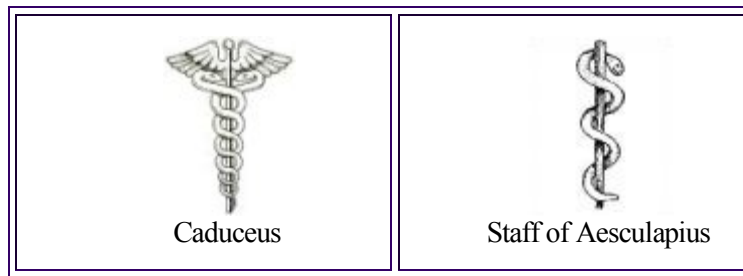


## One snake or two?



I have long intended to address another misconception about medicine — the idea that the caduceus (with two snakes) is the symbol of medicine. It is not. The true, original symbol of medicine is the staff of Aesculapius (one snake). This topic has been discussed elsewhere in great depth and I encourage you to read further if I have piqued your interest. One suggestion:  
<http://drblayney.com/Asclepius.html>

### **Caduceus (heralds staff)**

**Caduceus** (kā-dû'sî-ûs) (Kah-du'seus) [L., a herald's wand].



In Mythology, the wand or staff carried by Hermes or Mercury having two serpents entwined around it and surmounted by two wings. Used as the medical insignia of certain medical groups such as the U.S. Army Medical Corps. Even though it is sometimes used to symbol the medical profession, the staff of Aesculapius, q.v., Roman god of medicine, is usually considered to be the more appropriate symbol.

*Tabers Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary; F.A. Davis*

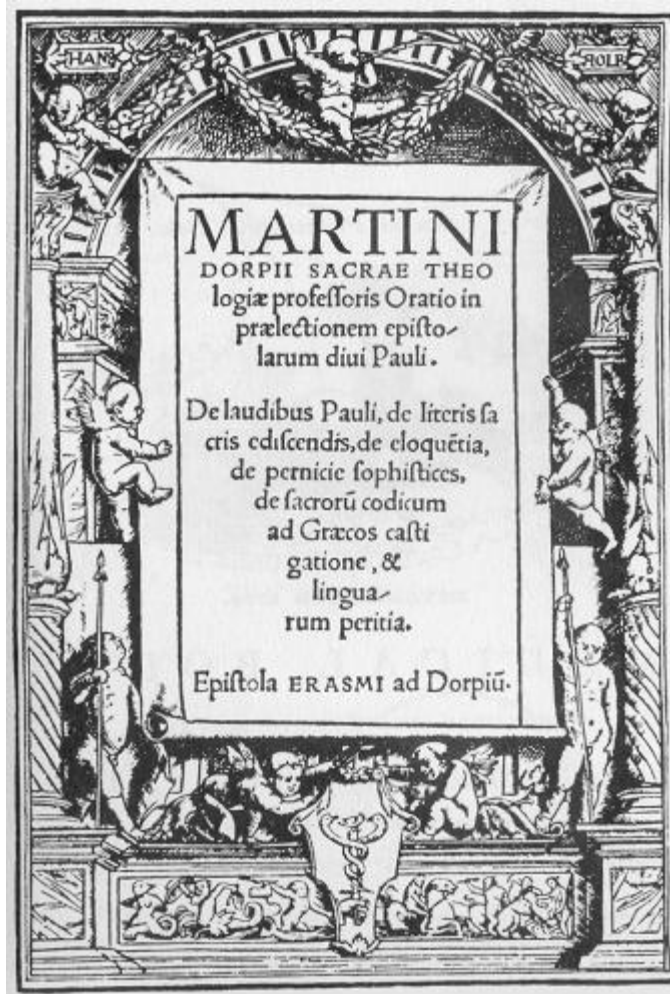
**In The United States** the caduceus is the more popular of the two commonly used symbols of medicine. The other symbol is the staff of the Greek and Roman demigod of medicine, Aesculapius. The Caduceus was the magic rod of Hermes, the messenger of the gods, "deity of wealth, god of trade and travelers, of commerce, manual skill, oratory and eloquence, of thieves, and of the wind and patron of the athletes. The Caduceus was adopted as the U.S. Army's Medical Departments official insignia in 1902.



In Greek and Roman mythology, a magic wand consisting of a rod topped by wings and intertwined by two snakes (kerykeion, caduceus in Greek; kerykeion skeptron meaning "a heralds wand"; keryx meaning announce or herald) was depicted as a medicinal or magical tool symbolized to indicate healing and immortality in literature and drawings from the era before Christ. The fabled wand or rod, the caduceus, was carried by Hermes in Greek myths and Mercury in Roman mythology as the messenger of the gods. Originally, the caduceus was represented as a simple staff wound about with two white ribbons. It is a figure that consists of two entwined serpents encircling a wand or rod. It was a symbol of authority and inviolability and protected the herald who carried it. In Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the caduceus is often mentioned as a type of magic wand by which Hermes opened and closed the eyes of mortals. It was therefore connected with death and the journey through the underworld. Later myth says Hermes once threw his magic wand at two snakes fighting on the ground. The snakes became entangled in the the magic wand and have been attached to it ever since. The wings at the top were added in later Greek and Roman art. In Virgil's *Aeneid* (book 4) the caduceus is said to have been given to Mercury by Apollo in exchange for Lyre. Milton, calling it Hermes' "opiate rod" in *Paradise Lost* (book 11.133), refers to the belief that the caduceus is associated with medicine because it was one of the symbols of Aesculapius, the god of medicine for the ancients. Le Sage, in *Gil Blas* (1715) writes; "I did not think the post Mercury-in-chief quite so honorable as it was called... and resolved to abandon the Caduceus [give up the medical profession] for ever."

**Some confusion** exists between the wand carried by Hermes and the Staff of the demigod Aesculapius which is classically characterized as a single serpent encircling a rough hewn tree branch. The Staff of Aesculapius is truly the more legitimate symbol of medicine, however the Caduceus has been adopted as the more commonly used symbol in medicine.

**According to mythology**, Hermes threw his magic wand at two fighting snakes. The snakes became entwined as they stopped fighting. The actual origin of the Caduceus is from two sources. The first was from the Babylonian god Ningizzida and the second was from a shepherd's crook that was forked on top.



*It* actually goes all the way back to the book of Genesis. Moses had to make a copper serpent for the Israelites to look at when bitten by poisonous snakes (during a plague that God had sent) in order to be cured.

*In* the early twentieth century A. J. Frothingham had presented to the Philological Association and the Archaeological Institute that the real character of Hermes and his *kerykeion* could be traced back to early Mesopotamia. He believed that the Babylonian Caduceus evolved to the Greek Caduceus. A libation vase which is stored on exhibit in the Louvre was excavated from the ancient Mesopotamian city of Lagash. The inscription on the vase reads: "To the god Ningizzida, his god Guidea, patesi of Lagash, for the prolongation of his life, has dedicated this." Also on the vase is a figure of two entwined snakes on a rod. The vase has been dated as early as 4000 to 3000 B.C. There are other images cast into the vase that can correlate an association with the caduceus. Ningizzida was the predecessor of the Egyptian god Thor. Ninazu, who was called the "Lord of Healing" was the father of Ningizzida. It was also represented in other examples of artifacts and emblems from that era. Among the Hittites, a third century Roman coin, a caduceus-god like mysterious symbol is shown between two seated gods. These were possibly the gods of Hierapolis of Syria. It was also stated by Professor Frothingham that the caduceus of the Hittites and the Babylonians was brought to the Etruscans of primitive Rome. Aesculpius' daughter or wife Hygia, the Greek demigoddess of health, is usually depicted with a serpent entwined and sometimes with an Aesculpius Staff.



Even though Frothingham might have been studying two different symbols characterized as a rod topped by a U or V shaped end. Or whether or not it was two snakes or a two headed snake or whether or not it is a rod or a staff. They all represented the same god or gods depending on which era and which culture is being addressed. It is said that Ningizzida is the same as Babu who in turn is the Greek Hermes. Also, early illustrations of the "Babylonian Mother Goddess" who is identified as Ishtar, who in turn is associated with the Greek goddess Aphrodite had a caduceus in them. More evaluation needs to be done and it will sometimes be left to the author or the audience to decide. The earliest caduei were an 8 shaped figure with the top circle opened. Snakes were added as early as the fifth century B.C. but remained unusual until the Middle Ages or the early Renaissance period. The wings were added in the fourth century B.C.

So what is this infatuation with serpents. Snakes are referred to in many cultures, religions, and myths. Cults and ancient Indian tribal and modern African tribal rituals worship snakes. Serpent imaginary even occurred where there are no snakes like New Zealand where eels assumed this function. A temple in Travancore India was dedicated to the Snake God. Similar serpent temples were built by the Druids at Stonehenge and Arbury. The Persians saw a celestial serpent in the rainbow. American Indians called the Milky Way the path of the serpent. American Indians gave ritual to the rattlesnake, the African tribes to the python, and the Asiatics to the cobra. This all do to the fact that the snake sheds its skin and thus renews its strength and youth and lives forever as believed by the tribes. The Serpent was and is associated as the regular symbol attributed to the worshipful dead. This demonstrated not only by the Greeks, but by present Zulu and other tribes in Africa. They believe that the souls of the departed are lodged in snakes.



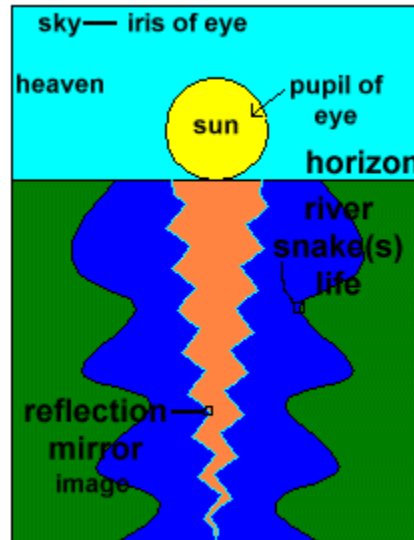
Humans alone are infected by about thirty species of worms, including pinworms and hookworms. One of the larger types causes thin, serpent-like ridges when it is present just under the skin. For thousands of years, healers have removed the "serpents" by winding them out very slowly, around a stick. The symbol of the medical profession continues to be a single serpent wound around a staff. This would seem to refer to The Staff of Aesculapius which is PART of the star of life.

*Another theory explaining why the star of life has only one snake and the Staff of Aesculapius is used is that: physicians hold the power over life and death, and E.M.S. personnel only have the power over life...?*

**And: Another theory from John Wallour:**

**The caduceus** (2 serpents on a eagle winged stick) is one of the most ancient of symbols. This was originally the symbol for the Sirian-Anunnaki Creator God, Enki. The Savior God of Noah (Utnapishtim). The symbolism in the caduceus reflects the Kabbalah Tree of Life.

It has been theorized, this symbol was derived from sightings of eagles carrying away poisonous snakes in its beak. Thus the caduceus, a symbol for healing, represents God (in the form of an eagle) carrying away and disposing of the poison of disease (in the form of a snake).

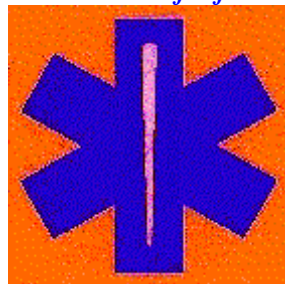


This is what John Wallour sees in the caduceus, ankh, and cross:  
The sun rising over a river. The banks meander,  
snake like. Perhaps it is from this very natural  
inspiration we get the caduceus/ankh/cross as the universal  
symbol of God, the river of LIFE.

### *The Star of Life*

*Aesculapius' staff apparently had only one snake wrapped around it:*

*"The Star of Life"*



*If you stay here long enough, the snake might come out and become entangled and climb the staff as it did for Hermes.  
Once it climbs up, it will continue forever at a faster rate...*

### *How the Star of Life became our symbol and trademark:*

*It started with the red cross, which is a ® trade mark of the American Red Cross (ARC) and the International Red Cross (ICRC). EMS organizations in the late '60s and early '70s used it or an orange variation. The ARC didn't approve of this and it is a violation of an international treaty, backed up by federal law. The treaty and law states that the red cross in any form cannot be use by anyone not connected with the ICRC. The only corporation that does so is Johnson & Johnson®, because they were grandfathered under the federal law. The first aid groups under the Society for Creative Anachronism had to change their badge two years ago when this was not-so-gently pointed out to them by people who wanted to make a political name for themselves.*

*The ARC has gone to a number of legal lengths in the past with people who have used the Red Cross ensign. The ICRC has made great effort to protect the indiscriminate use of the Red Cross symbol which... as an important part of the Geneva Conventions, should be used in vehicles and buildings to protect wounded combatants and hospitals. The "red cross" symbol's supposed primary use is to protect against violence (by agreement) during conditions of war for humanitarian purposes*

(Convention of 1864). Its use on civilian "peacetime" equipment probably concerned some. Modern military ambulances in the U.S. continue to post both emblems.

**The Department of Transportation (DOT)** took the Medic Alert symbol (red) and changed it to blue, with flat (not convex) ends in the early '70s. Note that the Star Of Life used by the National Registry of EMTs is slightly different. DOT made it their own TM on a white square, and it is ONLY to be used on EMS vehicles that meet the KKK-1822-8 specs.

Designed by Leo R. Schwartz, Chief of the EMS Branch, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the "Star of Life" was created after the American National Red Cross complained in 1973 that they objected to the common use of an Omaha orange cross on a square background of reflectorized white which clearly imitated the Red Cross symbol. NHTSA investigated and felt the complaint was justified.

The newly designed, six barred cross, was adapted from the Medical Identification Symbol of the American Medical Association and was registered as a certification mark on February 1, 1977 with the Commissioner of Patents and Trade-marks in the name of the National Highway Traffic Safety and Administration. The trademark will remain in effect for twenty years from this date.

Each of the bars of the blue "Star of Life" represents the six system function of the EMS, as illustrated below: The capitol letter "R" enclosed in the circle on the right represents the fact that the symbol is a "registered" certification.

As stated above, the snake and staff in the center of the symbol portray the staff Asclepius who, according to Greek mythology, was the son of Apollo (god of light, truth and prophecy). Supposedly Asclepius learned the art of healing from the centaur Cheron; but Zeus - king of the gods, was fearful that because of the Asclepius knowledge, all men might be rendered immortal. Rather than have this occur, Zeus slew Asclepius with a thunderbolt. Later, Asclepius was worshipped as a god and people slept in his temples, as it was rumored that he effected cures of prescribed remedies to the sick during their dreams. Eventually, Zeus restored Asclepius to life, making him a god.

Asclepius was usually shown in a standing position, dressed in a long cloak, holding a staff with a serpent coiled around it. The staff has since come to represent medicine's only symbol. In the Caduceus, used by physicians and the Military Medical Corp., the staff is winged and has two serpents intertwined. Even though this does not hold any medical relevance in origin, it represents the magic wand of the Greek deity, Hermes, messenger of the gods.

The staff with the single serpent is the symbol for Medicine and Health and the winged staff is the symbol for peace. The Staff with the single serpent represents the time when Asclepius had a very difficult patient that he could not cure, so he consulted a snake for advice and the patient survived. The snake had coiled around Asclepius's staff in order to be head to head with him as an equal when talking. The Winged staff came about when Mercury saw two serpents fighting, and unable to stop them any other way placed his staff between them causing them to coil up his winged staff.

The Bible, in Numbers 21:9, makes reference to a serpent on a staff: "Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he recovered.

Who may use the "Star of Life" symbol? NHTSA has exclusive rights to monitor its use throughout the United States. Its use on emergency medical vehicles certifies that such vehicles meet the U.S. Department of Transportation standards and certify that the emergency medical care personnel who use it have been trained to meet these standards. Its use on road maps and highway signs indicates the location or access to qualified emergency care services. No other use of the symbol is allowed, except as listed below:

Originally the **SOL** was supposed to be different for the different types of EMS personnel. For administrative and dispatch personnel, the **SOL** was to have a silver colored edge and the staff of Aesculapius (here's the Greek), a silver colored serpent. For EMT's and Paramedic's patches, the edge was supposed to be gold in color with a gold serpent.

States and Federal agencies which have emergency medical services involvement are authorized to permit use of the "Star of Life" symbol summarized as follows:

1. As a means of identification for medical equipment and supplies for installation and use in the Emergency Medical Care Vehicle-Ambulance.
2. To point to the location of qualified medical care services and access to such facilities.
3. For use on shoulder patches worn only by personnel who have satisfactorily completed DOT training courses or approved equivalents, and for persons who by title and function administer, directly supervise, or participate in all or part of National, State, or community EMS programs.
4. On EMS personnel items - badges, plaques, buckles, etc.
5. Books, pamphlets, manuals, reports or other printed material having direct EMS application.
6. The "Star of Life" symbol may be worn by administrative personnel, project directors and staff, councils and advisory groups. If shoulder patches are worn, they should be plain blue "Star of Life" on a white square or round background. The function, identifying letters or words should be printed on bars and attached across the bottom separately. The edges of the basic patch and functional bars are to be embroidered.

Special function identification and physical characteristics must be adhered to when applying the "Star of Life" to personal items, as follows:

- a) Administrative and dispatcher personnel must use a silver colored edge, and the staff of Asclepius should be with a silver colored serpent. These items do not need a white background.
- b) The shoulder patches and other EMS patches may be displayed on uniform pockets and the symbol can also be placed on collars and headgear.

**The blue Star of Life symbol** was designed in its specific configuration by Leo R. Schwartz, chief of the EMS branch of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The six barred cross was adapted from the personal Medical Identification Symbol of the American Medical Association.

For EMS, the bars represent the six system functions:

1. **Detection**
2. **Reporting**
3. **Response**
4. **On Scene Care**
5. **Care in Transit**
6. **Transfer to Definitive Care**

by Mitch Mendler; E.M.T. Fire Fighter Paramedic



**References:**

*The Golden Wand of Medicine, A History of the Caduceus Symbol in Medicine.*

by, Walter J. Friedlander; Greenwood Press

*The Facts On File Encyclopedia of World Mythology and Legend,*

by, Anthony S. Mercatante

*Some of this information on the "Star of Life" was obtained from "Lytes and Sirens," an EMS newsletter published by the Illinois Department of Public Health, Division of Highway Safety.*

*The balance of info on The Star of Life was extracted from a file found on the "net:"*

*The information used from that file came from the following resources:*

- PJ Geraghty FF2 / NR / MD EMT-P
- Peter Laws NREMT-P
- Biology; The Unity and Diversity of Life by Starr and Taggart pg # 418.
  - **Caduceus Caducary Cadaver Medical Word Origin Etymology**



*Esculapius (Medicine) between Mercury (Merchants) and the Graces (Medicine, Hygiene and Panacea)  
Esculapius dealt with Patients - Merchants make deals with Clients*

~ CADAVER id+ the "FALLEN" or MORTAL  
 note ESCULAPIUS WAS KILLED FOR  
 BRINGING THE DEAD TO LIFE  
 AND HIS CADUCEUS STANDS FOR LIFE  
 ~ CADUCARY started with see> CAD~ CADAVER  
 ^u id+ CAUCARY implies TEMPORARY  
 thus MORTAL sug> CADENCE  
 PRONE TO DECAY sug> DECADENCE  
 sug> CADAVER sug> INERT  
 sug> LETHAL sug> STUPOR

sug> LETHARGY sug> STUPID  
sug> OBLIVION sug> LIMBO  
ply> | MORTALS FATE ENDS IN  
FATAL SLEEP or COMA  
lat CADUCARIUS = WITHOUT SUPPORT  
WITHOUT MASTER  
sug> PASSING  
eng CADUCARY or  
ESCHEAT meaning REVERT PROPERTY  
TO THE CROWN LORD OR STATE from  
lat EX CADERE TO FALL UPON NO HEIRS  
CADERE TO FALL sug> DECADENT  
sp CADUCO TEMPORARY  
TRANSIENT AS IF  
DATED TO EXPIRE sug> OBSOLETE  
SENILE sug> EMERITUS  
CADUCAR WORN OUT or sug> EMETIC  
or USELESS sug> FUTILE  
CAER TO FALL as in "TO FALL ASLEEP"  
ukr SPAD SLID SLIDE FALL FAILURE COLLAPSE  
SPATY SLEEP LANGUOR ENNUI DOZE  
PADATY TO FALL  
via SOMNOLENT the above links to  
~ CADUCEUS id+ | MAGIC STICK or STAFF |  
hx> A ROD ADORNED  
WITH WHITE RIBBONS implicitly  
used to HEAL most often by INDUCTION OF SLEEP  
also TO TRANSMIT GODLY COMMANDS BY DREAMS  
note SLEEPING IS CURATIVE or REST or RESTITUTION  
note "PUT TO SLEEP" now is a EUPHEMISM FOR  
EUTHANASIA implying sug> THANATOS  
MERCY KILLING BY INDUCTION OF "PERMANENT" SLEEP  
med> more under SLEEP MORPHINE sug> MORPHEUS  
in modern terms CADUCEUS relates to  
MEDICAL ARTS and ESCULAPIUS see> below  
lit+ the CADUCEUS was called by John MILTON [#]  
" THE OPIATE ROD " sug> NARCOTIC DOPE  
myth> HERMES AND ISIS USED DREAMS  
AS A VEHICLE TO DELIVER DIVINE MESSAGES  
hx> MANY RELIGIOUS LEADERS REPORTED TO HAVE DREAMT  
DIVINE COMMANDS  
sug> VISION PHANTASM FANTASY IMAGE IMAGINE  
~ CADUCIARY PERISHABLE MORTAL TEMPORARY also  
TEMPORAL POWER in contrast to  
CONGENITAL or INHERENT POWER sug> HEREDITY GENETIC  
myth> THE STAFF OF HERMES or CADUCEUS BECAME LINKED WITH  
MEDICINE and the SYMBOL OF ESCULAPIUS  
these links probably relate to TRADITIONS CONCERNING  
ORIENTAL MAGIC STICKS WHICH OFTEN WERE DECORATED WITH  
ENTWINED SNAKES as SYMBOLS OF HEALING  
also note that HEALING BECAME INTERTWINED WITH SLEEP or  
SLUMBER STUPOR LETHARGY LANGUOR REST INERTIA CALM  
LASSITUDE perhaps INDUCED BY OPIATES sug> OPIUM  
med> the above denotes broad and persisting ideas  
linking SLEEP with HEALTH and BEAUTY  
note LACK OF SLEEP can be FATAL sug> LETHAL

note the enormous number of people      sug> MASS  
     using HYPNOTICS for SLEEP INDUCTION    sug> MORPHINE  
 gr HYPNO = SLEEP                            sug> HYPNOSIS  
 note such implications in SLEEP as        sug> LASSITUDE  
 " REST THERAPY "                            sug> RELAXATION  
 " SLEEPING THERAPY "                        sug> LETHARGY  
 " BEAUTY SLEEP "    vern    sp SON~AR = DREAM  
 " SLEEP ON IT "    also note    ukr SON    DREAM  
 " TO FALL ASLEEP "                          SONABULO SOMNAMBULIST  
 sp CADUCAR = GIVE UP                      eng INSOMNIA SLEEPLESS or  
     CAER    FALL                              FITFUL  
 ukr KAT    EXECUTIONER  
     KATHORHA TORTURE  
 eng CATACOMB PLACE FOR THE FALLEN  
     CATACLYSM CALAMITY  
 ukr PAD    FALL  
     SPATY    SLEEP                            sug> SLUMBER  
     PADAI    TO FALL                            sug> SLUMP  
 sp SOPOR    SOMNOLENT                      sug> SOPORIFIC  
 ukr NARCOSA    ANESTHETIC                    sug> PAIN  
 eng NARCOTIC SLEEP INDUCER                sug> NARCOLEPSY  
 note that THE CADUCEUS implies WALKING TRAVELING  
     IT IS A WALKING STAFF or STICK        sug> STAFFING  
 THE SNAKES REPRESENT KNOWLEDGE        sug> DOUBT  
 ITS WINGS ARE SYMBOLIC FOR SPEED        sug> MERCURIAL  
 THE CUP REPRESENTS HEALING or SLEEP POTION    sug> SEDATIVE  
 THE WHITE RIBBONS SHOW RESPECT FOR        sug> REVERENCE  
 THE MESSAGES FROM GODS or ZEUS        sug> DREAM  
 as if the " WHITE FLAG " of PEACE TRUCE  
 is A " SURRENDER TO THE FATE OF SLEEP "  
 only recently " HOSPITAL STAFF " CLINICAL ROUNDS CEASED  
     probably even the "STAFF NURSE" WILL SOON DISAPPEAR  
 THE CADUCEUS IS BEING REPLACED BY FOR PROFIT    sug> UTILITY  
 HEALTH "CARE" "MANAGEMENT" CORPORATE LOGOS    sug> LOGIC  
 hx> ANCIENT HERALDS HAD A CADUCEUS or STAFF  
     WHICH WAS DECORATED BY ENTWINED WINGED SERPENTS  
 SOME BIBLICAL RELIGIONS BLAME THE SNAKE FOR  
 HAVING TEMPTED EVE TO TEMPT ADAM TO EAT  
 FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OFFERED BY SATAN  
 later THE DEVIL OFFERED KNOWLEDGE TO TEMPT    see> MIND  
     DOCTOR FAUSTUS    see> MEPHISTOPHELES  
 lit+ "THE MIND IS ITS OWN PLACE AND  
     IN ITSELF CAN MAKE A HEAVEN OF HELL  
     AND HELL OF HEAVEN" Satan speaking in  
 "Paradise Lost" by John MILTON [#]  
 often RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONSIDER THAT  
     KNOWLEDGE IS A SOURCE OF DANGER AND NOTE  
 THAT KNOWLEDGE IS NOT WISDOM AND THAT MANY TYPES OF  
 "SACRED FIRE" CAN DESTROY HUMANITY        sug> ATOM  
 myth> THE WRATH OF ZEUS AGAINST PROMETHEUS    see> CHAMPION  
     FOR HAVING STOLEN THE SACRED FIRE    sug> CHORNOBYL  
 LED TO THE DIVINE CREATION OF PANDORA    see> GIFTED  
 THE PRIMAL TEMPTING MORTAL WOMAN        sug> WOMB  
 WHO AS WIFE OF EPIMETHEUS                see> EPIDEMIC  
 DELIVERED TO HUMANITY                      sug> UTERUS  
 EVIL PESTILENCE AND ETERNAL HOPE        sug> CHILD

note SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE WERE REPRESENTED AS  
SNAKES TO DENOTE VITALITY AND REJUVENATION  
SNAKES ARE SILENT AND SILENCE IS AKIN TO WISDOM  
SNAKES SHED THEIR OLD SKIN TO GET A NEW ONE sug> EXPRESS  
AKIN TO NEW KNOWLEDGE REPLACING HELD NOTIONS sug> IDEA  
IN BIBLICAL TERMS SCIENCE IS TEMPTATION sug> EXPERIENCE  
SCIENCE AIMS TO CONTROL THE NATURE OF THINGS sug> EXPERIMENT  
WHICH IN HUMAN HANDS MAY BE EVIL sug> VICE  
AND AN EXPRESSION OF THE DEVIL or SATAN sug> FAUSTUS  
art> LATE ROMAN AND GREEK ARTISTS ADDED WINGS TO THE TIP  
OF THE CADUCEUS or STAFF TO DENOTE THAT KNOWLEDGE  
PERMEATES EVERYTHING SILENTLY AND WITH MERCURIAL SPEED  
THE PROPERTY OF THE SILENT SPEEDY MESSENGER GOD HERMES

### Serpent (symbolism)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

*For other uses, see Serpent (disambiguation)*

**Serpent** is a word of Latin origin (*serpens*, *serpentis*) that is normally substituted for "snake" in a specifically mythic or religious context, in order to distinguish such creatures from the field of biology.

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[edit] General symbolism



The Maya Vision Serpent.

The serpent is one of the oldest and most widespread mythological symbols. There is some overlap of the themes that mythological serpents represent in various cultures. The snake's venom is associated with the chemicals of plants and fungi<sup>[1][2] [3]</sup> that have the power to either heal, poison or provide expanded consciousness (and even the elixir of life and immortality) through

divine intoxication. Because of its herbal knowledge and **entheogenic** association the snake was often considered one of the wisest animals, being (close to the) divine. Its divine aspect combined with its habitat in the earth between the roots of plants made it an animal with **chthonic** properties connected to the afterlife and immortality. This is also expressed by the way a snake sheds its skin and comes forth from the lifeless husk glistening and fresh, making it a universal symbol of renewal, rebirth and the regeneration that may lead to immortality.

Sometimes serpents and dragons are used interchangeably, having similar symbolic functions. The venom of the serpent is thought to have a **fiery** quality similar to a fire spitting dragon. The Greek **Ladon** and the Norse **Níðhöggr** are sometimes described as serpents and sometimes as dragons. In **Germanic mythology**, *serpent* (OE: *wyrm*, OHG: *wurm*, ON: *ormr*) is used interchangeable with the Greek borrowing *dragon* (OE: *draca*, OHG: *trahho*, ON: *dreki*). In China, the Indian serpent **nāga** was equated with the **lóng** or Chinese dragon. The Aztec and Toltec serpent god **Quetzalcoatl** also has dragon like wings, like its equivalent in **Mayan mythology** **Gukumatz** ("feathered serpent").

Sea serpents were giant **cryptozoological** creatures once believed to live in water, whether **sea monsters** such as the **Leviathan** or lake monsters such as the **Loch Ness Monster**. If they were referred to as "sea snakes", they were understood to be the actual snakes that live in Indo-Pacific waters (Family **Hydrophiidae**).

[edit] Cosmic serpents

The serpent, when forming a ring with its tail in its mouth, is a clear and widespread symbol of the "All-in-All", the totality of existence, infinity and the cyclic nature of the cosmos. The most well known version of this is the Aegypto-Greek **Ourobouros**. It is believed to have been inspired by the **Milky Way** as some ancient texts refer to a serpent of light residing in the heavens.



Vishnu resting on Ananta-Shesha, with Lakshmi massaging his "lotus feet."

In Norse mythology the World Serpent (or Midgard serpent) known as **Jörmungandr** encircled the world in the ocean's abyss biting its own tail.

In **Hindu mythology** **Vishnu** is said to sleep while floating on the cosmic waters on the serpent **Shesha**. In the **Puranas** **Shesha** holds all the planets of the universe on his hoods and to constantly sing the glories of **Vishnu** from all his mouths. He is sometimes referred to as "Ananta-Shesha" which means "Endless Shesha." In the **Samudra manthan** chapter of the **Puranas** **Shesha** loosens **Mount Mandara** for it to be used as a churning rod by the **Asuras** and **Devas** to churn the ocean of milk in the heavens in order to make **Soma** (or **Amrita**), the divine elixir of immortality. As a churning rope another giant serpent called **Vasuki** is used.

In pre-Columbian Central America **Quetzalcoatl** was sometimes depicted as biting its own tail. The mother of **Quetzalcoatl** was the Aztec goddess **Coatlicue** ("the one with the skirt of serpents"), also known as **Cihuacoatl** ("The Lady of the serpent"). **Quetzalcoatl's** father was **Mixcoatl** ("Cloud Serpent"). He was identified with the **Milky Way**, the stars and the heavens in several Mesoamerican cultures.

The demi-god **Aidophedo** of the West African **Ashanti** is also a serpent biting its own tail. In **Dahomey** mythology of **Benin** in West Africa, the serpent that supports everything on its many coils was named **Dan**. In the **Vodun** of **Benin** and **Haiti** **Ayida-Weddo** (a.k.a. **Aida-Wedo**, **Aido Quedo**, "Rainbow-Serpent") is a spirit of fertility, rainbows and snakes, and a companion or wife to **Dan**, the father of all spirits. As **Vodun** was exported to **Haiti** through the slave trade **Dan** became **Danballah**, **Damballah** or **Damballah-Wedo**. Because of his association with snakes, he is sometimes disguised as **Moses**, who carried a snake on his staff. He is also thought by many to be the same entity of **Saint Patrick**, known as a snake banisher.

The serpent **Hydra** is a star constellation representing either the serpent thrown angrily into the sky by **Apollo** or the **Lernaean Hydra** as defeated by **Heracles** for one of his **Twelve Labours**. The constellation **Serpens** represents a snake being tamed by

**Ophiuchus** the snake-handler, another constellation. The most probable interpretation is that Ophiuchus represents the healer **Asclepius**.

[edit] Chthonic serpents and sacred trees

In many myths the **chthonic** serpent (sometimes a pair) lives in or is coiled around a **Tree of Life** situated in a divine garden. In the **Genesis** story of the **Torah** and **Biblical Old Testament** the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil** is situated in the **Garden of Eden** together with the **tree of immortality**. In **Greek mythology** **Ladon** coiled around the tree in the garden of the **Hesperides** protecting the **entheogenic** golden apples.



**Níðhöggr** gnaws the roots of **Yggdrasill** in this illustration from a 17th century Icelandic manuscript.

Similarly **Níðhöggr** the dragon of Norse mythology eats from the roots of the **Yggdrasil** the **World Tree**.

Under yet another **Tree** (the **Bodhi tree** of **Enlightenment**), the **Buddha** sat in **ecstatic meditation**. When a storm arose, the mighty serpent king **Mucalinda** rose up from his place beneath the earth and enveloped the **Buddha** in seven coils for seven days, not to break his **ecstatic state**.

The **Vision Serpent** was also a symbol of **rebirth** in **Mayan mythology**, fuelling some **cross-Atlantic** cultural contexts favored in **pseudoarchaeology**. The **Vision Serpent** goes back to earlier **Maya** conceptions, and lies at the center of the world as the **Mayans** conceived it. "It is in the center axis atop the **World Tree**. Essentially the **World Tree** and the **Vision Serpent**, representing the king, created the center axis which communicates between the **spiritual** and the **earthly** worlds or planes. It is through **ritual** that the king could bring the center axis into existence in the temples and create a doorway to the **spiritual world**, and with it power". (Schele and Friedel, 1990: 68)



The Sumerian god **Ningizzida** accompanied by two **gryphons**. It the oldest known image of snakes coiling around an axial rod, dating from before 2000 BCE.

Sometimes the **Tree of Life** is represented (in a combination with similar concepts such as the **World Tree** and **Axis mundi** or "World Axis") by a staff such as those used by **shamans**. Examples of such staffs featuring coiled snakes in mythology are the **caduceus** of **Hermes**, the **Rod of Asclepius** and the staff of **Moses**. The oldest known representation is that of the **Sumerian** fertility god **Ningizzida**. **Ningizzida** was sometimes depicted as a serpent with a human head, eventually becoming a god of healing and magic. It is the companion of **Dumuzi** (**Tammuz**) with whom it stood at the gate of heaven. In the **Louvre**, there is a famous green **steatite** vase carved for king **Gudea** of **Lagash** (dated variously 2200–2025 BCE) with an inscription dedicated to **Ningizzida**. **Ningizzida** was the ancestor of **Gilgamesh**, who according to the **epic** dived to the bottom of the waters to retrieve the plant of life. But while he rested from his labor, a serpent came and ate the plant. The snake became immortal, and **Gilgamesh** was destined to die.

**Ningizzida** has been popularised in the 20th C. by **Raku Kei Reiki** (a.k.a. "The Way of the Fire Dragon") where "Nin Giz Zida" is believed to be a fire serpent of **Tibetan** rather than **Sumerian** origin. **Nin Giz Zida** is another name for the ancient **Hindu** concept of **Kundalini**, a **Sanskrit** word meaning either "coiled up" or "coiling like a snake". **Kundalini** refers to the mothering intelligence behind **yogic** awakening and **spiritual** maturation leading to altered states of consciousness. There are a number of other translations of the term usually emphasizing a more serpentine nature to the word— e.g. 'serpent power'. It has been suggested by **Joseph Campbell** that the symbol of snakes coiled around a staff is an ancient representation of **Kundalini** physiology. The staff represents the **spinal column** with the snake(s) being energy channels. In the case of two coiled snakes they usually cross each other seven times, a possible reference to the seven energy centers called **chakras**.

In Egypt, Ra and Atum ("he who completes or perfects") were the same god, *Atum*, the "counter-Ra," was associated with earth animals, including the serpent: *Nehebkau* ("he who harnesses the souls") was the two headed serpent god who guarded the entrance to the underworld. He is often seen as the son of the snake goddess *Renenutet*, often confused with the snake goddess *Wadjet*.

The image of the serpent as the embodiment of the wisdom transmitted by *Sophia* was an emblem used by gnosticism, especially those sects that the more orthodox characterized as "Ophites" ("Serpent People"). The chthonic serpent was one of the earth-animals associated with the cult of *Mithras*. The *Basilisk*, the venomous "king of serpents" with the glance that kills, was hatched by a serpent, *Pliny the Elder* and others thought, from the egg of a cock.

Outside Eurasia, in Yoruba mythology, *Oshunmare* was another mythic regenerating serpent.

The *Rainbow Serpent* (also known as the *Rainbow Snake*) is a major mythological being for Aboriginal people across Australia, although the creation stories associated with it are best known from northern Australia. In Fiji *Ratumaibulu* was a serpent god who ruled the underworld and made fruit trees bloom.

[edit] Greek Mythology

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*see also Dragons in Greek mythology*

Serpents figured prominently in archaic Greek myths. According to some sources, *Ophion* ("serpent", a.k.a. *Ophioneus*), ruled the world with *Eurynome* before the two of them were cast down by *Cronus* and *Rhea*.

The *Minoan Snake Goddess* brandished a serpent in either hand, perhaps evoking her role as source of wisdom, rather than her role as Mistress of the Animals (*Potnia theron*), with a leopard under each arm. She is a Minoan version of the *Canaanite* fertility goddess *Asherah*. It is not by accident that later the infant *Heracles*, a liminal hero on the threshold between the old ways and the new Olympian world, also brandished the two serpents that "threatened" him in his cradle. Classical Greeks did not perceive that the threat was merely the threat of wisdom. But the gesture is the same as that of the Cretan goddess.

*Typhon* the enemy of the Olympian gods is described as a vast grisly monster with a hundred heads and a hundred serpents issuing from his thighs, who was conquered and cast into *Tartarus* by *Zeus*, or confined beneath volcanic regions, where he is the cause of eruptions. *Typhon* is thus the chthonic figuration of volcanic forces. Amongst his children by *Echidna* are *Cerberus* (a monstrous three-headed dog with a snake for a tail and a serpentine mane), the serpent tailed *Chimaera*, the serpent-like chthonic water beast *Lernaean Hydra* and the hundred-headed serpentine dragon *Ladon*. Both the *Lernaean Hydra* and *Ladon* were slain by *Heracles*.

*Python* was the earth-dragon of *Delphi*, always represented in the vase-paintings and by sculptors as a serpent. *Pytho* was the chthonic enemy of *Apollo*, who slew her and remade her former home his own oracle, the most famous in Classical Greece.



Statue of *Asclepius* in the *Pergamon Museum*, *Berlin*.

*Amphisbaena* a Greek word, from *amphis*, meaning "both ways", and *bainein*, meaning "to go", also called the "Mother of Ants", is a mythological, ant-eating serpent with a head at each end. According to Greek mythology, the mythological *amphisbaena* was spawned from the blood that dripped from *Medusa the Gorgon's* head as *Perseus* flew over the *Libyan Desert* with it in his hand. *Medusa* and the other *Gorgons* were vicious female monsters with sharp fangs and hair of living, venomous snakes. The *Gorgons* wore a belt of two intertwined serpents in the same configuration of the *caduceus*.

*Asclepius*, the son of *Apollo* and *Koronis*, learned the secrets of keeping death at bay after observing one serpent bringing another (which *Asclepius* himself had fatally wounded) healing herbs. To prevent the entire human race from becoming immortal under *Asclepius's* care, *Zeus* killed him with a bolt of lightning. *Asclepius's* death at the hands of *Zeus* illustrates man's inability to challenge the natural order that separates mortal men from the gods. In honor of *Asclepius*, snakes were often used in healing

rituals. Non-poisonous snakes were left to crawl on the floor in dormitories where the sick and injured slept. In *The Library*, Apollodorus claimed that Athena gave Asclepius a vial of blood from the Gorgons. Gorgon blood had magical properties: if taken from the left side of the Gorgon, it was a fatal poison; from the right side, the blood was capable of bringing the dead back to life. However Euripides wrote in his tragedy *Ion* that the Athenian queen Creusa had inherited this vial from her ancestor Erichthonios, who was a snake himself and receiving the vial from Athena. In this version the blood of Medusa had the healing power while the lethal poison originated from Medusa's serpents.

Laocoön was allegedly a priest of Poseidon (or of Apollo, by some accounts) at Troy; he was famous for warning the Trojans in vain against accepting the Trojan Horse from the Greeks, and for his subsequent divine execution. Poseidon (some say Athena), who was supporting the Greeks, subsequently sent sea-serpents to strangle Laocoön and his two sons, Antiphantes and Thymbraeus. Another tradition states that Apollo sent the serpents for an unrelated offense, and only unlucky timing caused the Trojans to misinterpret them as punishment for striking the Horse.

Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great and a princess of the primitive land of Epirus, had the reputation of a snake-handler, and it was in serpent form that Zeus was said to have fathered Alexander upon her; tame snakes were still to be found at Macedonian Pella in the 2nd century AD (Lucian, *Alexander the false prophet*) and at Ostia a bas-relief shows paired coiled serpents flanking a dressed altar, symbols or embodiments of the Lares of the household, worthy of veneration (Veyne 1987 illus p 211).

[edit] Judeo-Christian references



Adam, Eve, and the (female) Serpent at the entrance to Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Medieval Christian art often depicted the Edenic Serpent as a woman, thus both emphasizing the Serpent's seductiveness as well as its relationship to Eve. (This connection might be due to the influence of Lilith, as well.) Several early Church Fathers, including Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea, interpreted the Hebrew "Heva" as not only the name of Eve, but in its aspirated form as "female serpent."

In the Hebrew Bible (the Tanach) of Judaism, the speaking serpent (*nachash*) in the Garden of Eden brought forbidden knowledge, but was not identified with Satan in the Book of Genesis. "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made," Genesis 3:1 reminded its readers. Nor is there any indication in Genesis that the Serpent was a deity in its own right, aside from the fact that the Pentateuch is not otherwise rife with talking animals. Although the identity of the Serpent as Satan is made explicit in the later writings of the Hebrew prophets and the New Testament of the Bible, in Genesis the Serpent is merely portrayed as a deceptive creature promoting as good what God had directly forbidden, and particularly cunning in manipulating truth toward its deceptive ends. (cf. Gen. 3:4-5 and 3:22)

Though it was cursed for its role in the Garden, this was not the end of the serpent, who continued to be venerated in the folk religion of Judah and was tolerated by official religion until the time of king Hezekiah.

A conversion of a rod to a snake and back was believed to have been experienced by Moses and later by his brother Aaron according to Islamic, Christian, and Jewish hagiography:



Moses lifts up the brass snake, curing the Israelites from the venom of snake bites.

*And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand. (Exodus 4:2-4)*

The Book of Numbers provides an origin for an archaic bronze serpent associated with Moses, with the following narratives:

"21.6. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. 7. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. 8. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived." (Book of Numbers 21:6-9)

When the young reforming king Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah in the late 8th century:

"He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan." 2 Kings 18:4.

In Christianity, a connection between the Serpent and Satan is strongly made, and Genesis 3:14 where God curses the serpent, is seen in that light: "And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life". Some feel that this seems to indicate that the serpent had legs prior to this punishment. But if the lying serpent was in fact Satan himself (as he is called THE serpent or dragon), rather than an ordinary snake simply possessed by Satan, then the reference to crawling and dust is purely symbolic reference to his ultimate humiliation and defeat.

In the Gospel of Matthew 3:7, John the Baptist calls the Pharisees and Saducees visiting him a 'brood of vipers'. Later in Matthew 23:33, Jesus himself uses this imagery, observing: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Gehenna?" ("Hell" is the usual translation of Jesus' word *Gehenna*.)

Although in the minority, there are at least a couple of passages in the New Testament that do not present the snake with negative connotation. When sending out the twelve apostles, Jesus exhorted them "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

Jesus made a comparison between himself and the setting up of the snake on the hill in the desert by Moses:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14-15).

In this comparison Jesus was not so much connecting himself to the serpent<sup>[citation needed]</sup>, but showing the analogy of his being a divinely provided object of faith, through which God would provide salvation, just as God provided healing to those who looked in faith to the brass serpent. The other most significant reference to the serpent in the New Testament occurs in Revelation 12:9, where the identity of the serpent in Genesis is made explicit:

"The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray..."

This verse lends support to the view that of the serpent *being* Satan himself, which helps to explain, as well, why Eve was not surprised to be spoken to by the serpent--it was not a talking snake, but a beautiful and intelligent (yet evil) angelic being.

Veyne, Paul, 1987. *A History of Private Life : 1. From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*

Snake handling is a religious ritual in a small number of Christian churches in the U.S., usually characterized as rural and Pentecostal. Practitioners believe it dates to antiquity and quote the Bible to support the practice, especially:

"And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." (Mark 16:17-18)

"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Luke 10:19)

[edit] Rod of Asclepius vs. Caduceus in modern medicine



Caduceus



The Star of Life features a Rod of Asclepius

Snakes entwined the staffs both of [Hermes](#) (the [caduceus](#)) and of [Asclepius](#), where a single snake entwined the rough staff. On [Hermes'](#) caduceus, the snakes were not merely duplicated for symmetry, they were paired opposites. (This motif is congruent with the [phurba](#).) The wings at the head of the staff identified it as belonging to the winged messenger, [Hermes](#), the Roman [Mercury](#), who was the god of magic, diplomacy and [rhetoric](#), of inventions and discoveries, the protector both of merchants and that allied occupation, to the mythographers' view, of thieves. It is however [Hermes'](#) role as [psychopomp](#), the escort of newly-deceased souls to the afterlife, that explains the origin of the snakes in the caduceus since this was also the role of the Sumerian entwined serpent god [Ningizzida](#), with whom [Hermes](#) has sometimes been equated with.

In [Late Antiquity](#), as the arcane study of [alchemy](#) developed, [Mercury](#) was understood to be the protector of those arts too and of arcane or occult 'Hermetic' information in general. Chemistry and medicines linked the rod of [Hermes](#) with the staff of the healer [Asclepius](#), which was wound with a serpent; it was conflated with [Mercury's](#) rod, and the modern medical symbol— which should simply be the rod of [Asclepius](#)— often became [Mercury's](#) wand of commerce. Another version is used in alchemy whereas the snake is crucified, known as [Nicolas Flamel's](#) caduceus. Art historian [Walter J. Friedlander](#), in *The Golden Wand of Medicine: A History of the Caduceus Symbol in Medicine* (1992) collected hundreds of examples of the caduceus and the rod of [Asclepius](#) and found that professional associations were just somewhat more likely to use the staff of [Asclepius](#), while commercial organizations in the medical field were more likely to use the caduceus.

[edit] Political propaganda

Following the Christian context as a symbol for evil serpents are sometimes featured in political [propaganda](#). They were used to represent Jews in [antisemite propaganda](#). Snakes were also used to represent the evil side of drugs in such films as *Narcotic* and *Narcotics: Pit of Despair*. In another one a drug dealer [transforms into a snake](#).

[edit] References

[Joseph Campbell](#), *Occidental Mythology: the Masks of God*, 1964: Ch. 1, "The Serpent's Bride"

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[Lewis Richard Farnell](#), *The Cults of the Greek States*, 1896.

[Joseph Eddy Fontenrose](#), *Python; a study of Delphic myth and its origins*, 1959.

[Jane Ellen Harrison](#), *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, 1912. cf. Chapter IX, p.329 especially, on the slaying of the Python. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)

[Joseph Lewis Henderson](#) and [Maud Oakes](#), *The Wisdom of the Serpent*. The tribal initiation of the shaman, the archetype of the serpent, exemplifies the death of the self and a transcendent rebirth. Analytical psychology offers insights on the meaning of death symbolism and the serpent symbol.

[edit] See also

Dragon  
Serpents in Hinduism and Buddhism  
Snake worship  
Ethnoherpetology  
Glycon

[edit] Notes

1. ^ *Vergil Aenid* 2.471.
2. ^ *Nicander Alexipharmaca* 521.
3. ^ *Pliny Natural History* 9.5.

[edit] External links

[The caduceus vs the staff of Asclepius](#)

[Dr Robert T. Mason, "The Divine serpent in myth and legend," 1999](#)

[Links to further serpent myth](#)

[Nagas and Serpents](#)

[Snakes of the bible and the koran](#)

[Jesus Our Serpent](#)

[Scientific American - Offerings to a Stone Snake Provide the Earliest Evidence of Religion](#) by J. R. Minkel 01/12/06

### Caduceus

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



The Caduceus



Two caduceuses without wings as decoration of door portal in Ztracená street in Olomouc (Czech Republic).

*For the medical symbol often mistakenly referred to as a caduceus, see Rod of asclepius.*

A **caduceus** (/kəˈduːsiəs/, -əs, -ˈdʒuː; *kerykeion* in Greek; Unicode U+2624 (☯) on the Miscellaneous Symbols table) is a winged staff with two snakes wrapped around it. It was an ancient astrological symbol of commerce and is associated with the Greek god *Hermes*, the messenger for the gods, conductor of the dead and protector of merchants and thieves. It was originally a herald's staff, sometimes with wings, with two white ribbons attached. The ribbons eventually evolved into snakes.

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[edit] Description

In some cases, depictions of the Greek kerykeion can be radically different from that of the traditional caduceus (as in the picture at right). These representations will feature the two snakes atop the wand (rod), crossed to create a circle with the heads of the snakes resembling horns. In this form, it looks remarkably similar to the symbol for the planet Mercury — Mercury is the Roman name for *Hermes*, who carries the kerykeion, or caduceus. The basic power of the Caduceus is the primal power to heal or harm.

In the seventh century, the caduceus came to be associated with a precursor of medicine, based on the *Hermetic* astrological principles of using the planets and stars to heal the sick. As a symbol for medicine, the caduceus is often used interchangeably with the *Rod of Asclepius* (single snake, no wings), although learned opinion prefers the Rod of Asclepius, reserving the caduceus for representing commerce.<sup>[1]</sup> Historically, the two astrological symbols had distinct meanings in alchemical and astrological principles.

Some medical organizations join the serpents of the caduceus with rungs to suggest a DNA double-helix.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> It has also been suggested that the caduceus derives from the treatment for *Guinea Worm* disease, which requires sufferers to pull the worms out of their legs by slowly, over a period of many days, winding the worm around a stick which is twisted a little more each day to draw the worm out. It is also said that doctors would wrap the extruding parasite around a stick over the course of weeks or months, and the result was worn as an indicator of the doctor's competence, although this suggestion seems to be more represented by the *Rod of Asclepius*.<sup>[2]</sup>

The symbol's origins are thought to date to as early as 2800 BC in *Mesopotamia*, and there are several references to a caduceus-like symbol in the *Bible*, namely in Numbers 21:4–9, and 2 Kings 18:4. During the Exodus, *Moses* was instructed by God to fashion a pole upon which he was to position a serpent made of brass; when looked upon, this *Nehushtan*, as it was called in *Hebrew*, would spare the lives of the *Israelites* stricken by venomous snake bites. The intent was that people would look upward and be reminded to pray to God, but eventually the meaning was forgotten and this symbol was apparently worshiped by the Hebrew people until the reign of *Hezekiah* as described in 2 Kings 18:4.

Walter Burkert has two figures in his book which show a rod with two intertwined snakes winding around a central axis from *Mesopotamia* in 2200 BC, and a similar image from *Crete* in 700 BC.<sup>1</sup> A similar symbol, but lacking the snakes and with a winged sun, is the *Staff of Hermes*. It was used by the astrologer priests in the *Eleusinian Mysteries* of ancient Greece, and has been associated with the *Gnostic Corpus Hermeticum* and *Kundalini Yoga*, where it is thought to be a symbolic representation of the "subtle" nerve channels the "ida", "pingala", and "shushumna" described in yogic kundalini physiology.

It should be further noted that the Staff of Hermes, the caduceus, was adapted by alchemists as their symbol, because *Hermes*, the God of Messengers, was also the patron lord of gamblers, thieves, tricksters and alchemists. As alchemists were the mainstay of ancient medicine, the symbol became associated with the healing arts, despite *Hermes* having no affiliation to the practice of saving lives. *Apollo*, the God of light and medicine and healing (and music), had the staff later adapted as the true staff of healing, the *Rod of Asclepius*. The Renaissance artist *Jacopo de' Barbari* signed most of his work just with a (wingless) caduceus.

[edit] Caduceus in popular culture

The comic book character *Promethea*, created by *Alan Moore*, wields a caduceus and invokes the magical traits associated with the symbol. In Issue #11, *Promethea* uses the linguistic powers of the caduceus to reprogram a living computer virus. The two snakes can speak (when spoken to) and represent the duality of magic. They are named Mack, short for "macro" and representing "yes," and Mike, short for "micro" and representing "no." Their speech balloons are differentiated by red or green outlines, but they constantly switch personae. They are featured prominently in Issue #12 where they explain magic and the *Tarot* entirely in rhyme.

In the *X-Files* episode "*The Erlenmeyer Flask*", *Scully* notices that a car is not the same as another car because of a Caduceus sticker in the car's window.

In the *X-Files* episode "*Arcadia*", *Scully* notices that one of her new neighbors is wearing a Caduceus on his necklace.

"Caduceus" is the name of a crucial international health organization formed to counter serious health hazards and bioterrorism in the video game *Trauma Center: Under the Knife* and its sequel, *Trauma Center: Second Opinion*, the first which was known as 'Chou Shittou Caduceus' in Japan.

In the *Matrix* movies series, the caduceus is mentioned as one of the hoverships in the Zion fleet.

In the video game *Starcraft*, the *Caduceus Reactor* is an upgrade available to Terran Medics.

*Liquid Snake* has a tattoo of the Caduceus Symbol, but with a sword replacing the rod.

In the video game *Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of The Cursed King*, *Jessica* and *Angelo* can learn *Caduceus* when she reaches the requisite level of skill with magical staves. The ability heals health points to an ally.

The 1987 video game *Barbarian* featured two snakes entangled on swords which bore a striking resemblance to the caduceus. They would hiss to signal an injury to a player.

In a *Simpsons* episode, Lisa uses a computer program called Virtual Doctor that depicts two snakes on a microphone as its opening animation.

Maynard James Keenan, vocalist of Tool and A Perfect Circle runs a winery called [Caduceus Cellars](#), located in Arizona.

In the movie *Cars*, Doc Hudson's Ornament Valley Medical Clinic logo is two jumper cables wrapped around a rod.

The teaser poster for *Snakes on a Plane* depicts two snakes winding around an airliner in the same style as a Caduceus.

In the online sci-fi fantasy game *Phantasy Star Online*, the Caduceus is a light-themed weapon useable by the magic using Force classes. It is capable of casting fire as a special attack and lends a slight boost to the holy spell Grants. It has the appearance of a golden staff with feathered wings atop it. When swung, the Caduceus leaves a trail of goose feathers in its wake.

In the television show *Lost*, the caduceus is part of the symbol for the medical hatch, otherwise known as the Staff.

In the sci-fi show *Dark Angel (TV series)*, the symbol for the Snake Cult is a version of the staff.

In the video game *Diablo II*, Paladins can use a high level, mace-like weapon called a "Caduceus".

The Caduceus is the official emblem of the United States Navy Hospital Corps. (see [Hospital Corpsman](#))

The Caduceus is the official magazine of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity. The symbol (with a slight difference) appears on the Order's pledge pin and crest.

In the Starpath Supercharger game *Suicide Mission* for the Atari 2600, the cover packaging features a parody of the Caduceus; the staff now has a skull mounted on top and the wings are now flayed and black. This goes hand-in-hand with the premise of the game: to fight microbes in a miniturized ship very much like the popular game *Asteroids*.

In *Ultima VII Part Two: Serpent Isle*, the symbol of Ophidian virtues is clearly inspired by Caduceus; it consists of Great Earth Serpent laying straight, with serpents of Order and Chaos twisted around it.

In the film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, the character Cameron Frye is seen wearing a T-shirt depicting a caduceus.

In the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the fourth angel, Shamshel, looks somewhat like a Caduceus.

In *Sims 2*, there's a symbol of Caduceus, if a sim is working in Medicine.

Caduceus Capital, a famous group of on & off-shore Venture Capital funds specializing in early-stage Life Science & Biotech security investments.

In the video game *Silent Hill*, an item called *Crest of Mercury* is used as the symbol of healing from heroine's suffering. *Crest of Mercury* is depicted the same as the Caduceus.

In the novel *The Geographer's Library* the caduceus figures prominently as the symbol of a secret society.

In the online RPG "Final Fantasy XI" The Caduceus is an item that is obtainable through the alchemy guild.

"Columbia Business School" uses a logo derived from the Caduceus symbol. They also have other references to the Greek god Hermes including an alumni magazine.

The caduceus is used in the coat of arms of the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv.

In the novel *Extreme Measures* by Michael Palmer (and the subsequent movie starring Hugh Grant and Gene Hackman) Caduceus is the name of the secret society that drives the plot.

Name of winery created by Tool frontman Maynard Keenan - Caduceus

In the anime *Fullmetal Alchemist* a form of Caduceus is printed on the back of Edward Elric's coat and Alphonse Elric's shoulder

Ryan Sinn from the band Angels and Airwaves recently got a tattoo of the Caduceus on the back of his head.

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Jacopo de' Barberi Italian Renaissance artist, signed his work with a Caduceus

CADUCEUS (expert system)

Palmette

Nehushtan

U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsmen use the Caduceus as their rating symbol

[edit] Notes

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<sup>↑</sup> Burkert, pp.31-32

[edit] References

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[edit] External links

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[Blayney, Keith, "The Caduceus vs the Staff of Asclepius"](#)

[Rosicrucian diagram: The Symbolism of Caduceus](#)

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[Encyclopaedia Britannica Caduceus](#)

[How did the medical emblem of two snakes intertwined around a dagger originate?](#)

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[Short article comparing the shape of the Caduceus to the shape of a double helix](#)

['Caduceus,' an article by Heinz Insu Fenkl](#)

[The original caduceus \(the symbol of the staff of Asklepios\) was only 1 snake, changed to 2 in the 20th century.](#)