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## Wheat

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Perhaps more than any other grain, wheat has established a reputation as both a culinary staple and a cultural symbol. It has been cultivated since the very beginning of human history and today is one of the most widely grown crops on the face of the earth.

When it comes to symbolic importance, wheat has much in common with other staple crops such as barley, rice and maize. As the primary foodstuff in many societies, it is a symbol of abundance, life and fertility. In this context, wheat served as an emblem for deities associated with these notions, such as the Greek goddess of agriculture Demeter (Ceres is the Roman version).

On a slightly more esoteric level, wheat is also associated with rebirth and resurrection. This is due to a fairly straightforward aspect of the grain's nature and is something also shared by other crops; when wheat sprouts from the soil after the barren season and grows into the mass of stalks that will feed the people throughout the year, it's easy to see the phenomenon as the emergence of new life from the throes of death (i.e. the barren season). Particularly in Egypt, which was considered the breadbasket of the ancient Mediterranean due to the sheer volume of wheat and other crops that it produced, this symbolic aspect was on full display. Osiris, the god of the underworld, was associated with wheat in this context and was even given small bundles made of linen



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and stuffed with the sprouting grain as a form of religious offering. In Christianity, the resurrection aspect of wheat is also on display, albeit more subtly. Wheat in this context is associated with the Eucharist, the bread that becomes the body of Christ during communion. It is sometimes paired artistically with grapes, which symbolizes the wine of communion (i.e. the blood of Christ).

Even without esoteric symbolism attached to it, the importance of wheat to human culture cannot be overstated. In Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and many parts of Asia, wheat has been an agricultural staple for thousands of years, and continues to be one of the most critical foodstuffs in the world today.

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