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Reference

Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography
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What do dragons, feet, empty chairs, lilies and art deco architecture have in common? All have been incorporated into funerary art over the years and convey a host of meanings to cemetery wanderers in the know.

If you'd like to be one of those cemetery wanderers in the know, you could do no better than Keister's wonderful new book *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*. Keister, a photographer particularly interested in historic architecture, has written a handy, engaging, and exhaustively researched guide to the symbols found on gravestones and monuments.

Symbols such as the willow tree, the urn, and the Celtic cross are well-known and can be found in almost any cemetery in the United States and Europe, but what about the more obscure symbolism of funerary art? In clearly written sections such as "Tombs, Sculptures, Memorials"; "Flora"; "Fauna"; Religious Devotion"; "The Constructed World"; and "Secret Societies, Clubs, and Fraternal Organizations," Keister handily documents more unusual gravestone art, giving the reader a window into a fascinating, worldwide language of symbolism.

He writes of the use of cranes high atop monuments to connote vigilance, loyalty and rebirth, and of the use of daisies on the graves of children. That simple, hardy flower, Keister explains, was used by fifteenth century artists to symbolize the innocence of the Christ child.

Keister writes about carvings of boats and ships on gravestones of seafarers, and the use of boats for non-sailors to symbolize the journey to the next world. He details the evolution of well-known cemetery symbols such as the death's head and the soul's head.

In a wonderful section on the history of angels as funerary symbols, the author writes that angels are an important art of the belief systems of many world religions. "Within a few centuries after the death of Christ there were so many angels flying and hovering around that it became important to classify them as well as enumerate them," he writes, describing the various

classifications of angels and their appearance in the cemeteries of the world.

He also discusses the history of that most ubiquitous of cemetery symbols, the cross. From the early use of what is now known as the swastika by early Eastern religions to the Greek and Celtic crosses that stand as proud symbols of ethnic heritage in American cemeteries, the cross is an important part of the repertoire of cemetery symbols.

Though they're rarely seen, animals even appear on gravestones, and Keister provides fascinating examples of fish and dolphins being used as part of the language of Christian symbolism. "Dolphins symbolize salvation (in mythology they are often portrayed as rescuing sailors)," he writes. Cockle or scallop shells have their own place in the language of tombstone art. Cockles symbolize a journey or pilgrimage and are also symbols for baptism. In Italy, one might find images of whales or frogs on gravestones. The whale, of course, is meant to call up the biblical story of "Jonah and the Whale," and frogs refer to the story of Exodus in the bible, when the Lord told Moses to let his people go or he would be visited by a plague of frogs. If you look carefully, you can also find mythical creatures on tombstones. Chinese mythological dogs, dragons, phoenixes, and griffins all appear in cemeteries in Europe and Asia and bring their own meanings to the stones.

One of the most interesting chapters is the one on secret societies and fraternal organizations. We learn about the history of Masonic symbols and emblems used by the Knights of Columbus and the Boy Scouts of America. But we also learn about groups such as the Woodmen of the World, the Ladies of the Maccabees of the World, and the Fraternal Brotherhood. The histories of these organizations are fascinating and Keister details the symbols used on members? gravestones to usher them into the fold in the next world.

The guide is brought to life by Keister's sharp photographs, and its slim size and elegant binding make it a perfect companion whenever—and wherever—one travels. As he writes in the introduction, "Dead men may tell no tales, but their tombstones do." Guided by *Stories in Stone*, you'll hear many cemetery tales. All you have to do is listen.

Sarah Stewart Taylor