

THE RAINBOW IN CULTURES, MYTHS,

LEGENDS AND RELIGIONS

INDRA'S BOW

Since the beginning of time there have been two fortresses: In one of them have lived the gods, the Devas, and in the other the demons. From the very beginning they have fought one another. The attack of the demons was mainly directed at Indra, the king of the gods. In spite of his resistance the demons attacked him again and again and injured him. Finally Indra invoked thunder, wind and storm upon on his enemy. He thus achieved victory, but the Devas were exhausted. As the storm abated, Indra stretched a bow in the sky to celebrate his victory. This looked wonderful and was made up of seven colours; it delighted the hearts of the Devas and the people.

Swami Dharmjyoti, adapted from RBK



Awa-tsireh – The Rainbow, Hopi, USA

PUEBLO INDIANS

They call rainbows the ladder, by which they can descend into their underworld temple.

CAMILLE FLAMMARION WORLD-VIEW WANDERER

Wood engraving from the 1888 edition of L'Atmosphère. The engraving, in 15th century style, shows an observer kneeling upon the flat earth, gazing from within the sphere of the heavens and marvelling at the universe beyond. Until the year 1974 the illustration was wrongly seen as proof of the unsophisticated view of the world in the Middle Ages. In fact, Flammarion was merely expressing man's yearning to explore unknown worlds.



Nicolas Camille Flammarion, 1842-1925
French astronomer and author of popular scientific writings.

HEIMDALL

For the Teutons Heimdall, the God of Light, stood as watchman at the bridge-head of the rainbow, which linked the place where the gods resided with the houses of the ordinary folk. From his position in heaven Heimdall could foresee, day and night, the coming of the enemy.

THOR

For the Laps and the Fins the rainbow was part of Thor's bow, and his arrows were lightning and thunder. For other Germanic peoples, the rainbow was the gigantic bowl, in which God began with the creation of all living creatures.

CHRIST

In the Christian symbolism of the middle ages, the three principle colours of the rainbow were regarded as representing the Deluge (blue), Burning of the Worlds (red) and New Earth (Green). The seven colours of the rainbow were interpreted as illustrations of the seven sacraments, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost or also as the symbol of Mary reconciling heaven and earth.



The Son of God with the rainbow halo.
Detail from the Triumphal Arch mosaic in Ravenna, Italy.

IRIS

For the ancient Greeks the goddess Iris, together with Hermes, was a messenger. She hastened down on the rainbow from Olympia to earth and into the depths of the sea to deliver instructions and messages from the Olympic gods. Iris personified the rainbow and symbolised the bridge joining heaven and earth. The original Greek word 'Iris' has further meaning. It stands, even today, for the coloured ring of the eye, the rainbow skin, but also for the eye in the feathers of the peacock's tail and for the iris flower.



Iris and the Rainbow, Greek postage stamps 1935



> Peter Iseli, Avalokiteshvara – Buddha of compassion

BUDDHA

In India, Mesopotamia and in Judaism, the seven colours of the rainbow are associated with the Seven Skies. Buddha is also shown surrounded by a seven-coloured rainbow. The thousand arms of Avalokiteshvara are proof of his unlimited sympathy; the rainbow above him expresses his warmth towards all creatures.

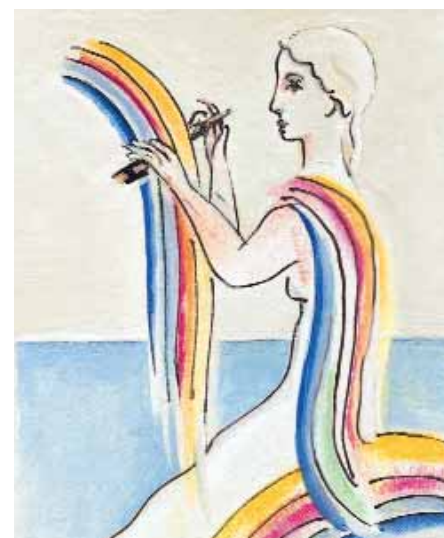


Illustration Paul Degen

KALÉVALA

In Finnish epic 'Kalévala', a collection of old songs and folk tunes, a maiden in the Northland is sitting at a spinning wheel weaving a rainbow. This symbolic image is the reflection of the human being. The rainbow is the promise God gives to mankind, that they will find their divine self in their earthly life. The Northland is none other than the human body, in which the soul – in the form of a maid – lives.

CERIDWEN

In the mythology of the Celts, the rainbow was the seat of the goddess Ceridwen. This represents, in Judo-Christian tradition, the image in which the rainbow is compared with the brilliance of God's throne – a symbol of hope that shines to comfort all God's children.

THE WHIRLING RAINBOW

In this sand picture of the Navayo-Indians the rainbows are represented moving in a clockwise direction; thus they are set in relationship to the four quarters of the world and the four points of the compass. The message: moisture in the air, abundance on the earth, new growth and new life that pours forth from the life-giving strength of the rainbow's colours and penetrates into the heart of all seeds.



Sandpainting by David Villaseñor

American Indians see the rainbow as a good omen and also a medicine. Head-dresses and face painting for ceremonies are often designed according to the rainbow colours. The rainbow is a bridge between heaven and earth – physically, materially and spiritually. It is the highest uniting revelation of the spirit of creation.

David Villaseñor, adapted from RBK



Rainbow Serpent (see page 14) by Terry Johnstone



Painting by > Pablo Amaringo

AYAHUASCA VISIONS

Ayahuasca is a pharmacological combination of two plants. The shaman use the potion Ayahuasca in religious ceremonies, for healing the sick, to meet the spirits and to look into the future. Its use is prevalent from the Andes to the Pacific coasts of Colombia and Ecuador.

TAROT

If I were a painter in the middle ages painting pictures of angels and saints in churches, with the hindsight of the present day I would always paint rainbows instead of haloes! Today we call this aura. The rainbow embodies on my Tarot cards an energy game. Thus we find the rainbow on cards that require great energy.



Gypsy-Tarot by Walter Wegmüller

> Walter Wegmüller 1937, is a painter and life advisor. Since 1969 he has been designing Tarot cards and gives Tarot courses. Since 1976 he has campaigned for the rights of the Yenisch in Switzerland. In this period he has produced many pictures, drawings, sculptures and art experiments with Sergius Golowin, Timothy Leary, H.R. Giger and Claude Sandoz. The rainbow plays a central role in his art. His extensive work is shown in exhibitions at home and abroad.