

Definition: **ankh** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Ancient Egyptian symbol (derived from the simplest form of sandal), meaning 'life', as in Tut *ankhamen*. It consists of a T-shape surmounted by an oval.



Summary Article: **ankh**

From *Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained*

*An ancient Egyptian symbol consisting of a T-shaped cross with a looped top, which represents life.*

Image from: [ankh, an ancient Egyptian symbol of... in Encyclopedia of African Religion](#)

The ancient Egyptian symbol of the ankh, which consists of a T-shaped cross with a looped top arm, appears frequently in Egyptian tomb paintings and other art. Egyptians carried the ankh as an amulet during life, and were buried with it to ensure their continuing existence in the afterlife. As a hieroglyph, the ankh is used to represent the words for both 'life' and 'hand mirror', and Egyptian mirrors were often made in the shape of an ankh; the ankh hieroglyph

also forms part of the hieroglyphs of words such as 'health' and 'happiness'. It symbolizes the life principle, and since it resembles a key, it is sometimes called the Key of Life. Gods and goddesses are often depicted holding it, either by the loop, or bearing one in each hand, crossed over the breast. In Egyptian tomb paintings, the deity is shown using it to confer the gift of life on the dead person's mummy, and in other Egyptian art the god or goddess touches a person with it to denote conception. It was also known as the Key of the Nile, since it was thought to symbolize the mystic union of Isis and Osiris which was believed to initiate the annual flooding of the river on which life in Egypt depended.

There is much debate among Egyptologists as to what the ankh was intended to represent. Some see it as a stylized womb, and others as a sandal strap with the loop going round the ankle (in ancient Egyptian, the word for 'sandal thong' and the word for 'life' were homophones). To some it is a representation of the human genitalia, the loop symbolizing the vagina and the T-shaped cross the phallus, while to others it symbolizes the sunrise, the loop depicting the sun coming up over the horizon, which is represented by the crossbar. Because of the ankh's importance to Egyptians, it was adopted by the early Christian church in Egypt, and although the cross became the dominant symbol of Christianity, the ankh, also known as the *crux ansata*, was retained, especially on Christian talismans, until well into medieval times. It is still worn today and used in popular culture as a symbol of arcane life-forces and spiritual magic.

**APA**

Chicago

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ankh. (2007). In U. McGovern (Ed.), *Chambers Dictionary of the unexplained*. London, UK: Chambers

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## APA

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## Harvard

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## MLA

"ankh." *Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained*, edited by Una McGovern, Chambers Harrap, 1st edition, 2007. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/ankh>. Accessed 18 Sep. 2019.