a similar purpose the bridegroom and his companions are often girt with pieces of net, or at least with tight-drawn girdles, for before a wizard can begin to injure them he must undo all the knots in the net, or take off the girdles. But often a Russian amulet is merely a knotted thread. A skein of red wool wound about the arms and legs is thought to ward off agues and fevers; and nine skeins, fastened round a child's neck, are deemed a preservative against scarlatina. In the Tver Government a bag of a special kind is tied to the neck of the cow which walks before the rest of a herd, in order to keep off wolves; its force binds the maw of the ravening beast. On the same principle, a padlock is carried thrice round a herd of horses before they go afield in the spring, and the bearer locks and unlocks it as he goes, saying, "I lock from my herd the mouths of the grey wolves with this steel lock."

8

Knots and locks may serve to avert not only wizards and wolves but death itself. When they brought a woman to the stake at St. Andrews in 1572 to burn her alive for a witch, they found on her a white cloth like a collar, with strings and many knots on the strings. They took it from her, sorely against her will, for she seemed to think that she could not die in the fire, if only the cloth with the knotted strings was on her. When it was taken away, she said, "Now I have no hope of myself." In many parts of England it is thought that a person cannot die so long as any locks are locked or bolts shot in the house. It is therefore a very common practice to undo all locks and bolts when the sufferer is plainly near his end, in order that his agony may not be unduly prolonged. For example, in the year 1863, at Taunton, a child lay sick of scarlatina and death seemed inevitable. "A jury of matrons was, as it were, empanelled, and to prevent the child 'dying hard' all the doors in the house, all the drawers, all the boxes, all the cupboards were thrown wide open, the keys taken out, and the body of the child placed under a beam, whereby a sure, certain, and easy passage into eternity could be secured." Strange to say, the child declined to avail itself of the facilities for dying so obligingly placed at its disposal by the sagacity and experience of the British matrons of Taunton; it preferred to live rather than give up the ghost just then.

9

The rule which prescribes that at certain magical and religious ceremonies the hair should hang loose and the feet should be bare is probably based on the same fear of trammelling and impeding the action in hand, whatever it may be, by the presence of any knot or constriction, whether on the head or on the feet of the performer. A similar power to bind and hamper spiritual as well as bodily activities is ascribed by some people to rings. Thus in the island of Carpathus people never button the clothes they put upon a dead body and they are careful to remove all rings from it; "for the spirit, they say, can even be detained in the little finger, and cannot rest." Here it is plain that even if the soul is not definitely

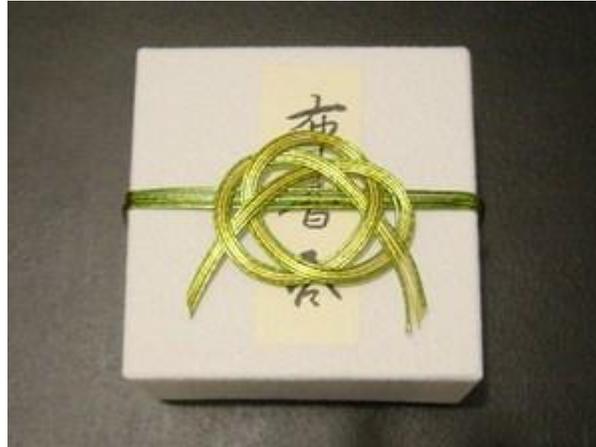
supposed to issue at death from the finger-tips, yet the ring is conceived to exercise a certain constrictive influence which detains and imprisons the immortal spirit in spite of its efforts to escape from the tabernacle of clay; in short the ring, like the knot, acts as a spiritual fetter. This may have been the reason of an ancient Greek maxim, attributed to Pythagoras, which forbade people to wear rings. Nobody might enter the ancient Arcadian sanctuary of the Mistress at Lycosura with a ring on his or her finger. Persons who consulted the oracle of Faunus had to be chaste, to eat no flesh, and to wear no rings.

On the other hand, the same constriction which hinders the egress of the soul may prevent the entrance of evil spirits; hence we find rings used as amulets against demons, witches, and ghosts. In the Tyrol it is said that a woman in childbed should never take off her wedding-ring, or spirits and witches will have power over her. Among the Lapps, the person who is about to place a corpse in the coffin receives from the husband, wife, or children of the deceased a brass ring, which he must wear fastened to his right arm until the corpse is safely deposited in the grave. The ring is believed to serve the person as an amulet against any harm which the ghost might do to him. How far the custom of wearing finger-rings may have been influenced by, or even have sprung from, a belief in their efficacy as amulets to keep the soul in the body, or demons out of it, is a question which seems worth considering. Here we are only concerned with the belief in so far as it seems to throw light on the rule that the Flamen Dialis might not wear a ring unless it were broken. Taken in conjunction with the rule which forbade him to have a knot on his garments, it points to a fear that the powerful spirit embodied in him might be trammelled and hampered in its goings-out and comings-in by such corporeal and spiritual fetters as rings and knots.

# JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

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The Symbolism of Knots: to Knot or not to Knot ... that is the Question



*THE MIZUHIKI KNOT (PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS) SEE THIS PHOTO GALLERY FOR MORE ORNATE FORMS OF MIZUHIKI*

In Japan, the tradition of knotting is well known and remains much alive especially in wedding customs, gift-giving and wrappings, festive occasions, shrine and temple ritual contexts, agricultural practices. Children are still taught how to tie mizuhiki though it is no longer as well practised as the cat's cradle.

The most well known form of Japanese knotwork may well be the mizuhiki which is most often seen accompanying the wedding invitation. Wikipedia gives a mizuhiki definition as follows:

*Mizuhiki is an ancient Japanese art form that uses a special cord. The cord is created from rice paper, that is tightly wound, starched to give it stiffness, and then colored. The ways of coloring include brightly colored Mylar (a very thin plastic), thin strands of silk, or simply painted. **The art form was used to tie up the hair of the samurai.***

*Currently there are several forms. The traditional decoration, given away at Japanese occasions, such as weddings, births, and funerals take the forms of animals or boats. Different animals are created for different meanings, including cranes, frogs, fish, dragons, and turtles are among the most popular. The other traditional way the art is done is in decorating cards with little colored knots, similarly to how people in western cultures use a ribbon and bow. A third way is being developed that uses the ancient art for a more modern purpose, jewelry.*

It is popularly transmitted that the history of the mizuhiki knotting tradition began thus:

In 607 AD, a Japanese delegate returned from China with a gift for the Japanese emperor. The gift was decorated with a red and white twine knot symbolizing "safe journey" for the delegate. The Japanese began recreating the knot from washi, starting a tradition of presenting a gift box with a twine or Mizuhiki knot.

Although the history of Japanese knotting is often attributed to Chinese contacts, knotting is known from earlier prehistoric Kofun (kurgan burial mound) times when patterns of intricate knots were carved on ritual rocks or funerary ceramic haniwa stands, suggesting a magical ritual and mythological context.

Some customs dating back to ancient Japan and at least proto-historic Japan include:

*musubi-matsu* — the ritual of tying the branches of a pine tree (*matsu*) together in order to ensure the safe return of a group or individual embarking on a journey.

*tama-musubi* — was the ritual action intended to “bind” the spirit of the deceased to a specific site or object. Combs were common grave objects for females in prehistoric Japan. Traditional ornaments called *tama-musubi* are still known: “*Various Tama-musubi was attached to the comb. The ornamental hairpin(Kanzashi) which imitated the shuttlecock of a Japanese battledore(Hagoita) and was made. They can be attached to hair in the time of any dresses.*”

— Mrs NH

From *Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories: Narrative, Ritual, and Royal Authority*” by David T. Bialock, comes an understanding of the origin of the “chinkon” and *tama* “cloudsoul” concept and the rites, and the purpose behind it and the cosmological framework that surrounded it:

Although *Nihon shoki*’s entry on Temmu’s rite is regarded as the earliest extant mention of the *chinkon* (spirit pacification), the graphs glossed as “*mitama-furi*” in the text are actually *shokon*, also read *tama-yobai* (“soul-summoning”). The conventional *chinkon* reading of the passage together with its vernacular gloss “*mitama-furi*” probably dates from a commentarial tradition transmitted by the Urabe lineage. Thus, according to a secret *kun*-reading given in the twenty-first scroll of the *Shaku nihongi*, the graphs were intended to be read “*mitama-furi*,” a ritual elsewhere represented in *Shaku nihongi* by the graphs *chinkonsia*. This reading of the graphs, now well established, was also argued for by Ban Nobutomo in his classic study *Chinkon den*, where he noted that the phrase “should be recorded as , but one can surmise that it was written in conformance with the usual Chinese practice.”<sup>51</sup>

... turn to some descriptions of the *chinkon* rite in the law codes and their commentaries, which have been the basis for most attempts to construct its ancient ritual function. These include the *Taiho Code* o 701 (extant only fragmentarily in the later *Yoro Code*), the *Ryo no shuge* (selected in 833), and the *Ryo no guge* (selected prior to 868). According to the *Taiho Code* , the *chinkonsai* was held in midwinter in the Eleventh Month on a *tora no hi* (days of the tiger), and followed by the *daijosai* on a *u no hi* (day of the rabbit), a period that coincided with the winter solstice. In Chinese yin-yang five agents thought, both of these days were identified with the agent wood (the beginning of the cycle), which corresponded to the direction east and the season spring. Both the month and days were a time when the positive yang pneumas were believed to mount upward and all things were held to be in a state of movement. It was thus an ideal time for initiating activities such as royal accessions. <sup>52</sup>

turning to some actual definitions of the *chinkon* rite, we find the following explanation in the *Ryo no gige* under the heading *chinkon*: “The graph means to pacify. A person’s yang spirit (*yoki*) is called soul (*tama*). The *tama* moves about, meaning one summons back the *tama* that wanders about in a state of separation and pacifies it inside the body (literally “bowels”).]

Therefore it is named “chinkon” (to pacify the soul), another definition from the Ryo no shuge contains some additional details: A person’s yang spirit is called ‘kon’ it moves about. A person’s yin spirit is called ‘haku’ it is white. Therefore one calls back the white soul wandering about in a state of separation and causes it to be pacified inside the bowels. Therefore it is called chinkon. The exact source for the ideas contained in these descriptions remains uncertain, but the language recalls ancient Chinese ideas about the fate of the soul after death. According to the Li ji: the yang qi of the “cloudsoul” (hun) rises up to the sky (tian) after death, whereas the yin or dark elements associated with the body or “whitesoul” (po) return to the earth. 55 Another passage in the Li Ji , on the rites of mourning , speaks of summoning back the cloudsoul and returning it to the body (po)56. It was under the influence of such commentaries, according to Watanabe Katsuyoshi, that modern scholars developed the idea of a “soul that wanders about in separation from its body” and interpreted chinkon as a rite primarily aimed at preventing such separation by placating the “tama” and thereby obviating the illness and death that were held to result from such separation57.

The yin-yang five agents principles and the related concept of “qi” which informed the ritual setting (temporal and geomantic) of the chinkonsai and the descriptive language of the law doctors, were fundamental, of course to Chinese philosophical thought. In Daoism, the induction of qi into the body and its proper regulation became one of the basic practices for achieving longevity, a central concern of later Daoist literature, as in Xiang’er’s commentary on the Daodejing, which also functioned as a guide to the enlightened ruler.58 thus in Bokenkamp’s paraphrase of one Xiang’er passage “the pneumas of morning and evening should be caused to descend into the human body , where they should be mixed with the body’s own pneumas so that they are evenly distributed throughout.” On the other hand, this time citing directly from the Xiang’er “When the heart produced ill-omened and evil conduct, the Dao departs, leaving the sack (belly) empty. Once it is empty, deviance enters, killing the person.”60 As these citations make clear, the principle of balancing and harmonizing qi was of paramount importance; deviance (xie) on the other hand, arose from a failure to achieve a proper balance or mixing of pneumas resulting in illness and death. ... The emphasis in the Xiang’er passage on the belly, for example, recalls what Watanabe characterizes as the peculiar language of the law commentaries where the aim of the rite was to draw the erring “tama” back into the “belly”. A related notion found in the Chuxue ji, a Tang period encyclopedia compiled at the order of Emperor Xuangzong (r. 712-756), states that on the winter solstice the yang qi is restored to the belly and hot things placed in qi are easily digested.61 If this Daoist medical advice offers a parallel to the ideas of the law doctors in their attempts to describe the chinkon rite, recipes for the production of immortality elixirs provide a suggestive context for understanding the relationship between the medicinal herb and Temmu’s spirit-summoning rite. An entry from scroll seventy-seven on “elixirs” in Yunqi qiqian (Seven Lots from the Satchel of the Clouds), an encyclopedia of older Daoist texts and extracts compiled under the Northern Song, describes a life-extending elixir called lingwan that allows one to “pacify the cloud souls, coagulate the white souls, and fly off into the seventy-four directions,” and in another passage “to sport about on the Five Mountain Peaks.” Not least interesting here is the combination of graphs chinkon, “pacify the cloud souls”) the same two graphs that are used for the Japanese chinkon or “mitama-furi” rite. Another entry from the Inner Transmission of the Purple Sun Master (Ziyang zhenren neichuan, 399), collected in scroll 106 of the Yunqi qiqian, relates that the consumption of zhu over a period of five years—the same medicinal herb ingested by Temmu—produces a glow in the body, gives one a vision that can see right through to the five viscera, and enables one to become an immortal.

### **The history of knots in different cultures**

More broadly, knots in cords, ropes, scarves were tied to bind magical power, and untied to release it, the actions accompanied by the chanting of spells while releasing the knots. Knots could be used to bind love towards someone or to prevent the affection from forming.

### **Egypt and Turkey:**

The Egyptians had elaborate love and antilove knotting charms. Source: The Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy, p. 162 by Rosemary Guiley

*“Isis was the Egyptian goddess associated with the magick of knots. It was believed that the priestesses could control the weather by braiding or unbraiding their hair as well as tying or blowing on knots. Isis could also have an influence in someone’s life by using knot magick.”* — [The Knotted Cord](#)

*Even in Christian times, under the reign of Constantine, a certain Sopater suffered death at Constantinople on a charge of binding the winds by magic, because it happened that the cornships of Egypt and Syria were detained afar off by calms or head-winds, to the rage and disappointment of the hungry Byzantine rabble. Finnish wizards used to sell wind to storm-stayed mariners. **The wind was enclosed in three knots**; if they undid the first knot, a moderate wind sprang up; if the second, it blew half a gale; if the third, a hurricane....**The art of tying up the wind in three knots**, so that the more knots are loosed the stronger will blow the wind, **has been attributed to wizards in Lapland and to witches in Shetland, Lewis, and the Isle of Man.** Shetland seamen still buy winds in the shape of **knotted handkerchiefs or threads from old women who claim to rule the storms.** There are said to be ancient crones in Lerwick now who live by selling wind. Source: [The Golden Bough “The Magical Control of the Weather](#) by James Frazer (at pp. 62a,b)*

### **India, Tibet, China**

*Knots are used in India and Thibet as Talismans for Longevity and to avert the Evil Eye (see Illustration No. 27, Plate II), the **Knot being considered potent to bind that which is good and precious**, and to **prove an obstacle or hindrance to that which is evil**; for instance, at the time of marriage knots are lucky, and the ceremonies connected with a Chinese marriage include knotted red and green ribbons, which are held by the newly wedded pair, the bride holding the green ribbon whilst the bridegroom seizes the red; and in our own country the true-lover’s knot is frequently used in the decoration of the wedding dress; but **at childbirth and death, there must be no knots** about the person to hamper the coming or going of the spirit.*

Chapter IV [The Book of Talismans, Amulets and Zodiacal Gems](#), by William Thomas and Kate Pavitt, [1922], at [sacred-texts.com](#)

From [Knot Magic a Brief History](#)

*In Hinduism, **knot tying is often associated with the death gods.** Buddhists refer to the untying of knots as a “process of liberation.”*

*When someone was dying, it was once a common practice to untie all knots within the room so as to not keep the dying person bound to life and suffering.*

## Middle East

*The Jewish tradition, like many others, also has a long history of the use of knots in the marriage ceremony. The Wilmingtonian And Delaware Advertiser, January 1826, reported this item under the banner of 'Miss Rothchild's Marriage':*

*"At an early hour on Monday morning, Stomford Hill, the country residence of N. M. Rothschild, Esq. was in a great state of bustle, and most of its inhabitants were on qui vive, waiting the approaching hour when Hymen was to tie the knot of a son and daughter of the house of Judah."*

Source: "Tie the knot" Phrase Dictionary

In the Koran, the prophet Mohammed believed that evil women knotted cords and blew on them, and according to folklore he had been the target of an evil bewitchment spell by the daughters of a man who had knotted 11 knots in a cord, and then thrown the cord down a well. To break the spell he spoke surahs over the cord, whereupon they untied themselves. Source: The Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy, p. 162 by Rosemary Guiley

## Mesopotamia, Near East

### In Sumeria:

*The Knot of Inanna is sacred to the Goddess. The image of this knot was the first written form of the Goddess's name. The Knot of Inanna often appears as the top of a tall pole. This symbol of the Goddess's authority was probably the original archetype of the much later crosier, which is carried by Christian bishops and abbots. The Knot of Inanna is a sacred symbol. — The Knot of Inanna*

### In Egypt:

*Knots have great antiquity in the region, "In fact, as far back ancient Mesopotamia, there are references to knots created and used for magickal purposes in both art and literature. It was common, during the age of sailing ships, that a wind cord would be created, in which several knots would have the power of favorable winds stored in them. A ship stranded without a wind, a knot would be undone to bring one along to save the ship and her crew." — Knots and Cord Magick*

The Egyptians had an amulet with a knot in the middle of it, called the tiet or tyet, its function is described as follows:



*"The standard form of the amulet was an open loop of material, tied with a sash that hung down below the loop on two sides. The tiet looks similar to the ankh, the hieroglyph for "life," except that its crossbar is folded down. In fact, the tiet may be related to the ankh, for the tiet sign is often translated as "life" or "welfare."*

The origins of the amulet are unknown. As a knot, however, its symbolism revolves around the idea of binding and releasing, the joining of opposites, and, since a knot secures things, protection. Knot magic was well known in Egypt from an early period; an inscription in one of the pyramids states, **“Isis and Nephthys work magic on Thee (Osiris) with knotted cords.”** The *Book of Coming Forth by Day* gives several examples of the magical power of the knot. In this one, **knots are tied around the deceased to help her come into the presence of the Deities; “The four knots are tied about me by the guardian of the sky . . .the knot was tied about me by Nut, when I first saw Maat, when the gods and the sacred images had not yet been born. I am heaven born, I am in the presence of the Great Gods.”** In addition to these four knots, there were **seven knots, or tesut, that were tied about the deceased to protect him or her.**

The tiet appears in Egyptian iconography in the third dynasty. It was frequently used in association with the djed pillar of Osiris, and so became almost exclusively associated with Isis. Used together, the two symbols could refer to the power of the Goddess and God to engender Life.

Because of this, the symbols may also be seen as sexual symbols — the pillar referring to the phallus of the god and the knot to the vulva and womb of the Goddess. Once born, the new or renewed life would have to be protected—an apt job for the protective properties of the magical knot. In the *Book of Coming Forth by Day*, **the Knot of Isis not only helps protect, but also raises up the deceased.** The formula says, **“The Knot of Isis amulet has laid her hands on me,” and by doing so sets the deceased in the place of rebirth, the eastern sky,** where he says, **“I have appeared in glory. I have been initiated, I have been ennobled as a god.”**

The Phoenician so-called “sign of Tanit” found aplenty at Punic Carthage, is said to be clearly related to the tiet and ankh symbols of Egypt — see “The Sign of Tanit, Interpretations of a symbol”:

*“It is impossible to support the view that a number of the symbols erroneously called the “sign of Tanit” do not incorporate the ankh sign, which was known to the Carthaginians at that time. it cannot be positively stated that the sign does not represent a votary, when a cippus which I excavated myself, dating back at least to the fifth century B.C., proves the contrary. It cannot be denied that several versions of the symbol, probably by association with the knot of Isis’s girdle, are simply female fertility symbols*

*The lower half of the symbol, with its lateral appendages representing incense-burners, unquestionably represents an altar, since this is proved by an altar-cippus of fifth century date from the sanctuary, although it has a baetylic column on top instead of a disc. It cannot be argued that the astral baetyl, which probably never had anything to do with the female symbol, is not interchangeable with the baetylic column. Another altar-cippus of similar shape and date actually shows the symbol itself with an astral baetyl on top. Carved in detail on the stone (unlike some examples, which are finished with little more than the bare outline of a simple contour), this specimen is one of the richest, if not the earliest, sources of information for an enquiry into the components of the “sign of Tanit”. On the slab of one altar a whole temple is shown. The incense-burners on each side are in this case the fire-altars in 7 front of the entrance, just as they appear on another cippus from the sanctuary which, precisely, reproduces a temple, and on some of the stelae from Sousse. In other cases they take the form of acroteria at the ends, thus forming a horned altar. The steps on the back are those of the stair by which the image of the deity, in the baetylic form of a bottle, a column or a disc, is approached. Finally, to call this symbol the “sign of Tanit” is a fundamental error. In the sanctuary at Constantine, which, judging by the number*

*of votive inscriptions, was dedicated to Baal Addir and Baal Hammon, the symbol appears just as frequently. It is regularly seen on stelae dedicated to these gods alone, and on the other hand is frequently absent from stelae happening to invoke Tanit. The sanctuary at Carthage itself, according to indisputable epigraphic evidence, was originally dedicated to Baal Hammon. At the top of one of the earliest examples of the famous sign<sup>17</sup> the written word “Baal” is actually engraved on the stone instead of the astral disc. It was not until the fifth century that Tanit, who appears to be the result of an ill-defined Punic syncretism, infiltrated (timidly at first) into the sanctuary, and succeeded in a remarkably short time in asserting her own undisputed supremacy there — a development which was not apparent anywhere else. In defense of those who are responsible for naming this diagram the “sign of Tanit”, it must be admitted that this intrusion occurred at a time when a parallel syncretism was clearly taking place in the realm of symbolic imagery.” — Pierre Cintas*

### **Gordian Knot (according to Wikipedia):**

*“At one time the Phrygians were without a king. An oracle at Telmissus (the ancient capital of Phrygia) decreed that the next man to enter the city driving an ox-cart should become their king. A peasant farmer named Gordias drove into town on an ox-cart. His position had also been predicted earlier by an eagle landing on his cart, a sign to him from the gods, and on entering the city Gordias was declared king by the priests. Out of gratitude, his son Midas dedicated the ox-cart[1] to the Phrygian god Sabazios (whom the Greeks identified with Zeus) and either tied it to a post or tied its shaft with an intricate knot of cornel (Cornus mas) bark. “*

According to the Penn Museum in [The Gordian knot](#), “For the site of ancient Gordion, however, this account owes its interest not only to the connection with Alexander, but also to the explanatory legend attached to it, one that describes the reason for the existence of the knot and the wagon, and its dedication in the Temple of Zeus.”

The ritual context and great ancient origins of the Gordian knot (known from Hittite texts) out of Anatolia is explained in B.W. Burke, “[Anatolian Origins of the Gordian Knot Legend](#),” 2002 Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies 42, 255-261. ‘Mitti’ or ‘mita’ means red twisted cords or threads and Gordios was a Phrygian king according to the book. Loops of red, black and white wool are mentioned and the rituals are tied to the Zeus Temple and Indo-European or Aryan storm god. The Phrygian dynasts had a ritual based on Hittite predecessors’. The ultimate origin of the story is from the period of the Hittite kings of central Turkey.

### **Italy:**

The witches garland is a rope tied into a garland that is used for casting curses. With every knot that is tied, a curse is repeated and a black feather stuck into the garland. For best effect, the garland was to be put beneath the victim’s mattress.

### **Greece:**

*The Greek goddess Circe was also associated with knot magick. She is more commonly known as the goddess of agriculture, which is why she adorns the dome of the Vermont State Capitol building. Circe controlled the forces of creation and destruction by placing knots and braids in her hair in a similar fashion to the priestesses of the Egyptian goddess Isis.—[The Knotted Cord](#)*

Knot weather gods were believed to tie or bind the winds.

*“In ancient Greek times, sorcerers used knotted cords to bind the winds to provide fair weather ... One, two or three knots are tied in the cord to mark the first, second, and third...”* . [New Encyclopedia of the Occult](#)

*...the Triple Goddesses of Fate are constantly weaving the Destinies of Humans and others! The art of weaving can be seen as the symbolic action of dealing with the endless possibilities giving a certain form to what was previously just a cord, thus deciding which will be the fate who mates with each one of us. By practicing Knot-Magic we try to add or maybe alter what the Fates have already decided for us. ...Moirae (and Norns) while also the Goddess Athena (Minerva in Latin – the greatest Weaver of all) are Patrons of Knot Magic. The Totem Archetype animals which can be invoked to guide us through knot magic is the Owl and the Spider.–[Knot Magic](#)*

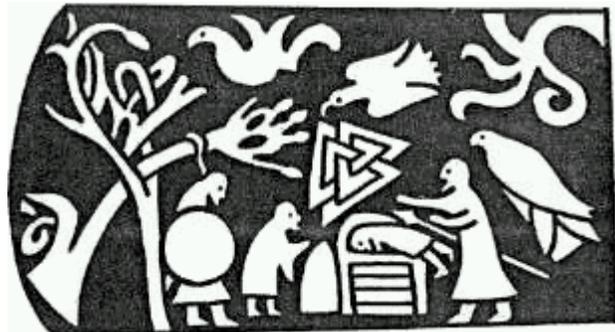
### **Scandinavian:**

*Scandinavian sorcerers used knotted cords to control the weather at sea – the cords contained three knots. To gain good weather with a breeze – they would untie one knot, two knots to procure a violent wind and three, a tempest. Source: [Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy](#) Fate Goddesses who were associated with the magickal tying and loosening of knots. The Triple Fate Goddesses of the Norse and the Norns are fate goddesses as well. These goddesses were able to use knots to tie up or release energy.*

*Special cords are sometimes presented to initiates for use in ceremonies and magick. These cords are worn around the waist until needed during a ritual. Some groups weave these cords temporarily together during a ritual for spell work. However, most cord and knot magick is done with smaller, more flexible cords or thread.*

*Knot magick is also used to store magickal power to use at a later time. For example, full moon magick is knotted into a cord and released during a spell during new moon days and vice versa. Source: [The Knotted Cord](#)*

A well known funerary knot was the Walknot and its variants — the [trefoil knot](#) and [Boromean triangles](#) and [Boromean links](#). Also known as Odin’s triangle’, ‘Walknot’ held the meaning of the knot of the slain.



*LEFT: CA 9TH C. STONE STELE FROM GOTLAND ISLAND, SWEDEN, NOW IN THE COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NATIONAL ANTIQUITIES (HISTORISKA MUSEET) IN STOCKHOLM. RIGHT: MAGNIFIED SEGMENT OF THE STONE INCLUDING THE WALKNOT NEAR THE TOP. PHOTOS: [UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH](#)*

For more on the significance and meaning of the Walknot, see [Blood & Honour – the Death Knot](#).

All around the border, of the above depicted Gotland stone stele, is a different kind of elaborate knotwork. It is called the “glain” and a part of the World Cosmic Serpent and Egg myth:

*“Mother Night, the Great Goddess of darkness, first birthed the World Egg which was identified with the moon. The ‘Druid’s egg’ or ‘serpent’s egg’ or ‘snake stone’, was an object which had powerful mystical properties. On St. John’s Eve, it was said that the snakes twisted and writhed in a tangled knot, creating the “glain”. The egg emerging from the ball of vipers, floated mysteriously upward into the air, to be caught by the priests while in the act of falling. It was said that the Druid who found himself the fortunate possessor of this invaluable treasure would quickly make his escape by leaping upon a horse, not stopping until he had got to the other side of the first running water. His pursuers were stopped by the stream; they could follow him no farther. Immense magical power and wisdom were believed to be gained by the possessor of the Druid’s egg, although few have ever seen one. The Serpent’s egg is the Philosopher’s Stone sought by the alchemists, and the Grail quested for by the Chivalric knights. — Jen Delyth*  
[A Gaelic Dictionary](#) explains that the serpent’s egg is not really an egg, but...

**“A vast number of serpents are twisted together in summer, and coiled up in an artificial knot by their slime and saliva. And this is called the serpent’s egg”**

The border knotwork conjures up the [elaborate spiral motifs of Cucuteni-Trypillian culture of Romania! Moldova and the Ukraine](#) where the [whorls and spirals that swirl and criss-cross over elliptical “eggs”](#) which have been interpreted by [Marijas Gimbutas](#) and others to be cosmic serpents around eggs and representative of their *“primordial deity was female, and their culture developed rich and complex artistic symbols rooted in their religious beliefs based on the Great Goddess and her various aspects as Giver-of-Life, Wielder of Death, and Regeneratrix”*... *“In the fourth millenium B.C., the conjunction of the egg, double-egg, lens, crescent, snake and spiral motifs on vases of the Cucuteni civilization reached a rare level of exquisite design. In the abstract and composite desingns, dictated by mythical thinking, a harmonious combination of germ cell, cosmic snakes and and fawns is apparent. The sign of a sectioned “double-egg” as an ideogram of the Great Goddess persisted into Mycaenaen-Minoan times...”*



POTTERY MOTIFS SEEN ON CUCUTENI-TRYPILLIAN VASES AND FUNERARY URNS. PHOTO: [GOV. OF UKRAINE](#) FAR RIGHT PHOTO: [LIBRARY THINKQUEST](#)

These motifs are common in Japan on tumuli wall murals and on funerary earthen stands called haniwa of the Kofun burial mound period, and as well as etched carvings on large sacred rock.

### **On the origin of expression “to tie the knot”**

In Pagan Roman times:

Couples would tie a knot while make solemn vows to each other and their gods during their wedding ceremony, which is where we get the phrase 'tying the knot'. Source: [Knots and Cord Magick](#)

Anglo-saxon and germanic traditions of the British Isles:

*"... the Winding Path, a specific length of rope, tied with three knots in specific places, is used when marking a specific space for magickal works. It's a rather practical aspect of knots in magickal work, but it's one of the ways we've incorporated them into our way of doing things. We also use Wet Knots, which as you might guess from the name, are used to store some of the power of rain storms in case of a particularly dry period. ...*

Source: [Knots and Cord Magick](#)

*To Bind the Wind: The old witches would tie the winds up with a length of rope, pulling the knots tight to tie up the wind, and releasing them when the wind is required. Undoing the first knot would give a light breeze, the second a strong wind, and the third a gale" Source: [Air Faeries](#)*

In Russia, knot magick was once very common. There are written accounts of the many types of knot spells including an 8 double-knot curse to use against an enemy in which wool yarn was used. Source: [Knot Magick A Brief history](#)

[Traditional weather witching](#) speaks of the quaint practice of selling wind and wind cord or knot charms:

*"Regardless of the method you choose to call the wind, make sure your hair is unbound and loose; binding and knotting are ways to capture the wind, not call it.*

*In a woodcut (right) housed in the collections of the Museum of Witchcraft in Boscastle, Cornwall, you can see a male witch selling a wind charm to sailors. This was a common and well-known practice in West Country Craft (pre-gardnerian witchcraft found in west England, Wales, and Cornwall). According to Cecil Williamson "There were well known sea witches selling the wind in each of the following places: Sennen, St.Ives, Appledore, Lee, Lynton and Porlock, where one found Mother Leaky still trying to flog her wind strings with their knots, right up to the mid 1939's." {3}*

*These charms are made by going to a high-windswept place, and tying a certain sailor's knot into a stout piece of rope to capture the wind. Winds from different directions or of varying forces may be captured using this method. Three such knots are tied in the charm, often with each containing a wind of varying strength. Traditionally this charm is then sold to sailors, but good luck getting a sailor, fisherman, or navy man to buy it nowadays."*

From [the Phrase Dictionary](#):

*There is a suggestion that this expression derives from the nets of knotted string which supported beds prior to the introduction of metal-sprung bedframes. The theory goes that, in order to make a marriage bed, you needed to 'tie the knot'. Like many such folk-etymological explanations, there's not a shred of evidence to support this idea.*

*It isn't clear whether this expression derives from an actual knot used in marriage ceremonies or whether the knot is merely symbolic of a lasting unity. Knots have a place in the folklore of many cultures and usually symbolize unbreakable pledges. Actual knots have certainly been used in*

*marriage ceremonies for some time and the tradition of trying the wrists of the bride and groom with twine continues today in marriages in the use of sashes which are placed over the principal's wrists. The word 'knot', although not in the phrase 'tie the knot', has been associated with marriage since at least the 13th century. The Legend of St. Katherine, circa 1225 used the Middle English 'cnotte', i.e. 'knot', to mean 'the tie or bond of wedlock; the marriage or wedding knot':*

*"Swa ye cnotte is icnut bituhhen unc tweien."*

E. and M. A. Radford's *The Encyclopedia of Superstitions* has it that:

*"In the seventeenth century, one or two of the bride-favours were always blue. These were knots of coloured ribbons loosely stitched on to the wedding gown, which were plucked off by the guests at the wedding feast, and worn as luck-bringers in the young men's hats."*

*The expression was recorded in 1717 by the English poet and diplomat, Matthew Prior. In his humorous poem, Alma; or, The Progress of the Mind he includes:*

*"So to the priest their case they tell: He ties the knot."*

*Francis Grose, in his 1811 edition of The Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue listed the 'knot tied with the tongue' with specific reference to marriage.*

*"He has tied a knot with his tongue, that he cannot untie with his teeth: i.e. he is married."*

### **To knot or not to knot ... that is the question**

Undoing knots was especially important in Childbirth and protecting children.

*"During a woman's labor it was custom in many cultures worldwide to undo all knots within the house. In black magic, knots can be used to hinder or stop the birth of a child, killing both the mother and infant. It was also believed that a knot can cause a painful and difficult delivery.*

*Red wool thread with nine knots was sometimes worn by children to protect them from fever.*

*A cord with 40 knots might be kept as an amulet for protection against thieves.*

*Knots were also believed to be a repository of magical power or power of the gods.*

*The Celtic Trinity Knot, or the Triquetra, is one of the most common of the knot ilk. The term Triquetra comes from Latin, and it means "three-cornered." ... The Celtic knot symbol, is also referred to as the mystic knot, or the endless knot. The more esoteric or spiritual meaning of this symbol eludes to beginnings and endings....Celtic knot can represent an uninterrupted life cycle. Some may use this symbol as a charm of sorts – warding against sickness or setbacks that might interfere with an otherwise calm and stable life ... In today's world, knot magic continues to have its place. Examples of this would be in the dream catchers made by the Lakota's, the "Eye of God", and shell decorated nets that are hung in homes and businesses. In ancient times, gifts adorned with mystic knots would be given with best wishes of longevity, or luck with new endeavors." Source: [the Celtic Knot](#)*

Further reading:

Roller, L. E. 1984. "Midas and the Gordian Knot," *Classical Antiquity* 3, 258-271.

[The Knotted Cord](#)

[The Golden Bough "The Magical Control of the Weather"](#) by James Frazer (at pp. 62a,b)

[The Knot of Isis – Tiet](#)

[The Celtic Knot](#)

[Ishtar](#)

Gimbutas, Marijas "[The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe: 7000 to 3500 BC Myths, Legends](#)

and Cult Images”  
7000 year old origins of the Supreme Ultimate

## 2 THOUGHTS ON “THE SYMBOLISM OF KNOTS: TO KNOT OR NOT TO KNOT ... THAT IS THE QUESTION”



1. **Dana** says:

January 8, 2014 at 3:36 am

The Cucuteni culture is not of Ukraine but of Romania. The name of this civilization was conventionally established by archaeologists, according to the villages of Cucuteni (in Romania, near Iași) and Trypillia (in Ukraine, near Kiev), where, by the end of the 19th century, where there were for the first time discovered painted ceramics and fired clay statuettes – categories of items which became symbols of this ancient civilization. The Trypillia culture is from Ukraine. Romania and Ukraine are two different countries.



heritageofjapan says: January 8, 2014 at 7:46 am

While I can understand modern-day countries wanting to “own” the associated artifacts and finds, hence the need for more precise terms, I mean, however, to apply them to the traits, symbols and iconography common to the broad cultural swathe that has been identified as the Cucuteni-Trypillian culture encompassing all three countries, Romania, Moldova and the Ukraine, and which has offered up as such by anthropologists and scholars as such... [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cucuteni-Trypillian\\_culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cucuteni-Trypillian_culture). Also the photos are attributed to the gov. Of Ukraine. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine in depth distinctions between the different countries, but suffice to note a possible early and ancient connection and movement or diffusion of these traits and influences from the Ukraine (nearest point) via the steppe lands eastwards towards East Asia. We have also noted elsewhere other similarities such as the use of cross-finials in roof architecture of shrines in common between Japan and C-T culture, as suggested by the ceramic shrine models (also relic styles in Lithuanian roofing-architecture).

SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 2010 Posted by Joseph Panek at [6:00 AM](#)

## The Knot – As A Symbol

The Knot is a very ancient Symbol which appears in the writings, legends, mythology and lore of nearly all cultures. As a Symbol, the Knot signifies complexity, confusion, completion, bindings, vows, and hidden secrets. And although the Knot is an ancient Symbol, we acknowledge it often through a number of our cultural Metaphors.

We use the term "*a knotty problem*" when referring to a complex, baffling, or intricate, obstacle or dilemma. "*Tying the knot*" refers to the marriage of a man and woman who bind themselves to each other in the Hope of achieving Oneness with each other through their voluntary Union. To "*tie up loose ends*" infers the completion of a project or agreement in which we finalize the small details of a task, solution or alliance.

In addition to the Knot being a Symbol and a Metaphor of myth and legend, it is also very evident in our everyday language, behavior, and customs.

As a Symbol for binding, the Knot represents the Promises and vows we make. It is also an allusion to the Honorable Person whose "word is as good as their bond". the Knot also "ties" us to the Karma we create for ourselves, both good and ill, based upon the Threads we use to Weave the tapestry of our lives.

We tie the umbilical cord of a newborn infant into a Knot to celebrate, and Symbolize, the successful completion of birth. Islamic men tie Knots in their beards in order to baffle evil demons (perhaps a Symbol similar to that of the Labyrinth). And legend provides us with the Gordian Knot: a Turkish Knot with both ends of the rope concealed within the Knot itself; Symbolizing not only a difficult problem but also the fact that the solution is hidden within, and is thereby part of, the problem.

As a Symbol of binding and complexity the Knot has both a positive and negative aspect:

On the negative side it represents the complications, Compromises, dilemmas, and problems we Weave into our personal Incarnation which tie us to the fruitless commitments, misguided ways of thinking, and structured behaviors that ultimately stagnate us and imperil our Spiritual Growth.

On the positive side, however, the Knot represents the threads of good habits, noble aspirations, and Esoteric pursuits which, over time, Weave strong spiritual bonds within us that repel and baffle the mundane Demons which are forever attacking the Thoughts, Beliefs, and Decision processes of our Divine Nature.

On a much deeper level, the level of hidden secrets, the Symbolism contained within the Knot is just as complex and intricate as the Knot itself.

On the one hand, by way of its tightly wrapped cords of mystery, fable, Riddle, and legend, the Knot protects the Truth and Wisdom which lie at its center from both prying eyes and the mindless curiosity of the common horde.

On the other hand, what better way to hide, protect, and pass down to future generations, sacred Truth and secret Wisdom than to conceal these priceless gems within those same tightly wrapped cords of mystery, fable, Riddle, and legend until some future Time when an enlightened mind can unravel the cords of the Knot and discover the Infinite Mystery that lies within.

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**1 comment:**

[Melinda said... \(April 20, 2015 at 4:24 AM\)](#)

For me, the knot has another symbolism. Yes, it represents problems, but it is also a reminder. When I was a child, I had little necklaces. I'd take them off at night and put them in a little jewelry box. In the morning, somehow, they would be full of knots. My fingers were too clumsy to undo them, but my mom had patience and could gently undo each one until the necklace had been restored. So, when I have a "knotty" problem, I am reminded to be patient, take it one thing at a time, and things will work themselves out. The key is patience.

Can knots be a form of art? It is in China. There is a long history of using knots for decoration on clothing or to hang from the ceiling or on a wall. Skilled knot artists weave complex knots that you might see sold as souvenirs that you can take back with you. They have a long history and a symbolic meaning even today.

## What Is a Chinese Knot?

A Chinese knot is a knot that is tied and woven from **a single length** of cord or rope to be a **variety of shapes** and of varying complexity. Each shape has its own symbolic meaning, and nowadays you can find them as decoration, gifts for special occasions, and adornments on clothes.

Most knots are double layered and symmetrical and have two cords entering the knot from the top and two leaving from the bottom. Each kind of knot is named after its shape or the symbolic meaning that it carries.

Knot weavers can use a variety of colors, but they usually weave deep red ones as in the picture above. The color red signifies good fortune.

## History of Chinese Knots

People may have originally made them to record information and convey messages before people started to write. One hundred thousand year old tools have been discovered that were probably used to tie and untie knots, and there is a reference to knots in ancient literature. But it isn't known when they first started to be used symbolically or woven for art.

It is known that there were used for artistic decoration and to symbolize and express thoughts and feelings in the Tang Dynasty era (618-907). The Tang Empire was a large one that covered most of regions of modern China, and the traditional art form was carried on by succeeding generations as part of their culture.

## Ancient and Modern Use of Artistic Knots



*Several styles and colors of Chinese knots*

Even today, Chinese knots are rich in symbolic meaning, and they therefore **hold sentimental value** when given as gifts or passed down through families.

For example, in ancient times and even now, lovers may give a knot as a token of their love. The 'true love knot' and the 'double happiness knot' are given or used at weddings to express mutual love and growing old together in fidelity. Knots connoted love and marriage in Chinese culture.

### Knot Etymology

This connotation can even be seen in Chinese words. The Chinese word for 'rope' is 'shèng' that sounds similar to the words for 'spirit,' 'divine,' and 'life.' Knots had a spiritual meaning and were used for worship.

The word for 'knot' itself is 'jié' and is related to many other terms that reinforce the symbolic meaning of the knots. For example, 'tuán jié' which means 'to unite,' 'jié hūn' means 'to marry,' and 'jié guǒ' means 'bear fruit,' 'result,' or 'outcome.' So a knot given to a marriage partner or a couple means all these things and **having children** as well.

### Modern Usage of Artistic Knots

Along with being symbolic gifts or messages, knots are still used if they wear traditional Chinese clothing or as good luck charms. They are a means of fastening traditional garments instead of buttons or wooden pegs. Now, silk is most widely used to make these clothing knots.

They are used as jewelry such as even rings, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. They are sold as handcraft novelty items too.

## Handicraft Shopping on China Tours



*Take a Chinese knot home with you.*

There are tourist shopping streets and retail markets where you can find artistic knots in various cities. Let us help you go to them.

We also offer a Traditional Chinese Handicraft Tour in Beijing where you may enjoy making the artwork and handicrafts you enjoy. Tell us you want to concentrate on knot making, and we'll try to arrange that.

Yiwu Commodities Trade Market (.....) is at Chengbei Rd, Yiwu, Jinhua, Zhejiang. The Chinese Knot area on the second floor of District 5 has an outstanding range of types of knots in the various shops.

Let us help you. Tell us your interests, and we'll try to arrange a tour for you for learning about or buying Chinese knots.

## Mystic Knot Symbol

Mystic knot, one of the most often used symbols in feng shui. This knot symbolizes a happy and long life full of good fortune. Being a combination of 6 times the infinity symbol, mystic knot is also referred to as the endless knot or eternal knot (in Chinese it is also called "Pan Chang" knot). This mystic knot is one of the 8 magical auspicious objects in Buddhism. It indicates no beginning and no ending, reflecting the philosophy of Buddhism of endless rounds of birth and rebirth.

It is conjectured that this popular symbol may have evolved from the Naga, which is an ancient symbol of two intertwined snakes. This dueling snake image signifies the dramatic interaction and interplay of two different opposing forces in life; good and evil. These two are united as one eventually and create harmony in the universe (just like [Yin and Yang](#)). The intertwining of these lines also represents past, present and future that are bound by a never-ending cycle of cause and effect. Thus this symbol is also used to remind people that future positive effects have their roots in the actions of the present.

## Mystic Knot in Feng Shui

In feng shui, mystic knot is used to represent a harmonious flow of auspicious energy uninterrupted by any setbacks, misfortunes or accidents. Because of this, the symbol is often used in feng shui amulets for abundance, love and protection. This interesting design can be used to decorate wind chimes, make a clasp for a purse or to make a pendant for a necklace.

The mystic knot is also used as a symbol to protect against heart break, illness, suffering, accidents, misfortunes, danger etc. Rubbing the knot is also believed to help anger or fear to subside and allow for mental clarity. It is also recommended for people who are making their long journeys abroad as it will protect them from accidents, thefts and kidnaps. The mystic knot carved out gems like agate, jade and rose quartz crystal considered most auspicious.

Apart from being used to encourage longevity and prosperity, it is also commonly used as a symbol of everlasting love. Mystic knot that is hung in the Southwest of your living room brings harmony and unity among family members. Displaying this symbol in the Southwest corner of your bedroom will enhance the relationship of the couple. Using this symbol in the Southwest of the office brings loyalty and harmony among the employer and employees.

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# The Legend Of The Celtic Knot



Celtic knots are perhaps the most notorious and recognizable artwork in Celtic history. Celtic knots started appearing in history after about 450 AD; the Celtic knots meaning is sketchy at best, because there is little written history documenting their purpose. However, repetition of their appearance through history in conjunction with other various human interpretations give us insight, and allow us to infer some basic information relating to the Celtic knots meaning.

The Celtic knot symbol is also referred to as the mystic knot, or the endless knot. The more esoteric or spiritual meaning of this symbol eludes to beginnings and endings. Celtic knots have no beginning or end, reminding of the timeless nature of our spirit. This translation hearkens to our most primal selves as we contemplate the infinite cycles of birth and rebirth in both physical and ethereal realms.

A less spiritual representation is also related to the knots endless nature. Due to it's infinite path, the Celtic knot can represent an uninterrupted life cycle. Some may use this symbol as a charm of sorts – warding against sickness or setbacks that might interfere with an otherwise calm and stable life. In this vein, these knots are used as emblems, which can be found in jewelry, clothing, or home décor. In ancient times, gifts adorned with mystic knots would be given with best wishes of longevity, or luck with new endeavors.

## The Trinity Knot

The Celtic Trinity Knot, or the Triquetra, is one of the most common of the knot ilk. The term Triquetra comes from Latin, and it means "three-cornered." There are many schools of thought when discussing the Celtic trinity knot meaning. All of the various interpretations agree on a culmination of three parts. For example, early Christian understanding views the symbols as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Whereas, a more pagan school of thought sees the trinity knot as the drawing of the three inherent feminine powers: Mother, Crone, and Maiden. Still another understanding can be found in a more metaphysical arena where the three corners represent mind, body and spirit.

This wide array of interpretations reminds us that the meanings of these engaging knots are not set in stone. As mentioned, sketchy remnants of historical records on the subject causes us to use our own powers of deduction.

This isn't a bad thing. The very fact that the Celtic knot meaning is so elusive makes more room for magic and allows for personal expansion. In short, let your imagination soar when contemplating Celtic art, knotwork or symbolism. Your personal interpretation will ultimately be your best guide, and the only answer you need.

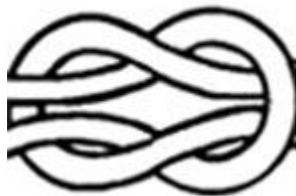
# Symbolism Behind the Phrase "To Tie the Knot"

June 9th, 2014

The expression "to tie the knot" means "to get married". There are several places where tied knots have been connected to marriage and love.

During Roman times, brides wore a belt or girdle at their wedding tied in a Hercules Knot. Only the groom was allowed to untie it (the unloosening was supposed to be a further symbol of childbearing). The knot was supposed to represent the binding character of the marriage oath.

A Hercules Knot:



Then there's the True-Love's Knot from Scotland, England and Denmark which were given as a symbol of love and fidelity to one's beloved.

Ribbons with true-love knots were also given out as bridal favors at weddings. In Great Britain, they put these ribbons in their hats. In France, they were worn around the arm. At first the ribbons came in different colors, but eventually just white ones were used.

One example of a True-love's Knot used at weddings:



In Hindi wedding ceremonies, they tie together the bride's garment to the groom's scarf (as you can see in the video below). This symbolizes a life-long bond. The knot should not be untied until the ceremony has been completed.

Hindi brides are also given a yellow or gold necklace called the mangalsutra during the wedding ceremony. The groom ties it unto his bride. (See video below.) Three knots may be tied into the necklace too.

Sometimes the bride and groom's hands are tied together during wedding ceremonies.

In the Philippines, they put a cord over the bride and groom's shoulders to signify everlasting fidelity.



In France, there's a different shade of tying a rope. They have the phrase "passer la corde au cou de quelqu'un" which means "to get married". But it has slightly darker undertones since it literally means, "to pass the rope around someone's neck." I suppose there's some humor in that phrase.

Please feel free to share other traditions and expressions that involve tying the knot in the comments below.

-Mama Lisa

Image of Mangala sutra: [Wikipedia](#)

NOTE: I just learned about an [Iranian New Year's Tradition of tying a knot in grass in hope of getting married](#) the following year.

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