

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

---

---

VOL. IX, No. 1.

DES MOINES, IOWA, APRIL, 1909.

3D SERIES.

---

---



Your friend & fellow Hawk Eye  
Thomas Wilson

A REVIEW OF DR. WILSON'S SWASTIKA.<sup>1</sup>

BY ALBERT NEWTON HARBERT.

The request for American literature on the Swastika led Dr. Thomas Wilson to make an exhaustive search for information on the subject. Such material as was obtainable concerning the meaning and history of the Swastika, was presented in an interesting form, and as positive evidence was not obtainable, the author makes no attempt at conclusions regarding the time and place of origin of the primitive meaning of the symbol. His paper was published in the *Report of the United States National Museum for 1894*, and as a reprint in 1896.

It is the earliest known symbol, and is itself so simple that it might have originated among any people however primitive, and in any age however remote. The straight line, the circle, the cross, the triangle, are forms easily made, meaning much or little, and different things among different people or at different times among the same people; or they may have had no settled or definite meaning. The normal Swastika consists of four bars of equal length and thickness, crossing each other at right angles, and with ends bent to the right. The symbol was extended and spread over the entire world in prehistoric times, and no other symbol has given rise to so many interpretations.

Many theories have been advanced concerning the symbolism of the Swastika, and its relation to the ancient deities. It is claimed to have been of early Aryan origin, and the emblem or symbol of the supreme Aryan god; that it so continued down the line of descent until it became the symbol of Brahma, and finally of Buddha. The possible migrations of the Swastika, and its general appearance in widely separated countries and among people of different culture, creates the principal

<sup>1</sup>*The Swastika, the Earliest Known Symbol, and its Migrations with Observations on the Migration of Certain Industries in Prehistoric Times.*

x two (2)

interest on this subject to anthropologists. The modern interest in it as a symbol alone is subsidiary to the question of the cause and manner of its appearance in prehistoric times, in practically all countries. The beginning and first appearance of any of the forms of the Cross is also lost in antiquity, and their meaning unknown.

The word as it has been handed down to us is of Indian origin and has its history and definite meaning in India. It has been called by different names in different countries, but in recent times the ancient Sanskrit name of Swastika has been generally accepted. The definition and etymology of the word is thus given in *Littre's French Dictionary*: (Paris, 1852, p. 625.)

Svastika, or Swastika, a mystic figure used by several (East) Indian sects. It is equally known to the Brahmins as to the Buddhists. Most of the rock inscriptions in the Buddhist caverns in the west of India are preceded or followed by the holy (sacramentell) sign of the Swastika.

Etymology: A Sanskrit word signifying happiness, pleasure, good luck. It is composed of *Su*, "good," and *asti*, "being," "good being," with the suffix *ka*.

In the *Revue d'Ethnographie*, IV., p. 329, 1885, is given the following analysis of the Sanskrit Swastika:

*Su*, radical, signifying *good, well, excellent* or *suvidas*, prosperity.

*Asti*, third person, singular, indicative present of the verb *as*, to be, which is *sum* in Latin.

*Ka*, suffix forming the substantive.

The views of the author as to the possible use of the Swastika are:

- I. As a symbol—
  - 1, of a religion,
  - 2, of a nation or people,
  - 3, of a sect with peculiar tenets;
- II. As an amulet or charm—
  - 1, of good luck, or fortune, or long life,
  - 2, of benediction, or blessing,
  - 3, against the evil eye;
- III. As an ornament or decoration.

The presence of the Swastika on altars, idols, and sepulchral urns, demonstrates the Swastika to have possessed the attribute of a religious symbol. If it was a religious symbol of India and migrated as such in times of antiquity to America, it was necessarily by the hand of man. The people who brought it would have undoubtedly introduced with it the religion it represented, provided the symbol had the same meaning among the aborigines in America as it had in India. The evidence of communication would be strengthened if the Swastika and Buddhism came to America together, however as no trace of the Buddhist religion has been found here, we may conclude that the Swastika came at an earlier date than the development of the Buddhist religion. It was more or less a religious symbol in the ceremonies of the North American Indians, as were the various forms of the Cross. There being no direct evidence available by which the migration of symbols, arts, or peoples in prehistoric times can be proved, because the events are beyond the pale of history, we must resort to secondary evidence of the similarity of conditions and we can only subject them to our reason and determine the truth from the probabilities. The author is of the opinion that the probabilities of the migration of the Swastika to America from the Old World is greater than that it was an independent invention. The Indians make use of the emblem in their beadwork and in their blanket making. It is used in the necklaces and garters by the sun-worshippers, which included the Musquakies and Iowas. These garters are held to be sacred, and only worn on certain religious ceremonies. They call the emblem "luck" or "good luck," and say they have always made that pattern. These Swastika wearers believe in the Great Spirit, who lives in the sun, who creates all things, and is the source of all power and beneficence.

The Swastika has been found on objects of bronze and gold, but the more common form was on the pottery. It appears to have been used more commonly upon the smaller and insignificant objects. In the bronze age in western Europe, including Etruria, it is found on the common objects of life, such as pottery and bronze articles. In Italy on the hut urns in which

the ashes of the dead are buried; in the Swiss lakes stamped in the pottery, in Scandinavia on weapons and swords, and in Scotland on the brooches and pins; in America on the metates for grinding corn, and the Brazilian women wore it on the pottery fig leaf. It was found among the ruined pueblos of the Mesa Verde, in southwestern Colorado, and in the ruined palaces of Yucatan. Among hundreds of patterns of the Swastika belonging to both continents and to all ages, none of them have sought to represent anything else than just what they appear to be—plain marked lines.

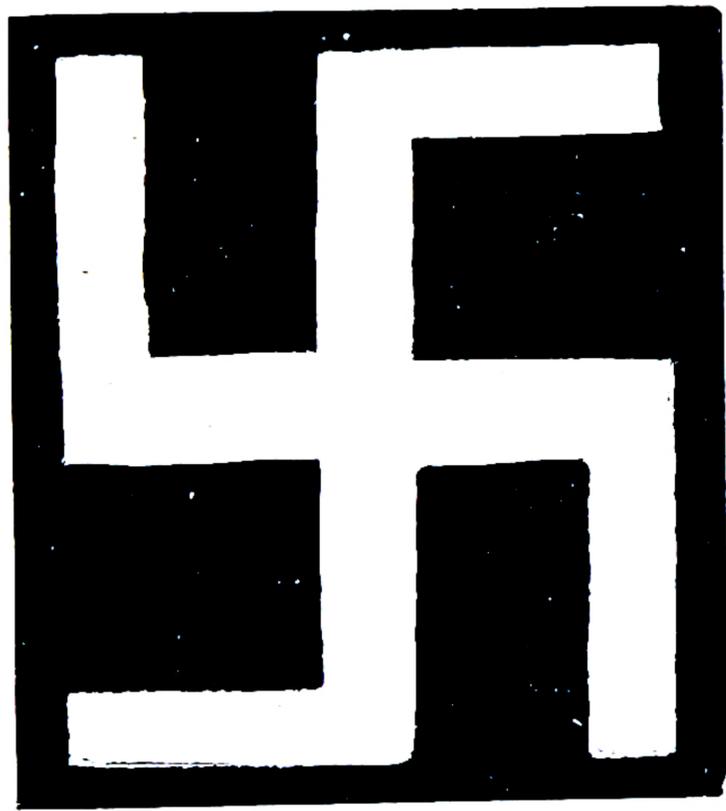
What appears to have been at all times an attribute of the Swastika is its character as a charm or amulet, as a sign of benediction, blessing, long life, good fortune, good luck. This belief has been handed down to modern times, and while the Swastika is recognized as a holy and sacred symbol by at least one Buddhist sect, it is used by the common people of India, China and Japan as a sign of long life, good wishes, and good fortune. The Chinese believe it to be good omen to find the Swastika woven by spiders over their fruits and melons.

The author found after making careful comparisons of all the material that had been prepared on the subject, that the Swastika was confined to the common uses, implements, household utensils, and objects of the toilet and personal decorations. The specimens of this kind number a hundred to one of a sacred kind. With this preponderance in favor of the common use, it would seem that, except among the Buddhists and early Christians, and the more or less sacred ceremonies of the North American Indians, all pretenses of the holy or sacred character of the Swastika should be given up, and it should (still with these exceptions) be considered as a charm, amulet, token of good luck or good fortune, or as an ornament and for decoration.

---

Among the pioneers of Iowa is associated the name of Thomas Wilson. He was born in New Brighton, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, July 18, 1832, of Quaker parentage.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Okely. *A Pedigree and Family History of the Lineal Descendants of John Okely, of Bedford, England, which dates from about 1650 to the present time. To which is added the collateral branches of de Guylpyn, West and Wade.* Isaac E. Wade, Editor, Pittsburg, Pa., 1899.



THE SWASTIKA

Both on his father's and mother's side he was of North English race, having in his composition both Scottish blood and predilections. In his career he was an example of American life—born on a farm, received a common school education, and then started out to make his way in the world. At the age of sixteen he was apprenticed to a wagon maker, and worked at the trade until he attained his majority. He came west and finally located at Marietta, Iowa, which was regarded as the "far west" in those days, and opened a shop for making heavy plows for breaking prairie.

He was chosen deputy clerk of the district court, and while serving in that capacity turned his attention to the study of law, pursuing his studies after the day's work. His course of studies was completed in the office of Finch and Crocker, in Des Moines, after which he practiced for several years in Marietta, where he was fairly successful. He was an active participant in the contest between Marietta and Marshalltown, which is recorded as one of the most strenuously prosecuted county-seat wars that ever occurred in Iowa, the contesting parties coming dangerously near actual warfare. Marshalltown finally won in the court proceedings (1859), and the once ambitious town of Marietta has now become a productive cornfield.

At the breaking out of the Civil War, he was among the first to respond to the call, serving in the Second Iowa Cavalry and the Forty-fourth Infantry until 1864, when he was mustered out with the brevet rank of colonel. He then settled in Washington, and resumed the practice of his profession, chiefly before the court of claims and the United States

---

*Christopher Wilson* [1] according to tradition, was a Quaker preacher of some note in the North of England, perhaps Yorkshire. He visited Maryland prior to 1760. p. 28.

*John Wilson* [2], son of Christopher, married November 14, 1764, Alisanna Webster, sister of Daniel Webster, resided at Stafford, on the Susquehanna river, about five miles from Havre de Grace, Maryland. He died May 29, 1800. p. 64.

*Thomas Wilson* [3], son of John and Alisanna Wilson, born November 1, 1779. Married Sarah Douthitt Sala, nee Douthitt. His death occurred in 1828. p. 65.

*James Wilson* [4], son of Thomas and Sarah Douthitt Sala, born April 12, 1806. Married Lydia Mercer, in 1837. She died February 20, 1885. p. 67. Was a maker of wagons and buggies in New Brighton, Pa. Died at New Galilee, Pa., January 6, 1900.

*Thomas Wilson* [5], son of James and Lydia Wilson, born July 18, 1832. Married Martha Jane Beacon, October 27, 1857. p. 69. His death occurred at Washington, D. C., May 4, 1902.

supreme court, in which he was so successful that he was soon able to retire with a competence.

A desire for foreign travel led to his appointment to a consulate in Ghent, Belgium, in 1881. During his leisure he returned to his archaeological studies, and investigated the cave man and the cave bear of the Mousterian epoch, which were to be found in the immediate vicinity. In 1882 he was transferred to the city of Nantes, and was then brought into immediate connection with the megalithic monuments of Brittany. He was also given access to the original records in the archives of the department, of the trial of Gilles de Retz (or Rais), commonly known as Bluebeard. He was finally transferred to Nice, where he was easily in reach of Switzerland, Italy and southern France. After five years of consular service, he spent two years traveling over Europe, exploring and studying wherever there was a new prehistoric station to be opened or a collection to be examined. He also had opportunity for meeting and working with the noted anthropologists of Europe. He had for many years before going to Europe taken much interest in the study of archaeology, having explored many prehistoric mounds.

After returning to this country, he became curator of the division of prehistoric archaeology in the United States National Museum (1887). Besides the routine of administration, he published monographs, and gave public lectures on anthropological subjects. These publications have given him a permanent place in the literature of American archaeology:

- The Treaty of Ghent.* 1888. New York, Press of J. J. Little & Co.  
*Ancient Indian Matting from Petit Anse Island, La.* 1888. Report U. S. National Museum.  
*A Study of Prehistoric Anthropology—Hand Book for Beginners.* 1890. Report U. S. National Museum.  
*The Palaeolithic Period in the District of Columbia.* 1890. Proc. U. S. National Museum.  
*Results of an Inquiry as to the Existence of Man in North America during the Palaeolithic Period of the Stone Age.* 1890. Report U. S. National Museum.  
*Criminal Anthropology.* 1891. Smithsonian Report.  
*Report on Hygiene and Demography.* 1891. Washington.  
*Les Instruments de Pierre Dure en Amerique.* 1892. Paris, Printed by E. Jamin.  
*La Periode Paleolithique dans L'Amerique du Norde.* 1892. Paris, Printed by E. Jamin.  
*Anthropology at the Paris Exposition in 1889.* 1892, Washington.  
*Minute Stone Implements from India.* 1894. Report U. S. National Museum.

- Primitive Industry.* 1894. Smithsonian Report.
- On the Process of Flourine as a test for the Fossilization of Animal Bones.* 1895. American Naturalist.
- The Golden Patera of Rennes.* 1896. Report U. S. National Museum.
- The Swastika, the Earliest Known Symbol, and its Migrations; with observations on the Migration of certain industries in Prehistoric times.* 1894. Report U. S. National Museum, and reprint 1896.
- A Classification of Arrow or Spear Heads or Knives.* 1897. Antiquarian, Columbus, Ohio.
- The Antiquity of the Red Race in America.* 1897. Report U. S. National Museum.
- Prehistoric Art; or the Origin of Art as manifested in the works of Prehistoric Man.* 1898. Report U. S. National Museum.
- Blue-Beard A Contribution to History and Folk-Lore. Being the History of Gilles de Retz of Brittany, France, who was executed at Nantes in 1440 A. D., and who was the original of Blue-Beard in the Tales of Mother Goose.* 1899. New York and London. G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Arrowpoints, Spearheads, and Knives of Prehistoric Times.* 1899. Report U. S. National Museum.
- The Beginnings of the Science of Prehistoric Anthropology.* 1899. Chemical Publishing Co., Easton, Pa.
- Lahaute anciennete de l'homme dans l'Amerique du Nord.* 1901. Paris, L'Anthropologie.
- Arrow Wounds.* 1901. New York. American Anthropologist.
- Classification des pointes de fleches, des pointes des lances et des couteaux en Pierre.* 1902. Paris, Masson et Cie.
- Communication to the Congres International d'Anthropologie et d'Archéologie Prehistoriques.* 1902. Paris, Masson et Cie.
- Information for the Guidance of Explorers and Collectors.* Proc. U. S. National Museum, Vol. XI.
- Description of Exhibit made by the Department of Prehistoric Anthropology in the National Museum at the Ohio Valley and Central States Expositon in Cincinnati, Ohio.* 1888. Proc. U. S. National Museum.
- Sur la Statistique du Crime dans Les Etats-Unis de L'Amerique du Nord.* n. p. n. d.

Among the scientific organizations with which he was associated are the following:

Anthropological Society of Washington; the American Folk-Lore Society; the Societe d'Anthropologie de Paris; the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland; the Societe d'Anthropologie de Bruxelles; the Societe d'Archeologie de Nantes; and the Archaeological and Asiatic Association of Nevada, Iowa. He was also a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; a member of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion and of the American Oriental Society; a commander of the Order of Isabella of Spain; and an officer of the Order of Leopold. He also held a professorship in the National University with the title of LL. D.

Thomas Wilson was a broad minded man, and made a success of everything he undertook. His death occurred in Washington on May 4, 1902.