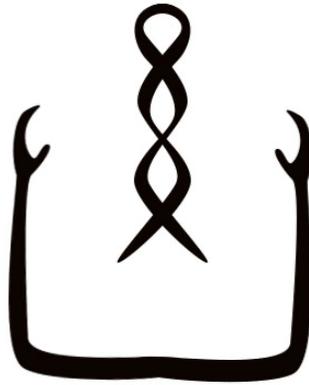


Shining Forth Heka

New Perspectives on the Eldest Magician



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To me belonged the universe before you gods came into being. You have come afterwards because I am Heka.
— *Coffin Texts, Spell 261*

Heka is the ancient Egyptian god of magic and medicine. His name is identical with magic in the ancient Egyptian language, and “has a close association with speech and the power of the word... Thought, deed, image, and power are theoretically united in the concept of *heka*”¹. Heka was variously said depending on place and time period to have “been created at the beginning of time by the creator Atum” and the son of Khnum and one of several goddesses; he is further given a role in the solar barque “as a protector of Osiris”.² While disagreements exist among sources as to whether Heka had any public cult following³, his presence and pervasiveness within the Egyptian worldview cannot be overstated. He is one of the most significant deities in the Egyptian pantheon, yet has received little to no attention within the Golden Dawn tradition. This essay represents an attempt to shed light on the person of Heka as well as the related concepts; to detail the surrounding vocabulary; and to explore the corresponding interrelationships, especially as they may touch on or inform areas of Golden Dawn theory and practice.

Name

The name of Heka (Egyptian *ḥkꜣ*, Coptic *ⲁⲓⲕ*) is synonymous with magic, but care must be taken with vocabulary because Egyptian homophones are often distinguished from each other by use of determinative signs. Egyptian words and names are formed from a combination of hieroglyphs which possess phonetic values, as well as one or more determinative hieroglyphs which possess only semantic value and distinguish otherwise identically-sounding words from each other. That said, Egyptian homophones do often possess related meanings. This tendency holds when it comes to the name of Heka and related concepts in the Egyptian world. Dr. Flora Brooke Anthony explains the lexical details of Heka’s name as follows:

¹ Ani; et al. (1994) [1250 BCE]. Goelet, Ogden Jr. (ed.). *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*. Translated by Faulkner, Raymond. preface by Carol Andrews (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books. p. 145.

² Wikipedia. 2022. *Heka (god)*. [online] Available at: <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heka_\(god\)>](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heka_(god)>) [Accessed 26 June 2022].

³ The World History Encyclopedia article on Heka states that he had “no cult following; no ritual worship, and no temples (except in the Late Period...525-323 BCE)”, but this is contradicted by Natalia Klimczak citing Geraldine Pinch, who states that although “no major temples were built for Heka, ...he did have a priesthood and shrines were dedicated to him in Lower (northern) Egypt”. Ritner also affirms that Heka received a public cult following.

The word *heka*, when written in hieroglyphs consists of the mono-consonantal hieroglyph, *h* (a twisted rope) and the bi-consonantal hieroglyph, *kꜛ* (*ka*), two parallel arms pointing up, a sign also used to express the ancient Egyptian concept of the vital force called *ka*. Following these two symbols, either next to them or below them, is the hieroglyphic determinative, a sign indicating the general idea of the word, whether it was a name, a concept, a location, etc. For *heka* the determinative is a papyrus scroll, which is the symbol for both writing and/or an abstract concept. The word also includes the three strokes sign, which signifies plurality. When another determinative, a seated god, is added, it indicates that the text is referring to the god with the same name (Ḥeka) who embodies the concept of *heka*.⁴

The word *heka* is often pluralized to *hekau* (*hkꜛw*), itself referring to magic and to “a supernatural energy that the gods possess”⁵. Herman te Velde also notes that “the Egyptians...connected the notion of light with the concept *hkꜛ*”⁶, a concept we may fairly equate with the *LVX* of our own tradition. Because of the pivotal role that *hkꜛ* plays in Egyptian thought, “we must consider related phrases and synonyms in order to discover the perceived range and nature of this force”⁷. An exploration of these synonyms is illustrative, as will be demonstrated in various ways throughout the remainder of this essay.

Along with Isis, Heka shares the epithet “Eldest Magician” (*hkꜛ smsw*); together the two deities “recite spells or perform magical rites to protect the sun-god Re from Apopis, the monster of chaos”⁸. The name of Heka is additionally similar to that of Hekatē, the Greek goddess of magic. While Stephen Skinner has noted that this is conceivable as an historical connection, “to date [a link] has not been found, apart from a superficial lexical similarity”⁹. Still, this lexical similarity and the fact that both deities are embodiments of magic are intriguing ones. Furthermore, Heka was “seemingly evoked during liminal stages of transition from one state of being to another in birth and death”¹⁰; the association of Hekate herself with liminality is loose, but suggestive.

⁴ Anthony, F., 2022. *Heka: Understanding Egyptian Magic on Its Own Terms - TheTorah.com*. [online] Thetorah.com. Available at: <<https://www.thetorah.com/article/heka-understanding-egyptian-magic-on-its-own-terms>> [Accessed 26 June 2022].

⁵ Wikipedia. 2022. *Heka (god)*. *Op cit*.

⁶ te Velde, H., 1970. The God Heka in Egyptian Mythology. *Ex Oriente Lux*, p. 178.

⁷ Ritner, R., 1993. *The mechanics of ancient Egyptian magical practice*. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, p.30.

⁸ te Velde, H., *Op cit*.

⁹ Skinner, Stephen. *Techniques of Graeco-Egyptian Magic*. Singapore: Llewellyn, 2014, p. 35.

¹⁰ Flora Brooke Anthony, “Heka: Understanding Egyptian Magic on Its Own Terms,” *TheTorah.com*, accessed June 20, 2022, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/heka-understanding-egyptian-magic-on-its-own-terms>.

Depiction and Iconography

Heka was generally “depicted in anthropomorphic form as a man in royal dress wearing the regal curved beard of the gods and carrying a staff entwined with two serpents”.¹¹ The serpent-twined staff, while originally a symbol of the Sumerian god of healing Ninazu, “was adopted for Heka and traveled to Greece where it became associated with their healing god Asclepius, and today is the caduceus,”¹² the staff of Hermes, himself the Greek god of magic.

Heka is generally depicted either wearing the Hemhem Crown representing rebirth and the rising of the sun¹³, or with the symbol of Heka (i.e. the pair of upraised arms and twisted flax braid), and holding an ankh¹⁴. He is frequently depicted with two serpents, perhaps due to a myth involving Heka defeating two snakes which represented evil spirits attacking the barque of Rē¹⁵, as is said in the Coffin texts: “Hu and Heka defeat the malignant snake for me”¹⁶. Heka is thus connected to the subdual of chaos by the power of Rē’s “fire-breathing uraeus snake”¹⁷. The braid of flax itself was thought to resemble two intertwined serpents, adding a further layer to Heka’s symbolism.¹⁸ He is additionally depicted on occasion as a falcon-headed man crowned with a solar disc¹⁹—similar to depictions of Horus, but omitting the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Heka is also at times depicted in child form as *Heka-pa-khered* (“Heka the child”), a representation we may fairly call “Hekapocrates” following the Hellenized name Harpocrates as used to render *Ḥor-pa-khered* in the case of Horus.²⁰ Te Velde notes that a “special connection...proves to exist here between Heka and the *ka* of the royal infant”, and notes that the depiction of Heka as an infant was a development that

¹¹ Encyclopedia Britannica. 2022. *heka*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/heka>> [Accessed 23 June 2022].

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Wikipedia. 2022. *Hemhem crown*. [online] Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hemhem_crown> [Accessed 27 June 2022].

¹⁴ Sesh Kemet Egyptian Scribe. 2022. *Hekau/Heka*. [online] Available at: <<https://seshkemet.weebly.com/hekau-heka.html>> [Accessed 27 June 2022].

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ te Velde, H., *Op cit.*, p. 178.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

¹⁸ Ancient Egypt Online. 2022. *Heka*. [online] Available at: <<https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/heka/>> [Accessed 27 June 2022].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Sesh Kemet Egyptian Scribe. 2022. *Hekau/Heka*. [online] Available at: <<https://seshkemet.weebly.com/hekau-heka.html>> [Accessed 27 June 2022].

arose after the New Kingdom.²¹ In this capacity Heka “might thus have been conceived of as the consecrator, the initiator or strengthener of the *ka*.”²²

Role and Significance

The part that Heka played in Egyptian religion is difficult to encompass, given the aforementioned pervasiveness of Heka’s presence. Heka is both god and magic itself, both an unborn entity pre-existing creation and the child of other gods. Heka is “among the oldest gods of Egypt, recognized as early as the Predynastic Period in Egypt (c. 6000 - c. 3150 BCE)”²³. As of the time of the Coffin Texts (the First Intermediate Period, c. 2100 BCE) Heka was “said to have been created at the beginning of time by the creator Atum”²⁴; later he is shown protecting the solar barque of Osiris and said to be “capable of blinding crocodiles”²⁵. He appears in both funerary texts “guiding the soul of the deceased to the afterlife”²⁶ and in medical texts. As the Corpus Hermeticum is written in the name of Hermes Trismegistus, so too are the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts written with “Heka as their authority (the god whose power makes the texts true)”²⁷ and was “viewed as a god of inestimable power who was feared by the other gods”²⁸.

Ancient Egyptians held that “*heka* was the primordial force present at the creation of the world” and that the “chief function” of *heka* “was the preservation of the natural world order”, or *ma’at*.²⁹ The god Heka was seen as “the protector and sustainer of humanity and of the gods they worshiped as well as the world and universe in which all lived”, and upheld *ma’at*, “the central defining value of Egyptian civilization...the harmony and balance which allowed the universe to function”³⁰. Heka was “all-pervasive and all-encompassing, imbuing the daily lives of the Egyptians with magic and meaning and sustaining the principle of *ma’at* upon which life depended”³¹.

²¹ te Velde, H., *Op. Cit.*, p. 179.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ World History Encyclopedia. 2022. *Heka*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.worldhistory.org/Heka/>> [Accessed 22 June 2022].

²⁴ Wikipedia, *Heka (god)*, *Op cit.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ World History Encyclopedia, *Op cit.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica. 2022. *heka*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/heka>> [Accessed 23 June 2022].

³⁰ World History Encyclopedia, *Op cit.*

³¹ Summit Learning. 2022. *Ancient Egyptian Religion*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.summitlearning.org/docs/63295>> [Accessed 27 June 2022].

The relationship between Heka and the *ka*, between *ḥkꜣ* and *kꜣ*, is similarly difficult to overstate. The *ka* was one of the parts of the Egyptian soul, and Heka was “originally the deity who watched over one’s soul, gave one’s soul power, energy, and allowed it to be elevated in death to the afterlife”³². The deity and the *ka* of the soul are etymologically linked: the hieroglyph used to represent the *ka* sound in *ḥeka* is a pair of upraised arms, which is identical with the hieroglyph used to represent the part of the soul called *kꜣ*. The name of Heka was explained by the Egyptians themselves as “the *ḥii* of the *kꜣ*: he who dedicates or initiates the *ka* to life upon earth”³³. Heka is “an all pervading coercive power—comparable to the laws of nature in its coerciveness and all pervadingness—by which in the beginning the world was made, by which it is daily maintained and by which mankind is ruled”³⁴.

Heka was viewed by the Egyptians as “a manifestation of [the] creative energy [of the sun god Rē] as an embodiment of his Ba (his soul³⁵)”, which “empowered man to create using words and actions, mirroring the sun god’s creation of the universe”; Heka can therefore shine forth as “the creative force or life-giving energy connecting the objects, links and symbols of life with the universe, like a subtle tapestry of energy, which the magician must learn to read”³⁶. Nor is Heka’s role in creation a passive one: Heka himself is “expressly said to have the ability ‘to create’”³⁷. Indeed, “Heka could be identified with the creator himself...he was the energy which made creation possible and every act of magic was a continuation of the creative process”³⁸. He was “thought to have been present at creation and was the generative power the gods drew upon in order to create life”³⁹. He does this through the power of directed heart or will and the power

³² *Ibid.*

³³ te Velde, H., *Op cit.*, pp. 179-180.

³⁴ Anthony, F., *Op cit.*

³⁵ Both *ka* and *ba* are often translated as “soul”, but these are distinct from each other. The Egyptian soul was composed of multiple parts, varying in number over time. The three principal parts of the soul are the *ka*, the *ba*, and the *akh*. The *ka* or life force is generally defined as that part of the soul which differentiates the living from the dead; whereas the *ba* is the individual personality, and the *akh* is the part of the soul that is associated with living intellect—what the ancient Greeks would have called *Nous*. In the Qabalistic system, the *ka* is analogous to the astral body or Nephesh; the *ba* analogous to the Ruach; and the *akh* analogous to the Neshamah. The *akh* also connects to the idea of Light, as is demonstrated further in this essay.

³⁶ Rankine, David. *Heka: The Practices of Ancient Egyptian Ritual and Magic*. United Kingdom: Avalonia, 2006.

³⁷ Ritner, R., *Op cit.*, p. 30.

³⁸ Klimczak, N., 2016. *The Magic of Heka: Ancient Egyptian Rituals That Have Crossed Cultures and Time*. [online] *Ancient-origins.net*. Available at: <<https://www.ancient-origins.net/history-ancient-traditions/magic-heka-ancient-egyptian-rituals-have-crossed-cultures-and-time-006668>> [Accessed 30 June 2022].

³⁹ World History Encyclopedia, *Op cit.*

of the spoken word: “At the stroke of a word, Magic penetrates the ka or vital essence of any element in creation and invests it with power, either generative or destructive”⁴⁰.

Given the information we have about Heka, this creation takes place most especially through speech. Thōth is the god of magical spells and writings, but Heka is the spoken magic itself which is reflected in those written texts. “In this magic the mouth is essential”, states Wim van den Dungen, “for it is with it that the Great Word is spoken. If it were closed, nothing could be said and no magic could ensue”⁴¹. The view of magic and creation as being especially related to speech is commonplace across a number of cultures; we can see this in the Abrahamic traditions as well, in which God spoke the universe into being. This is expounded upon in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, which emphasizes the role of speech in creation, along with writing and breath, as God spoke the universe into being. The Sephiroth “rush to His saying like a whirlwind”⁴².

We can gain further insight into the nature of this connection by examining the relationship between Heka and the deities Hu and Sia. Hu and Sia are personifications of the tongue and heart respectively; “the heart was considered the seat of one’s individual personality, thought, and feeling, while the tongue gave expression to these aspects”⁴³. Heka, meanwhile, is “the power which infused both”⁴⁴; that is to say, the power of *intentional utterance*: the harmonious combination of one’s heart with one’s mouth to produce speech.

Heka went through a number of depictions and was seen in a number of different ways throughout the many millenia of Egypt’s antiquity, but the view of magic persisted; it “enabled a personal relationship with the gods which linked the individual to the divine. In this way, Heka can be seen as the underlying form of spirituality in ancient Egypt regardless of the era or the gods most popular at any time”⁴⁵.

With the advent of the Graeco-Egyptian cultural fusion, Heka was identified with both the Stoic concept of the *Logos* and the Neoplatonist idea of the *Nous*; “a force which flowed through and bound all things together but was, at the same time, distinct from creation and eternal”⁴⁶. Thus Heka continued into a new era, transformed but still pervading the entirety of the universe.

⁴⁰ Anthony, F., *Op cit.*

⁴¹ van den Dungen, W., 2022. *To Become a Magician : I AM HEKA !*. [online] Sofiatopia.org. Available at: <<http://www.sofiatopia.org/maat/heka.htm>> [Accessed 30 June 2022].

⁴² Kaplan, A., 1997. *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation. Revised Edition*. York Beach: Samuel Weiser, p.51.

⁴³ World History Encyclopedia, *Op cit.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Heka and the Golden Dawn

Heka has historically held almost no individual significance within the Golden Dawn tradition, garnering only a single mention in the Theoricus Ceremony⁴⁷, despite being “probably the most important god in Egyptian mythology”⁴⁸. The lack of emphasis on Heka within the Golden Dawn tradition may however be a product of the time at which the Order was originally founded: At that time Heka was “often overlooked because his presence [in Egyptian myth] was so pervasive as to make him almost invisible to the Egyptologists of the 19th and 20th centuries CE”⁴⁹. Nonetheless, there are several connections we can make from Heka to various pieces of Golden Dawn teaching.

Given Heka’s close association with *ma’at*, there exists a special relationship between the god and the office of the Hegemon, as the representative of the goddess Ma’at who is the incarnation of the principle, much as Heka is the incarnation of the principle of *heka*. In the Vienna Papyri, Heka is called “Controller of the House of Natural Law [*ma’at*]”, and the phrase “upholding Maat [sic]” was itself used to refer to “the practice of heka”⁵⁰.

Heka may also bear some connections to other godforms familiar to us from the Neophyte Hall, including that of the Hieres. The magic of Heka “is performed in the west, in the hidden region of the netherworld”⁵¹; the magician additionally must possess “knowledge of the terrible confrontation with the...’face of terror’ and of the magic (*hk3*) with which one may conquer this face of terror”⁵². We are therefore reminded of the Banner of the West, and of the speech of the Hieres in which the Neophyte aspirant is told that “fear is failure” and admonished to persevere throughout the ceremony. The occasional depiction of Heka as a falcon-headed man crowned with the solar disc also ties Heka to Horus in terms of representation.

It is curious as well that the word *heka* refers to the Egyptian crook staff, originating from the shepherd’s staff or *awet*, which “represented the pharaoh’s role as a shepherd in caring for the people of Egypt”⁵³. The crook also represents “control and

⁴⁷ Regardie, Israel. *The Golden Dawn: A Complete Course in Practical Ceremonial Magic : the Original Account of the Teachings, Rites, and Ceremonies of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*. United States: Llewellyn Publications, 1989, p. 158.

⁴⁸ World History Encyclopedia, *Op cit*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ Rankine, David, *Op cit*.

⁵¹ te Velde, H., *Op cit.*, p. 175.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵³ "Crook & Flail in Ancient Egypt: Definition & Symbolism." Study.com. October 23, 2019. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/crook-flail-in-ancient-egypt-definition-symbolism.html>.

leadership”, and is the counterpart to the *nekhekh* or flail⁵⁴. It must be noted that this word is not purely a homonym of the deity name: in addition to the consideration of hieroglyphic determinatives mentioned previously, the crook is phonetically spelled *heka* as opposed to *heka* (i.e. with a different uniliteral hieroglyph for the /k/ sound, in this case Gardiner N29 rather than Gardiner V31 as found in the name of Heka). The words must therefore not be treated as identical, but their homophonic nature connects them nonetheless. And within the Golden Dawn tradition the connection of Heka to the crook staff is an intriguing one, as it links the god of magic to the Crook of Mercy which is an emblem of Chesed and the Spheres and Paths of the Pillar of Mercy on the Qabalistic Tree of Life.

Mohamed Ibrahim notes that *heka* “means ‘ruler’, but originally it meant ‘the controller; shepherd’—the one who leads and directs the crowds. An alternative meaning is ‘the courthouse’—the place where silence is expected, and respect is given to the judge,” as within the Neophyte Ceremony where Harpocrates represents the silence in which the soul is judged in the Hall of Two Truths⁵⁵. Similarly, the god Heka is the shepherd of magic, who wields its power; and the representative of the power that naught but silence can express. Further meditation on the connections between the deity and the crook staff, as well as the meanings of the word *heka* in comparison with those of *heka*, may prove instructive.

The god Heka is associated with serpents, and carries a predecessor of the Caduceus wand, later associated with the Greek god Hermes. The Keryx who wields the Caduceus in the Neophyte Hall is therefore the herald not only of the Light, but also of Heka himself. Anubis, the godform of the Keryx, also shares the title *Wer-Hekau*, meaning “Mighty of Magic”, with several Egyptian deities including Heka as well as Isis and Thōth.⁵⁶ Seth is also given this title, and it “can be given to anyone who can create great magic”⁵⁷.

Heka is also not as distinguishable from the Light itself as one may initially be led to believe. Not only was Heka “seen as a gift from the sun god Re to mankind”⁵⁸, but an additional word meaning magic in the Egyptian language was *ꜥḥw* or *iꜥḥw* (*aḥu* or *iaḥu*), frequently translated “spells” but also often translated as “sunshine”. Indeed, the *ꜥḥw* that represents the “creative energy or magical strength of Atum” is so synonymous with this latter meaning that te Velde notes “one is sometimes in doubt whether to

⁵⁴ Ibrahim, M., 2022. *Hekaw: Magical Speech and Symbolism in Ancient Egypt*. [online] Face the Current. Available at: <<https://facethecurrent.com/hekaw-magical-speech/>> [Accessed 27 June 2022].

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Rankine, David. *Op. cit.*

⁵⁷ Ibrahim, M., *Op cit.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

translate *ꜥhw* as magic or sunshine”.⁵⁹ The root of this word, the verb *ꜥh*, “may mean either ‘to be effective’ or ‘to be bright’, and derivatives of both nuances are common”⁶⁰. Indeed, one of the more common quotes concerning Heka derives from the Book of Amduat and plays upon both meanings of the word when it states “May your words occur; may your magic shine.”⁶¹

Not only is the word *ꜥhw* or *ꜥshw* synonymous with sunlight, sunshine, or brilliance⁶², but this is the closest thing the ancient Egyptians had to a generic word for “light”. Therefore while we hold that the mythic words Khabs Am Pekht are ancient Egyptian for “Light in Extension”, a far more accurate word to translate the Light we refer to as *LVX* is in fact *ꜥhw*. And indeed to what do we refer when we speak of *LVX* if not “creative energy or magical strength”? As the god embodying magic, he who watches over the individual soul, and the initiator of the *ka*, Heka is therefore also the embodiment of the *LVX* which we are seeking; he is the overseer of the Current and the personified emblem of the Current itself. While he is so pervasive as to be invisible within the Golden Dawn tradition, Heka is behind all that we do and all that we seek. When we speak of the Golden Dawn Current, we speak of the transmission of the *LVX* in the succession of the Order and of its egregore. If there is a fitting deity to serve as the patron and embodiment of that Current, Heka seems the preeminent choice to fill this role.

⁵⁹ te Velde, H., *Op. cit.*, p.176.

⁶⁰ Ritner, R., *Op cit.*, p. 33

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Ringgren, H., 1969. “Light and Darkness in Ancient Egyptian Religion”. In *Liber Amicorum*. Numen Book Series, Vol. 17. Amsterdam: Brill, p.140.