

Magic through the Linguistic Lenses of Greek *mágos*, Indo- European **mag(h)-*, Sanskrit *māyā* and Pharaonic Egyptian *Heka*.

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You look up when you desire to be exalted. And I look down,
because I am exalted.

- Nietzsche.¹

Magic, like religion, is notoriously difficult to define. No scholarly consensus can be said to exist, a fact compounded by the increasing tendency in recent studies to deconstruct the very category of magic rather than provide a constructive or at least heuristic definition of it. What is presented here is a return to a philological basis of description, but one which attempts to extend the linguistic analysis beyond the confines of a single language/culture. We will therefore approach magic by considering some of its semantic and etymological aspects, with specific attention to i) Persian *magu-* and Greek *mágos* in Hellenistic antiquity, ii) the proposed Indo-European root of *magu-* and its cognates, iii) the root and cognates of Sanskrit *mā* as basis of the

concept of *māyā*, and iv) the Egyptian concept of *heka* and its signification in Egyptian cosmogony and theology. Finally, we will conclude by identifying a number of motifs which are felt to adumbrate a broader definition of magic, yet which nevertheless remain consistent with the examples discussed. Before we turn to this, however, some discussion of the nature of scholarship on magic needs to be ventured.

Magic and Religion : To Separate or not to Separate?

Einar Thomassen has remarked that, as far as the history of religions is concerned, magic is the black sheep in the discipline's family of theoretical concepts.² This, it is suggested, explains why one of the first scholarly tasks was the conceptual separation of magic from religion, followed by the reduction of it to a social reality.³ While scholars are increasingly realising the arbitrary nature of the magic-religion dichotomy, it appears that there is ultimately no consensus as to whether religion and magic are conceptually identical or separate. Yet evidence from the ancient world alone compounds the ambiguity.

Scholars have become increasingly aware of the dual tendency to compare magic, unfavourably, not only to religion, but also to science.⁴ Magic, it seems, has suffered at the hands of polemicists since as far back as Plato, the term being denigrated in order to exalt either logocentric paradigms on one hand (philosophy, science), or communally sanctioned 'irrationalities' on the other (religion).⁵ In the words of Johnathan Z. Smith, magic has become 'doubly dichotomized.'⁶ The positivist-evolutionist tendency to plot magic, religion and science (in that order) upon an ascending hierarchy (proceeding from the irrational to the rational) further enables magic to be chronologically subsumed by either of its opposites.⁷ Hence, magic is either erroneous religion subsumed by righteous religion (as per Gnosticism and Christianity), or pseudo-science subsumed by true science (as per alchemy and chemistry). Further permutations are also possible. Magic has been understood in terms of specific lacks or excesses that have been overcome by suitably evolved forms of religion and science,⁸ or conversely in terms of a *devolution* from such evolved forms of religion or science (i.e., when the chronological record did not support an evolutionist view). Either way, we are confronted with an understanding of magic which proceeds from an

arbitrarily constructed vantage. While some evidence supports the perspective gained from such a vantage, other evidence does not, and it is hence toward a more relativistic paradigm that post-existentialist scholars have turned when confronted with the ultimate elusiveness or contingency of any 'solid' authority. Indeed, there is a tendency to abandon any claim to the validity of categories beyond the narrow limits of their demonstrable socio-cultural construction, and a climate of over-specialisation has ensued to compensate for previous over-generalisation.

Coequal with this dual dichotomization is the so-called 'grand dichotomy' that has informed Modernist scholarship (most notably in the legacy of Tylor and Frazer).⁹ In other words, a gulf is seen to divide 'us' from 'them,' separating the rationalist West from that which is Other.¹⁰ Under the aegis of Post-Modernism in general, and social anthropology in particular,¹¹ the projection of such Modernist religious categories is widely (and rhetorically) disparaged. Hence a seemingly reactive oscillation toward the opposite pole has developed, an orientation which prefers to see all grand or universal understandings of reality as utterly contingent social-constructs. Extreme ethnocentrism is accordingly replaced with extreme cultural relativism. Yet it would seem that the tendency to deconstruct the category of magic, while it usefully exposes the prejudices of those who use the term in an etic sense, does little to clarify what it may have meant to those who used it in an emic sense.¹² Indeed, in spite of the increasing popularity of the 'social-construction-of-religious-categories' approach,¹³ other scholars have spoken for the validity and usefulness of the more traditional taxonomy. So while recognition of the arbitrary nature of this dichotomy is apparent, so too is the recognition of this dichotomy as an emic distinction in some of the studied cultures. With this comes the necessity to distinguish between the dichotomies created in the process of scholarship (i.e. etic distinctions) and those evident within the material studied (i.e. emic distinctions).¹⁴ Ultimately however, a lack of consensus prevails about the so-called demise of the grand dichotomy, for some maintain that our religious categories may nevertheless provide useful heuristic tools. That is to say, our dichotomous categories, instead of being simply abandoned or rejected as products of a

Western ethnocentric bias, may be more usefully refined and contextualised, rather than unthinkingly universalised.¹⁵

The refinement rather than deconstruction of our religious categories is somewhat justified in so far as ancient cultures exhibit emic examples of equivalent distinctions. That the conceptual separation of magic and religion antedates Early Modern theology¹⁶ is suggested most notably by recent studies of magic in Antiquity. Here the two-fold polemic which pits both religion and science against magic is viewed not merely as a retroactive projection of Modern prejudices but, as H. S. Versnal and Fritz Graf have shown, is in fact evident in the Classical world.¹⁷ That Greek philosophers and doctors began to distinguish themselves over and against magicians as early as the fifth century B.C.E. effectively displaces the Protestant and positivist-evolutionist models that are generally viewed as the prototypes for this dichotomising. Moreover, it argues for an understanding of these categories as far more deeply entrenched in Western culture than previously appreciated.

If the presence of our categories in fifth century B.C.E. Greece effectively deposes the social anthropologist myth that projected religious categories are a Modern (if not Modernist) construct. Jens Braarvig's identification of the magic-religion dichotomy in Hindu and Buddhist sources effectively demonstrates the existence of non-Western examples.¹⁸ Hence, the recognition that the magic-religion dichotomy is present in both pre-Reformation and non-Western contexts may be seen as reasonable justification for the use of the categories as a general heuristic tool, but only in so far as care is taken to contextualise the categories rather than to universalise them.

Yet we will do well to remember that while such a theoretical distinction between religion and magic constitutes the Western (i.e. Greco-Roman, Judaeo-Christian) bias, this distinction, even in light of the supporting non-Western examples supplied by Braarvig, cannot be extended to *all* non-Western cultures.¹⁹ Hence, following from the views that i) an 'unconscious clinging' to our received categories is counterproductive, and ii) deconstruction of these categories tends to preclude any meaningful

understanding of our subject, a more (self-)conscious use of definitions or categories is posited in order to actually facilitate an understanding of magic in any positive or meaningful manner.²⁰

Realizing that magic can neither be conclusively separated or identified with religion in a universal sense, other scholars have looked toward more fluid models of the relationship magic-religion. In accordance with a generally neglected aspect of Mauss' theory,²¹ Goode,²² has usefully suggested that a continuum rather than a chasm exists between the polarised opposites of magic and religion.²³ The dichotomy still exists, but it is mediated. The notion thus arises that any given magical or religious phenomenon may be plotted somewhere along the continuum, usually closer to one pole than the other, but only rarely at either extreme. Such a view allows religion and magic to blend and overlap. While this model is valuable, Thomassen's suggestion that an essential *intertextuality* characterizes the magic-religion relationship is perhaps a more nuanced restatement of the position.²⁴ Even when an emic distinction is seen to exist between magic and religion, magic is still informed by the religious and vice versa. Indeed, so much of the difficulty in distinguishing magic and religion is due to the fact that often both are deeply informed by each other's conventions. At the very least, recognition of the fundamental intertextuality of the magic-religion relationship seems enough to avoid many of the pitfalls typically engendered when attempting to account for their conceptual separateness or unity.

A Question of Semantics

PERSIAN *magu-*; GREEK *mágos*

The origins of the Western concept of magic lie in Greek antiquity. The native term for magician in archaic Greece was *gōēs*, 'sorcerer,' which referred to a socially marginal figure connected with the passage of the dead between worlds and to indigenous purificatory practises of a probable shamanic nature.²⁵ In such a context we find healing in Homeric Greece inextricably bound to magic, the term *phármakon*, 'medicine, poison' being ascribed by Homer to medico-magical practises.²⁶ This evidence suggests that a blurring of spiritual and physical technologies is evident in the archaic period,²⁷ seemingly evincing a fundamental conflation of the dualities that

would later be recapitulated in the symbolism of alchemy (e.g. medicine-poison, healing-death etc.).

By the fifth century B.C.E., a foreign loanword came to predominate in Greek descriptions of magic. Derived from the Iranian (Old Persian *maguš*, Avestan *moγu*, Elamite *ma-ku-iš*),²⁸ and apparently signifying a 'member of the tribe',²⁹ the term *mágos* is a designation specifically understood by the Greeks as well as by scholars as referring to a member of the learned Median priest-class of Archaemenid Persia.³⁰ More generally, the West-Iranian Magi typically had the reputation in classical antiquity of being wise men heir to ancient wisdom.³¹ Though the Persian priest, on closer scrutiny, seems to have been a ritual specialist rather than a 'magician,' their practises were nevertheless seen as foreign and alien to the civic religion known to the Greeks.³² Over time the exotic and barbarous dimension of the Greek perception became emphasised over the ethnographic realities,³³ a change which accounts for the subsequent employment of magic (Greek *mageía*) to characterise religious practises or ideologies deemed aberrant, fraudulent or Other. Terms such as *mágos* and *mageía* thus came to possess a dual meaning, referring on one hand to Persian priests (regarded with some prestige), and on the other to religious practices diverging from civic religiosity (regarded as errant).³⁴ This latter sense of magician came to refer particularly to itinerant ritual specialists who offered religious services for a fee.³⁵ The general notion of the Magus however, came to be regarded with simultaneous opprobrium and respect.

A century after Herodotus, a dual polemic arises against magic, indicating a shift in awareness whereby philosophy and medicine begin to be distinguished from the domain of magic. These tendencies are respectively exemplified in the writings of Plato and the Hippocratics; in both cases the methods of magic, which bordered on the domains of both the numinous and the medical, became displaced as the disciplines of theological philosophy and medicine were rationalised.³⁶ By late antiquity, magic had become well established as a term of disparagement.³⁷ Competing religious factions contemporaneous with nascent Christianity bear witness to a particularly intense need for polemical denigration of religious alternatives. Amidst such a climate, the term *mágos* became a polemical term *par excellence*. As Segal has shown,

the would-be prophet had great need to simultaneously i) prove his numinous authority and ii) distinguish himself from the stigma of magic.³⁸ Thus a strong sense of ambivalence came to characterise the charismatic philosopher and divine-man (e.g. Jesus, Apollonius etc.), who could become a sage, sorcerer or charlatan depending on one's perspective (or bias).³⁹ Indeed, a very fine and, it would seem, arbitrary line separates the exercise of spiritual power from the practise of magic, to the point where the magic-religion distinction in late antiquity was based increasingly upon a politico-religious expediency oriented towards monopolisation of the *numen*.

INDO-EUROPEAN **mag(h)*-

Despite the vicissitudes of the word *mágos* in the Graeco-Roman world, the question remains: what was its original significance? The Old Persian term is of uncertain etymology.⁴⁰ The most probable Indo-European root of 'magic' is **mag(h)*-,⁴¹ which refers primarily to the ideas of ability and power. This is certainly the semantic field attested in Pokorny's *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, which glosses Indo-European *magh*- as 'können' (can/could, to be able), 'vermögen,' (to do, to be able/capable), 'helfen' (to help, assist), and Indo-European *magh*-ti- as 'Macht' (power, might).⁴² Mann's *An Indo-European Comparative Dictionary* lists two senses of **mag(h)*-, the first of which refers to 'charm, delight,' and the second to 'contrivance, invention.'⁴³

Cognates of **mag(h)*- permit a more nuanced view. Among the Indo-Iranian languages, we find Indic *maghá*-, 'power, strength/force, wealth, gift,'⁴⁴ *maghávan*-, *maghávat*-, 'strong, powerful';⁴⁵ Iranian *magu*-, Old Persian *maguš*, 'magician.'⁴⁶ The Thraco-Phrygian languages, preserved only in Armenian, give us *marthankh*, 'aid, means of help.'⁴⁷ The Greek lexicon furnishes *mékhos*, (Doric *mákhos*, poetic *mékhar*), 'aid,'⁴⁸ as well as *mékhané*, (Doric *mákhana*), 'device, art,'⁴⁹ whence Latin *machina*, 'machine, mechanism, aid, tool' (figuratively: 'cunning trick or ruse').⁵⁰ The Germanic languages provide two of the senses attributable to the Indo-European root **mag(h)*-. The first, glossed generally with the modern German cognate, 'mögen' (to want to, like to), is attested in Gothic *magan*, Old Icelandic *mega*, *muga*, Old Frisian *muga*, Middle Low German *mögen*, and Old High German *magan*, *mugan*. The second appears to be derived

from Proto-Germanic **mag-* (to be able, to have power), which in Germanic forms **mah-tiz* and **mag-ena*.⁵¹ Examples, which include Gothic *mag*, *mahts*, Old Icelandic *magn*, *megin*, Anglo-Saxon *mæg*, Old Saxon *megin*, Old High German *magan* and Old Frisian *mei*, are glossed variously as ‘power, most important thing,’⁵² or ‘strength.’⁵³ Among the Baltic languages we find Lithuanian *māgulas*, ‘numerous, many,’⁵⁴ Latvian *māžs*, ‘fantasy,’⁵⁵ Old Church Slavonic *mogo*, *mošti*, ‘can, to be able; to do,’⁵⁶ and *moštъ* (Russian *močъ*), ‘power, strength.’⁵⁷

What this string of ‘barbarous’ words suggests is that magic may primarily find its etymological basis in concepts of power, ability and facility. Magic might best be conceived as stemming from a semantic field which suggests i) empowerment, ii) effectiveness, and iii) that which speeds, aids or quickens power, ability and effectiveness. From the foregoing we may therefore surmise, with Jean Gebser, that:

There is a word group correlating among others the words ‘make,’ ‘mechanism,’ ‘machine,’ and ‘might,’ which all share a common Indo-European root *mag(h)-*. It is our conjecture that the word ‘magic,’ a Greek borrowing of Persian origin,⁵⁸ belongs to the same field and thus shares the common root.

That said, it is necessary to reiterate that the presumed connection of the name Magi with the reconstructed Indo-European root **mag(h)-* is by no means certain. Due to the tentativeness of the premise, it seems prudent to temporarily undervalue its place in our discussion pending supporting evidence. Therefore, to supplement our understanding of magic, and to provide independent descriptive vantages, we will turn to two examples which are linguistically unrelated to the Persian-Greek loanword and its proposed cognates.

SANSKRIT *māyā*

Little evidence appears forthcoming to suggest that the Sanskrit term for magic, *māyā*, is connected to the Indo-European root discussed above.⁵⁹ The agreed etymology of *māyā* derives it from the Sanskrit root *mā*, the primary meaning of which is ‘to measure, mete out, mark off.’ Further

permutations give i) to measure across/traverse; ii) to measure by any standard, to compare; iii) to correspond in measure; iv) to measure out, apportion, grant; v) to help anyone, anything; vi) to prepare, arrange, fashion, form, build, make; vii) to show display, exhibit; and viii) to be measured, to cause to be measured or built, measure, build, erect.⁶⁰ The Sanskrit root is expandable to the broader Indo-European root, **med-*, which describes the concept of measure in the context of ancient Indo-European notions of law. According to Emile Benveniste, the Indo-European root **med-* forms the basis of the Greek concepts ‘to take care of’ (*medomai*) and ‘meditate, reflect, invent’ (*mēdomai*); the Latinised Oscan concept of ‘magistrate’ (*med-dix*); the Latin concepts of ‘heal’ (*medeor, medeo*),⁶¹ and ‘measure, moderation’ (*modus, modestus*); and lastly two Germanic concepts: ‘to measure’ (Gothic *mitan*, Old High German *mezzan*, German *messen*) and ‘to reflect, make plans’ (Gothic *miton*, Old High German *mezzon*, German *ermessen*). As has been indicated, the notion which is posited to unify these diverse lexemes is that of *measure*. However, this is not a measure of material dimension, but an ethical measure which is imposed *on* things. As Benveniste points out, it is:

... a measure of which one is master and which implies reflexion and choice, and also presupposes a decision. In short, it is not something to do with measurement but with moderation, that is to say a measure applied to something to which measure is unknown, a measure of limitation and constraint [...] which is applied to a disorderly situation.⁶²

Hence, **med-* suggests a ‘tried and tested measure which brings order into a confused situation.’ This is apparently the root meaning of the derived verbs signifying ‘to heal,’ which stem less from the notion of ‘giving health,’ and more from the concept of ‘submitting a disturbed organism to given rules,’ or ‘bringing order into a state of confusion.’⁶³ The measure of *māyā* then, is presumably to be understood in the sense of ‘taking measures,’ and may be conceived as a process which rectifies and orders according to the dictates or juridical customs of sovereign power. As scholars such as Georges Dumézil have argued,⁶⁴ divine sovereignty is dually composed in Indo-

European ideology, consisting of a spiritual authority on one hand (the so-called magico-religious function), and a temporal power on the other (the regal-judicial function).⁶⁵ In the former case, sovereign control is executed via magic, in the latter via law and war.

All this is to suggest that the root *mā* is semantically centred in controlling measures exercised by sovereign divinity. We may justifiably expand this conception to include the very process that *establishes* the order which divine sovereignty seeks to maintain. Thus, beyond the senses denoting rectification and 'healing' exist those designating creation: 'fashion, form, make, build.' Furthermore, permutations such as 'show, display, exhibit' (Monier-Williams) and 'measure of limitation' (Benveniste) suggest the cosmogonic process of differentiation. That is to say, 'show, display and exhibit' refer to appearance, and hence manifestation; 'measure of limitation' to the process of demarcation or delineation. These terms therefore indicate the process whereby the invisible is made visible, the unmanifest manifest, the unlimited limited, and so on.⁶⁶ Let us refine our position by turning to the mythic and philosophical expressions of *māyā*.

Jan Gonda observes that a central meaning may be discerned amidst the polyvalent uses and shades of meaning which adhere to *māyā*.⁶⁷ While it is a fact that, in Sanskrit literature, one is able to distinguish between a pre-Vedic *māyā* (which is more 'mythic,' as exemplified in the magical exploits of Rudra and Indra) and a Vedāntic *māyā* (which is more 'philosophical,' notable chiefly in early Upanishadic thought), care must be taken to avoid emphasising one to the exclusion of the other.⁶⁸ Thus, both the subjugating power of Indra's magical net, and the Brahminic doctrine of phenomenal reality as an illusory veil obscuring absolute reality, must equally inform our understanding of *māyā*. Indeed, it is possible to define *māyā*, after Jan Gonda, in a way that accounts for both change *and* continuity. *Māyā* may thus be discerned as an 'incomprehensible wisdom and power enabling its possessor, or being able itself, to create, devise, contrive, effect, or do something.'⁶⁹ It does not always refer to illusions or false-reality, nor does it *necessarily* deal with the issue of phenomenal versus absolute reality (i.e. *māyā* vs. *brahman*).⁷⁰ Instead, the mythic dimension of *māyā* seems to converge upon the exercise of miraculous power which results in the creation

of concrete form.⁷¹ Accordingly, *māyā* encompasses power, process and tangible result. That is to say, it is usefully understood in terms of i) the *power* which engenders an appearance, ii) the performative *act* of engendering an appearance, and iii) the resultant *appearance* itself.⁷² Not insignificantly, these three aspects of *māyā* can be usefully compared to the notions of *śakti* ('power'),⁷³ *karman* ('to act, do') and *prakṛti* ('material form').⁷⁴

It is necessary to emphasise that such a power is in essence amoral. That is to say, *māyā* acquires moral duality only insofar as 'good' or 'evil' agents employ it (e.g. *devas*, 'gods,' or *asuras*, 'anti-gods').⁷⁵ This instrumentality of *māyā* finds its most immediate expression in the form of Indra's net (*indrajālam*). Like Varuṇa's noose (to which it is often assimilated), it exists primarily as a symbol of divine superiority, and hence sovereignty.⁷⁶ Its overmastering power is well represented in *Atharvaveda* 8.8.5-8:

The Atmosphere was the net ; the great quarters [were] the net-stakes ; therewith encircling [them], the mighty one (*çakrá*) scattered away the army of the barbarians (*dásu*). [...] Since great [is] the net of the great mighty one, the vigorous (*vāgnínīvant*) – therewith do thou crowd (*ubj*) down upon all [our] foes, that no one soever of them may be released. [...] Great, O Indra, hero (*çúra*), is the net of thee that art great, that art worth a thousand, that hast hundred-fold heroism ; therewith encircling the army of the barbarians, the mighty one slew a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred million. [...] This great world was the net of the great mighty ⁷⁷ one ; by that net of Indra do I encircle all yon men with darkness.

Elsewhere, Indra's net is synonymous with *māyā*, conveying concepts such as 'magic,' 'spectacular feat,' or 'creation of phantasms.'⁷⁸ Whether employed by gods or anti-gods, *māyā* is used to engender bewildering form (appearance, manifestation), or to modify, disguise or otherwise alter the appearance of a given form.⁷⁹ This is most explicit in the divine ability to shape-shift: 'By his uncanny powers (*māyā*) does Indra/ Rove around in many a form.'⁸⁰

Ultimately, it is not a difficult transition from *māyā* as ‘outward appearance’ to *māyā* as ‘phenomenal reality,’ and in this way the mythological *māyā* finds continuation in a manner which is applicable to the cosmos as a whole.⁸¹ The philosophical dimension of *māyā* may thus be seen to converge upon the Upanishadic doctrine of the emanation of the phenomenal world by *brahman*. If anything, the shift reveals the pronounced metaphysical orientation which the Upanishads brought to Indian thought. Thus, in conceiving reality on an increasingly cosmological scale, the meaning of *māyā* is not so much transformed, but widened to signify the entire matrix of phenomenal appearance. This much is present in the passage from the *Atharvaveda* cited above (‘This great world was the net of the great mighty one’). However, in the Upanishads, this phenomenal matrix is distinguished sharply from the absolute (i.e. the godhead), from which it is typically seen as either a derived form, or as an illusory veil.⁸² This power is well characterised as ‘hiding reality and projecting a pseudo-reality.’⁸³ Yet *māyā* retains its sense of bewildering appearance, paired with a subjugating valence; in its wider application, it bequeaths to the phenomenal world the same qualities of bewilderment and confusion as are engendered by the *māyā*-wielding gods of the *Rg Veda* upon their spectators.

PHARAONIC EGYPTIAN *ḥeka*

Egyptologists are fortunate that the traditional Pharaonic Egyptian term for magic, *ḥkꜣ* (*ḥeka*), via its Coptic descendent (*hik*), came to be identified by the Egyptians with the Greek notion of magic (Greek *mageía*, Coptic *magia*),⁸⁴ thereby eliminating the problems usually besetting the use of Western categories in the study of other cultures. That being said, the Egyptian concept of magic is very different from that typically adhering to the received Western understanding (which as we have seen is largely a product of Graeco-Roman and Judaic-Christian perspectives).⁸⁵

According to H. te Velde, *ḥeka*, stemming from the verb *hwi-kꜣ* initially concerned the one who ‘strikes’ (*hwi*, ‘to strike’) the doubles or vital essences (*kꜣw*, ‘kas’) of the creator god. That is to say, the one who consecrates, dedicates, or initiates the *kas* to life on earth.⁸⁶ Following from this, Robert Ritner suggests that the original significance of *ḥeka* is thus the ‘consecration of images.’⁸⁷ In the context of Egyptian ceremonial,

this takes on particular significance, for not only is the root meaning of *ntr* (the Egyptian term for god) also ‘image,’ but the Pharaoh, the priest, and the objects employed by them in ritual are so many embodiments of divine realities. Comments Ritner:

The ‘imagistic’ process is shown repeatedly on Egyptian temple reliefs in which the king’s ritual presentation of food, diadems and prisoners is a *reflection* of the god’s granting of life, prosperity, and victory, each object being a tangible image of its abstract counterpart. The essential unity of the divine and royal actor is concretely embodied in the person of the Pharaoh, who is at once god and living image, expressed theologically in such names as [...] ‘The living image of Amon/Re.’ Obviously Pharaoh cannot perform every rite in all temples, and thus these were performed by *his* image, the priest. It is the priesthood which composed, collected and performed rites and spells for both public and private ceremonies, not merely imitating gods, but becoming them. By an intricate series of consciously elaborated imagery, humans may exploit the powers of the primordial gods.⁸⁸

That royal and priestly action is homologous with divine action therefore suggests a functional identity by which humans can be magically assimilated to gods. The divine power to act at a distance is perhaps reflected in the word translated as ‘spells’ (*špw*, or *akhu*), which is traceable to a verbal root signifying both ‘to be effective,’ and ‘to shine.’⁸⁹ Accordingly, spells have the literal nuance of ‘effective things,’ and, concomitant with this, they may also denote an *emanation*. The latter notion seems to be justified insofar as it is consistent with the role of magic in Egyptian cosmogony and theogony.

Heka, in addition to being a concept, is also personified as a god, and throughout Egyptian texts, no real distinction seems to be made between the concept of ‘magic’ (*heka*), the title ‘magician’ (*heka*) and the god ‘Magic’ (*Heka*).⁹⁰ The divine personification is portrayed in Spell 261 of the *Coffin Texts* as the son of the Creator, as well as the causal, animating force of the gods:

I am he whom the Unique Lord made before two things ('duality') had yet come into being in this land by sending forth his unique eye when he was alone, by the going forth from his mouth ... when he put Hu ('Logos') upon his mouth.

I am indeed the son of Him who gave birth to the universe ('the All'), who was born before his mother yet existed. I am the protection of that which the Unique Lord has ordained. I am he who caused the Ennead to live ... I have seated myself, O bulls of heaven, in this my great dignity as Lord of *kas*, heir of Re-Atum.⁹¹

In the cosmogonic and theogonic process (which is cyclic, recurring with each dawn), Heka as the first-born son of Re-Atum, is in actuality 'the hypostasis of the creator's own power which begets the natural order,' and as such may be seen to reside within the creative word itself (i.e. 'logos,' personified as Hu).⁹² Heka is therefore coeval or consubstantial with his father, and while Heka manifests as the son of Atum-Re, he does not do so as a newly created god, but as the expression (cf. *b3* or *ba*) of the vital essence or power (*ka*) of the creator himself.⁹³ The epithets of Heka, such as 'First-born son (of the creator-god)' and 'Eldest Magician,' are therefore explicable by virtue of his provenance as the primordial power which initiates, permeates, animates and ultimately actualises existence.⁹⁴ Just as the creator must precede the theogony, so too must his creative force, personified as Heka, necessarily antedate the divine forces that it brings into being (to include 'rival' first-born deities such as Shu).⁹⁵

Of course, Heka's primacy as a personification of divine creative power does not preclude other roles. This is most notable in the chthonic journey of the solar bark, where Heka protects the sun-god against nocturnal dangers, the most formidable of which is the eternally regenerating serpent of chaos and non-existence, Apophis.⁹⁶ In the tenth hour of the Book of Gates, for instance, we find the god Heka wielding nets to constrain and control Apophis, thereby effecting the dominance of divine order over primeval chaos through magical binding.⁹⁷ Thus, the power which establishes the ordered universe at daybreak, inherent both to the generation and

animation of existence, is wielded by night to defend the created order and destroy its enemies.

It is thus apparent that the force embodied as *Ḥeka*, like the net wielded by Indra, is an ultimately bivalent force. This follows from its instrumentality, and as such it may be understood as an essentially unadulterated power. Indeed, lexical evidence tells us that as early as the twentieth dynasty, the phonetic rendering of the god's name was often replaced with the emblem of the lion's hind-quarters (*pḥty*), to which is ascribed the meaning of 'strength/power.'⁹⁸

Thus, the concept of *ḥeka* is primarily understandable as a bivalent force inherent in the *ka* or vital essence, and able to be emanated to effect creative/apotropaic and destructive influence. Like **mag(h)-* and *māyā*, it is deeply bound with notions of power, effectiveness and the ability to *do*. Therefore, evidence philologically unrelated to Indo-European **mag(h)-* serves to consolidate, via cultural if not linguistic parallel, the tentative identification of Persian *magu-* with the semantic field of strength and ability. Moreover, the instrumentality of magic, expressed in both the *Atharvaveda* and the *Book of Gates* as a binding net, seems to correlate well enough with the notion of 'mechanism' or 'tool' attributable to **mag(h)-*. Additionally, while *māyā* and *ḥeka* are without doubt forces of domineering subjugation, their destructive valence is compensated by their connection to the sovereign creative force that underpins the phenomenal cosmos. Overall, we can begin to see a basic facility between the numinous and the concrete.

Between Essence and Manifestation

By way of conclusion, we will draw attention to a few motifs which may reveal additional meaning. It should be noted that such can only be preliminary to a more encompassing theory of magic, and should not be mistaken for a comprehensive nor universal definition. At most, I seek to articulate some of the common underpinnings discernable in the material presented above. Where appropriate, I will cross-reference material outside the bounds of the present discussion in order to further consolidate the significance of the motifs identified.

As we have seen, the semantic complex of power-ability-effectiveness is evident beyond the proposed cognates of *mágos*. Magic, as apprehended through the linguistic lenses of **mag(h)-*, *māyā* and *heka*, all converge on the power to *do*.⁹⁹ In the latter two examples, this is closely connected with the power of affecting and effecting *appearance* (e.g. phenomenal reality, living image). This sense is not explicit in the Indo-European derivatives of **mag(h)-*; only the Latvian cognate *māžs*, ‘phantasy,’ gives us a comparable sense. Yet, in the predominantly Greek-influenced magical tradition of Western Europe (of which the Florentine Neoplatonists are representative), it is precisely the notion of *phantasía*, ‘imagination’ that is discernable as a fundamental magical concept.¹⁰⁰ Here it is worth noting that the Greek term *phantasía* (derived from the verb *phaínō*, ‘to appear, to be apparent, to come to light’) is bound to the notion of that which is *phenomenal* (*phainómenon*). Derived from the same verb is *phantázō*, ‘to take a definite appearance, to take shape – as of a spectre, or to give oneself an appearance, to exalt oneself.’¹⁰¹ All this pertains quite transparently to phenomenology. Of this, we may extrapolate two orders: A first, which simply signifies manifestation, and a second, which seems to recall the Vedic understanding of *māyā* as an ability or power to affect an appearance in the phenomenal world. One pertains to the manifest world itself (i.e. the world of phenomena), and the other to something *beyond* the world of appearances which is able to reveal itself in phenomenal form (e.g. as in a theophany).

The primacy of *power* in our discussion of magic has some further implications that require explication. The deep and fundamental connection of magic to power provides the basis upon which we may understand much of its attendant symbology. This is most notably structured in terms of a divine-human continuum. The scale of being from human to god is functionally equivalent to a scale of power. Relative positions on this scale are sufficient to account for the duality of god and human, immortal and mortal, subjugator and subjugated, master and slave, and so on. Moreover, it also provides the basis of initiation, which is not only founded upon ontological transition, but accounts for the strong presence of *liminality* in the mechanics and symbology of magic.¹⁰² Thus, to acquire magical power is equivalent to making the transitions which result in self-deification, as was explicitly the

case in Egypt where identification with the deity was fundamental to the mechanics of magic.¹⁰³ More power meant more ability, more effectiveness, and was analogous to more ontological freedom in the cosmos. Conversely, less power meant less ability, effectiveness and freedom in the cosmos. Almost unanimously, this conception of reality is overwhelmingly cast in the symbolism of binding; fettering and unfettering thus become the currency of subjugation and liberation upon the scale of being. Magically, this finds diverse expression: Indra's net, the bound prisoner motif in Egyptian ritual, the Greek *katádesmos* and Roman *defixio*, Giordano Bruno's *vinculum*, to name but a few.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, it is here where we can most clearly see the boundaries between religion and magic dissolve, as is suggested, for instance, in the root meanings of *religō* ('tie up, fasten') or *yoga* ('to yoke').¹⁰⁵ Even in philosophy, the will to power has been expressed (by Nietzsche) as *Selbst-überwindung*, literally 'self over-winding.'¹⁰⁶

Finally, that the magician could effect a resonance or identification of human and god on the scale of being suggests, as it were, some *bond* between these dimensions of existence. This is implicit in so far as the divine power of magic actually gives rise to the manifest or phenomenal world, whether emanated as cosmogony or projected as a bewildering veil. Thus the impetus toward divine power, like Gnosis, may be conceived as a return to an original or primordial condition;¹⁰⁷ it is tantamount to a reversal of the cosmogony, a withdrawal of projected delusions. Indo-European traditions are less anticosmic; rather than a 'fall' from spirit to matter to be rectified by salvific ascent, the transition is viewed as an eternally recurring shift between microcosmic and macrocosmic orders of manifestation (the basic substance of each condition being identical, merely constituted differently at different moments in the cosmic cycle).¹⁰⁸ Grounds exist to suggest that the theogony sung by the Persian Magi during ritual sacrifice¹⁰⁹ bespoke the creative phase of precisely this cosmogony.¹¹⁰ Egyptian processes of eternally-regenerating creation are not entirely dissimilar. All this is to suggest that the bond between essence and manifestation is cyclic, as reflected in the phases of interiorisation and objectification, union and separation, 'love and strife.'¹¹¹ Esotericism and exotericism, magic and religion, may well be seen as complimentary, any distinction between them being one of relative orientation.

Be that as it may, it is enough to establish that the path to attaining divine power is centripetal, while the path of *exercising* divine power is centrifugal. Our etymologies affirm that magic is most closely related to the latter phase. What is fundamental to magic is sufficient *mastery* over the process, which brings us back to the concepts of power, ability, and effectiveness (**mag(h)-*). Whether magic is the vital power consubstantial with divinity and responsible for the generation and animation of the phenomenal world (*heka*), or the bewildering power of appearances which conceals and reveals absolute reality (*māyā*), mastery over this power enables both the trans-empirical manipulation of phenomenal reality (hence magic as commonly understood), and the ‘shifting of the veil’ to reveal absolute reality (hence self-deifying Gnosis).

Notes

¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Werke : Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967-8), VI.I, 45: ‘Ihr seht nach Oben, wenn ihr nach Erhebung verlangt. Und ich sehe hinab, weil ich erhoben bin.’ Translation, R.J. Hollingdale.

² Einar Thomassen, ‘Is Magic a Subclass of Ritual?’ in *The World of Ancient Magic : Papers from the First International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4-8 May 1997*, ed. Hugo Montgomery, Einar Thomassen, and David R. Jordan, *Papers from the Norwegian Institute at Athens ; 4* (Bergen: The Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1999), 55-6.

³ Cf. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen and Unwin, 1915), 44 ff; James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough : A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings* (London: Macmillan, 1911; reprint, 1963), 234 ff; Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 24.

⁴ Cf. the articles collected in Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, eds., *Religion, Science, and Magic : In Concert and in Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁵ For discussion of issues surrounding rationality, see Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality, Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures ; 1981*. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, ‘Trading Places,’ in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Allan Mirecki, *Religions in the Greco-Roman World ; 129* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 13-14.

⁷ Frazer conjectures that magic is the earliest and most primitive form of human thought: ‘just as on the material side of human culture there has everywhere been

an Age of Stone, so on the intellectual side there has everywhere been an Age of Magic.' See Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 232-40. For discussion, see Smith, 'Trading Places,' 13-15.

⁸ Smith, 'Trading Places,' 14-15.

⁹ For Tylor, see Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture : Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1871), I, 116.

¹⁰ See Jens Braarvig, 'Magic : Reconsidering the Grand Dichotomy,' in *The World of Ancient Magic: Papers from the First International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4-8 May 1997*, ed. Hugo Montgomery, Einar Thomassen, and David R. Jordan (1999), 21 n.1.

¹¹ See E. E. Evans-Pritchard's 'The Morphology and Function of Magic : A Comparative Study of Trobriand and Zande Ritual and Spells,' *American Anthropologist* 31 (1929): 619-41; 'Witchcraft (Mangu) among the A-Zande,' *Sudan Notes and Records* 12 (1929): 163-249; and *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), *passim*.

¹² On the original formulation of the terms 'emic' and 'etic' (derived from 'phonemic' and 'phonetic'), see Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Preliminary ed. (Glendale, Ill.: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954). It should be noted that in the kind of linguistic analysis that we will be advancing, such distinctions can become lost to the extent that lexical items are removed from their original contexts.

¹³ Cf. discussion in David Frankfurter, 'The Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond : Towards a New Taxonomy of Magicians,' in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Allan Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World ; 141* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), 159.

¹⁴ Braarvig, 'Magic : Reconsidering the Grand Dichotomy,' 27-8. Recent years have seen the scholar and practitioner of magic coincide in the same individual, as is the case, for instance for Susan Greenwood, on which see her *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld : An Anthropology* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2000), 11-19. This is not an exclusively modern phenomenon, however; Apuleius also blurs the boundary with the dual perspectives displayed in his *Apologia* and *Metamorphoses*.

¹⁵ Braarvig, 'Magic : Reconsidering the Grand Dichotomy,' 22-3.

¹⁶ Cf. Keith Vivian Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic : Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 641 ff.

¹⁷ Fritz Graf, 'Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic,' in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Allan Mirecki, *Religions in the Greco-Roman World ; 129* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 30-35; H. S. Versnel, 'Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion,' *Numen* 38 (1991): 188-92.

¹⁸ Braarvig, 'Magic : Reconsidering the Grand Dichotomy,' 44-5. Braarvig discusses

Bhavya as an apologist for the religious rather than magical use of mantras in mahāyāna Buddhism.

¹⁹ Hence the approach of Robert Ritner, who, with no pretence of universality, responds by explicitly adopting a working definition advanced from a self-acknowledged Modern Western perspective, a definition which is proclaimed as serviceable only for examining cultures purely from our own cultural vantage. See Robert Kriech Ritner, 'The Religious, Social and Legal Parameters of Traditional Egyptian Magic,' in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Allan Mirecki, *Religions in the Greco-Roman World*; 129 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 44-5. Here Ritner defines magic as: 'any activity which seeks to obtain its goal by methods outside the simple laws of cause and effect.' Moreover, Ritner's study of ancient Egyptian magic shows, contrary to evidence for the separation of magic and religion, that magic (or *heka*), was actually *central* to Egyptian religion, thereby providing a finite historical counter-example to the validity of Western categories. See Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization*; No. 54 (Chicago, Ill.: Oriental Institute of University of Chicago, 1993), 4-28, 192-249.

²⁰ Braarvig, 'Magic : Reconsidering the Grand Dichotomy,' 21 ff.

²¹ In Mauss's words, we have: 'two extremes which form the differing poles of magic religion: the pole of sacrifice and the pole of evil spells.' Commenting further, he adds that: 'A continuity thus exists between magic and religion. Yet despite this interrelationship, an awareness of their differences is also present, which thereby influences how they are practised.' Consequently, Mauss reasons that these consciously expressed differences enable some kind of classification to be made.

²² William J. Goode, 'Magic and Religion : A Continuum,' *Ethnos* 14, no. 2-4 (1949): 176 ff.

²³ Cf. discussion in Versnel, 'Magic-Religion,' 181, 87.

²⁴ Thomassen, 'Is Magic a Subclass of Ritual?'

²⁵ Cf. Ritner's conclusion (in accordance with van Genep) that for ancient Egyptian temple practice, 'magic' in fact comprised the *techniques* of 'religion' (i.e. official cult), from which it was inseparable. Ritner, *Mechanics*, 247.

²⁶ For the shamanic nature of the archaic Greek magician (*gōēs*), see Walter Burkert, "ΓΟΗΣ : Zum griechischen 'Schamanismus'," *Rheinisches Museum* 105 (1962): 36-55. For Greek shamanism in general, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational, Sather Classical Lectures*, v. 25 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 135-78.

²⁷ Graf, "Excluding the Charming," 36-7. According to Graf, the Homeric *phármakon* was a drug possessing supernatural effect, and employed toward both criminal and medical ends (e.g. poisoning and healing). This existed alongside the *epoidē* or 'incantation,' a verbal utterance with supernatural effect (mostly positive/medical).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36-40.

²⁹ See Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, Indogermanische*

Bibliothek. 2. Reihe, Wörterbücher. (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1960), II, 156; Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi : Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World v. 133.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 394-5. The Iranian loanword reached Greece in the sixth century B.C.E., on which see Burkert, „ΓΟΗΣ,“ 38.

³⁰ Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 387.

³¹ The chief classical account of the Magi is Herodotus' *Histories*, where the Magi (Greek *Mágoi*) are mentioned as one among several Medean tribes (1.101). Others include the Busae, the Paretaceni, the Struchates, the Arizanti, and the Budii. For text and translation, see Herodotus, *Herodotus*, trans. A. D. Godley, *Loeb Classical Library*. (London: Heinemann, 1920). For secondary accounts of the Magi, see Elias J. Bickerman and H. Tadmor, "Darius I, Pseudo-Smerdis and the Magi," *Athenaeum* 59 (1978): 239-61; Gherardo Gnoli, "Magi," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1993), IX, 79-81; Jong, *Traditions of the Magi*, 387-413. For the development of the meaning of *mágos* in the classical world see Arthur Darby Nock, "Paul and the Magus," in *Arthur Darby Nock : Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), I, 308-330. See also Graf, "Excluding the Charming," 30-33; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 26 ff; Peter Kingsley, "Meetings with Magi : Iranian Themes among the Greeks, from Xanthus of Lydia to Plato's Academy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 5 (1995): 173-209.

³² This was certainly the case for Plato (*First Alcibiades*, 122 E f, 123 A) as it was for Apuleius (*Apology*, 25.10).

³³ Various attributes and practices of the Magi are recorded in Herodotus, to include royal dream interpretation, rites of exposure, killing of noxious creatures, offering of libations, sacrifice, and sorcery. See Herodotus' *Histories*, 1.107, 1.120, 1.128, 7.19, 7.37 (dream interpretation), 1.140 (rites of exposure, killing of noxious animals), 7.43 (offering of libations), 7.113 (sacrifice), and 7.191 (sacrifice, sorcery).

³⁴ Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 29.

³⁵ The Magus was also conceived as a charlatan, fraud or quack. See Nock, "Paul and the Magus," 301 ff, 23-4.

³⁶ Walter Burkert, "Itinerant Diviners and Magicians : A Neglected Element in Cultural Contacts," in *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C. : Tradition and Innovation : Proceedings of the Second International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 1-5 June, 1981*, ed. Robin Hägg (Stockholm: Svenska institutet i Athen, 1983), 116, 18.

³⁷ For Plato, see in particular *Laws*, 10.909 B. For the Hippocratics, see Hippocrates and Heraclitus, *Hippocrates : With an English Translation by W.H.S. Jones and E.T. Withington, Loeb Classical Library*. (London: Heinemann, 1923), II, 140-1. See discussion in Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 20-7; Graf, "Theories of Magic in Antiquity," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Allan Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World ; 141* (Leiden: E.J. Brill,

2002), 97-9.

³⁸ For discussion of the understanding of magic contemporaneous with Jesus, see Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 68-91.

³⁹ Segal, "Hellenistic Magic : Some Questions of Definition," 355 ff.

⁴⁰ Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 232-3.

⁴¹ Gnoli, "Magi," 79.

⁴² In historical linguistics, an asterix before a lexeme denotes a word that has been reconstructed by scholars; while unattested, it is proposed as a root of attested forms.

⁴³ Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern: Francke, 1951), II, 695.

⁴⁴ Stuart Edward Mann, *An Indo-European Comparative Dictionary* (Hamburg: H. Buske, 1984), 726.

⁴⁵ Pokorny, *IeW*, II, 695: 'Macht, Kraft, Reichtum, Gabe.'

⁴⁶ *Ibid*: 'kräftig.'

⁴⁷ *Ibid*: 'Magier, Zauberer.'

⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 'Hilfsmittel.'

⁴⁹ *Ibid*: 'Hilfsmittel.'

⁵⁰ Mann, *ICD*, 726. Cf. **magh-* as 'contrivance, invention.'

⁵¹ Pokorny, *IeW*, II, 695: 'Hilfsmittel, Werkzeug, List.'

⁵² Stephen E. Flowers, *Runes and Magic : Magical Formulaic Elements in the Older Runic Tradition* (New York: P. Lang, 1986), 127; Friedrich Kluge and Elmar Seebold, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 22. Aufl. / ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 453; Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte, Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1956), I, 275 ff.

⁵³ Pokorny, *IeW*, II, 695: 'Macht, Hauptsache.'

⁵⁴ *Ibid*: 'Kraft.'

⁵⁵ *Ibid*: 'zahlreich, viel.'

⁵⁶ Mann, *ICD*, 726. Usually attested in the plural: *mā• i*, 'fantasies.'

⁵⁷ Pokorny, *IeW*, II, 695: 'können, vermögen.'

⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 'Macht, Stärke.'

⁵⁹ Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, 46.

⁶⁰ While *māyā* has in the past been connected to I-E **mag(h)-*, more recent scholarly consensus deems this unlikely. However, due to the nature of the evidence, the position cannot be wholly excluded, if only for the reasons that a) where the Indo-European root and the Sanskrit term differ phonetically (a voiced palatal stop versus a palatal semivowel), they nevertheless share the same *place* of articulation (i.e. the palate), and b) *māyā* came to possess the dual meaning of 'magic' and 'illusion' as did *mágos* in the Graeco-Roman world. Be that as it may, the cognates or *māyā* are with Zend Avestan *mā*; Greek *metron*, *metreo*, *medomai*;

Latin *mētiōr*, *mensus*, *mensura*, *medeō/r*; Slavic *mera*; and Lithuanian *merà*. Cf. Emile Benveniste and Jean Lallot, *Indo-European Language and Society, Studies in General Linguistics*. (London: Faber, 1973), 400; Monier Monier-Williams, Ernst Leumann, and Carl Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary : Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*, New ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 804.

⁶¹ Monier-Williams, Leumann, and Cappeller, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 804.

⁶² Some derived forms: *medicare*, *medicatio*, *medicina*, *medicamentum*, *remedium*.

⁶³ Benveniste and Lallot, *Indo-European Language and Society*, 403.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 405.

⁶⁵ See in particular Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna : An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty*, 2nd ed. (New York: Zone Books, 1988), *passim*. For general discussion of Dumézil's theories, see C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology : An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil*, Rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), *passim*.

⁶⁶ Cf. the excellent exegesis on this motif by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government, American Oriental Series ; v. 22*. (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1942), *passim*.

⁶⁷ In this light, the Greek and Germanic cognates which give us 'reflect, invent, make plans' seem to indicate a microcosmic reflection of a homologous macrocosmic process. That is to say, from an inner or unmanifest activity (*meditation*, *men-tation*) is derived an outer or manifest expression (taking measures).

⁶⁸ J. Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), 192-3: 'It cannot however be said that the idea itself has in the course of the last twenty-three hundred centuries or so been essentially modified. What was at first intuitively understood and imperfectly formulated, elucidated by popular similes, or intimated by means of mythological imagery, underwent, in later times, a process of intellectualization, of deepening and broadening; the very core of the concept, however, remained unaffected.'

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 164-5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 166. In this connection, it is well to note that Indra, whom we see to figure prominently the mythic expression of *māyā*, is in Dumézil's schema the second-function god, i.e. the king-warrior who is characterised by activity (*rājas*), that is, one who enacts or *does*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Teun Goudriaan, *Māyā Divine and Human : A Study of Magic and Its Religious Foundations in Sanskrit Texts, with Particular Attention to a Fragment on Vishnu's Māyā Preserved in Bali*, 1st ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), 2. Creation of concrete form may take human or non-human forms.

⁷³ On *māyā* as outward appearance, cf. *R̥g Veda* 6.58.1: *vīṣvā hí māyā́ ávasi svadhāvo bhadrā́ te pūshann ihá rātír astu*. For edition, see Theodor Aufrecht, ed.,

Die Hymnen des Rigveda, 4. Aufl. / ed., 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1968), I, 448.

⁷⁴ Cf. the tantric Śakti as personification as the Lord's creative power.

⁷⁵ Goudriaan, *Māyā*, 3-4.

⁷⁶ Cf. *su-māyā*-, 'good *māyā*,' and *durmāyā*-, 'bad *māyā*,' as discussed in Gonda, *Change and Continuity*, 167.

⁷⁷ Goudriaan, *Māyā*, 215. The motif of *māyā* as a magic net (*māyājāla*) is traceable to the *Atharvaveda*.

⁷⁸ Translation, William Dwight Whitney, *Atharva-Veda-Samhita*, 2nd Indian reprint ed., 2 vols., *Harvard Oriental Series*; V.7; V.8. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), II, 504, parenthesis and square brackets Whitney, square brackets marking ellipses, mine (here I have only removed editorial commentary between the translated passages).

⁷⁹ Goudriaan, *Māyā*, 214.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁸¹ *Rg Veda* 6.47.18: 'rūpām-rūpam prātirūpo babhūva tād asya rūpām praticākṣhaṇāya / indro māyābhīḥ pururūpa ūyate yuktā' hy asyā hārayaḥ ṣatā dāṣa' For edition, see Aufrecht, ed., *Rigveda*, I, 437. See also *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.5.19. Text and translation in *Bṛhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣad : Containing the Original Text with Word-by-Word Meanings, Translation, Notes and Introduction*, 2nd ed., *Upaniṣad Series*. (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1951), 177-8.

⁸² Gonda, *Change and Continuity*, 171.

⁸³ Teun Goudriaan, "Māyā," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1993), IX, 297.

⁸⁴ Gonda, *Change and Continuity*, 184-5.

⁸⁵ This occurred in Coptic Christian times. A passage from the 'Martyrdom of Saint George' is cited by Ritner as representative of the identification, also attested in the Coptic translation of *Acts* 8: 9 to describe the 'magic' of Simon Magus (*rhik* 'to do *hik*' = Greek *mageúon*). See Ritner, *Mechanics*, 14-15; Ritner, "Traditional Egyptian Magic," 48. On the derivation of Coptic *hik* see Jaroslav Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 276. For Coptic usage and Greek parallels, see Walter Ewing Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary : Compiled with the Help of Many Scholars* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939), 661.

⁸⁶ The inadequacy of Western theories of magic in relation to *heka* is discussed in W. Gutekunst, "Zauber(er) (-Mittel, -Praktiken, -Spruch)," in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, ed. Wolfgang Helck, Eberhard Otto, and Wolfhart Westendorf (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1972), VI, cols. 1321-6; Ritner, *Mechanics*, 4-28, 192-249.

⁸⁷ Herman te Velde, "The God Heka in Egyptian Theology," *Jaarbericht ex Oriente Lux* 21 (1970): 179-80. The sense of 'initiation' (i.e. a beginning) may well be

reflected in the native or 'folk' etymology from Esna, which derives *ḥk3* from *ḥ(3.t)-k3(.t)*, 'first work'. Cf. Ritner, *Mechanics*, 25.

⁸⁸ Ritner, "Traditional Egyptian Magic," 49.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 50-1, italics Ritner

⁹⁰ Cf. Fifth hour, fifth scene in *The Book of the Amduat*: 'may your ... magic shine.' For text and (German) translation, see Erik Hornung, *Das Amduat : Die Schrift des verborgenen Raumes*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963), I, 180, II, 98: 'Mögen eure Worte entstehen und mögen eure Zauber leuchten (*sšp*).' On the relationship of *ḥk3* to *šhw*, and the sense 'effective; bright,' see Ritner, *Mechanics*, 30, 34; te Velde, "Heka," 176-7.

⁹¹ Ritner, *Mechanics*, 16; te Velde, "Heka," 177.

⁹² Translation: Ritner, *Mechanics*, 17. See also Raymond Oliver Faulkner, ed., *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Warminster, U.K.: Aris & Phillips, 1973), I, 199-201; te Velde, "Heka," 180. Ritner and te Velde appear to lend the most precise renditions of the passage under consideration.

⁹³ Ritner, *Mechanics*, 17. On Heka as preceding creation, see discussion in Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt : The One and the Many* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 208-9; Ritner, *Mechanics*, 17; te Velde, "Heka," 176.

⁹⁴ On Heka as a hypostasis or personification of the creator's power, see Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1952), 301; Ritner, *Mechanics*, 17; te Velde, "Heka," 180-1. The connection of *ḥeka* with the vital essence (*ka*) is variously attested. At the birth of the Pharaoh, the child and his *ka* are brought to the god Heka, who brings them to Ennead of gods. Heka probably bestows magical protection via consecrating or initiating vital potential. Elsewhere, Heka is one of the fourteen *kas* of the Pharaoh, and one of the 14 *kas* and 7 *bas* of Re. See te Velde, "Heka," 178-82.

⁹⁵ Ritner, *Mechanics*, 25. It is worth noting that the native etymology ('first work') appears to be consistent with these epithets. On the generative power of Heka in the cosmogony, see *Coffin Texts* spell 648: 'It was Heka ... who created the mountains and knit the firmament together.' Translation: Faulkner, *Coffin Texts*, 223-4.

⁹⁶ te Velde, "Heka," 180-3. It has been rightly recognised that the fundamental consubstantiality of magical power underpins the significance of the creator's bodily fluids (notably saliva), a motif which informs practices down to the *Greek Magical Papyri*. See Ritner, *Mechanics*, 74 ff.

⁹⁷ Ritner, *Mechanics*, 18-20.

⁹⁸ Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 208.

⁹⁹ Ritner, *Mechanics*, 25-6; te Velde, "Heka," 184-5. Te Velde glosses *phṯy* as 'physical strength, sexual power, creative power.'

¹⁰⁰ This much was clear to Mauss (based on somewhat different evidence). Marcel Mauss's theory of magic first appeared in French as early as 1904, later to be published in his *Sociologie et Anthropologie* in 1950, and translated into English

in 1972. For editions, see Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, "Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie," *Année sociologique* 7 (1904); Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*. Here magic and technology are seen as different kinds of ability, magic being etymologically connected with the semantic notion of 'to do,' as attested in the examples of Sanskrit *karman*, *kṛtya*, Latin *factum* and German *Zauber*. This sense of effectiveness attributed to the magical rite was seen as indistinguishable from the *effectiveness* of techniques commonly found in arts, crafts etc. While the arts and crafts themselves are 'universally distinguished' from magic, Mauss suggests that rites might be distinguished as '*traditional actions whose effectiveness is sui generis*' (Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 19-20, emphasis Mauss). Magic then, while essentially the art of doing things, is more specifically the art of 'pure production *ex nihilo*.' A magician is able to achieve with word and gesture what technique achieves with labour: 'A magician does nothing, or almost nothing, but makes everyone believe that he is doing everything' (*A General Theory of Magic*, 141-2).

¹⁰¹ The Renaissance Neoplatonists from Ficino to Bruno are particularly representative. For a magisterial treatment of magic and phantasmology in Renaissance thought, see Ioan P. Culianu, *Eros and Magin in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), *passim*. See also the chapters on the *vis imaginativa* in Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition : Studies in Western Esotericism*, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 99-167. For the theoretical exposition of the imaginal as a mediating reality with its own ontological verity, see Henry Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis: Or, the Imaginary and the Imaginal* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1976), *passim*.

¹⁰² Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought* (Norwood, Pa.: Norwood Editions, 1977), 12.

¹⁰³ For the general theory of liminality and initiation, see Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process : Structure and Anti-Structure, Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures ; 1966*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969). For discussion of liminality in the mechanics and symbology of magic, see Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 106 ff; Sarah Iles Johnston, "Crossroads," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 88 (1991): 217-24; H. S. Versnel, "The Poetics of the Magical Charm : An Essay on the Power of Words," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Allan Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World ; 141* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), 145-51.

¹⁰⁴ Derived practices continue down through to the Theurgy of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the *Mithras Liturgy* and the *Greek Magical Papyri* in general.

¹⁰⁵ For the bound-prisoner motif and the function of binding in Egyptian magic, see Ritner, *Mechanics*, 113-44. For binding in Graeco-Roman execration texts, see John G. Gager, ed., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York:

Oxford University Press, 1992); see also the discussion in Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 118-26. For Bruno, see “On Magic” and “A General Account of Bonding” in Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle, and Unity*, trans. Robert de Lucca and Richard J. Blackwell, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 105-42, 45-76; For discussion see Culianu, *Eros and Magic*, 95-9. In Hebrew, magic and binding cohere in the terms *hōbēr*, *habārīm*, on which see Peter Schäfer, “Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism,” in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg, *Studies in the History of Religions*, 75 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 27; However, cf. comments in W. Robertson Smith, “On the Forms of Divination and Magic Enumerated in Deut. XVIII. 10, 11 (Part II),” *The Journal of Philology* 14 (1885): 123. In Nordic myth, fetters of war and sorcery are described in *Hávamál* 148-9, *Gróagaldr* 10, and chapter 7 of *Heimskringla*; among the epithets of Óðin are Haptaguð (fetter-god) and Haptoenir (fetter-loosner). For further examples and discussion, see Mircea Eliade, ‘The “God Who Binds” and the Symbolism of Knots,’ in *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 92-124.

¹⁰⁶ Eliade, ‘The “God Who Binds”,’ 115.

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 6.1: 8: ‘Der Mensch ist Etwas, das Überwunden werden soll. Was habt ihr gethan, ihn zu überwinden?’

¹⁰⁸ On this theme, see Hans Jonas, “Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought,” *Journal of Religion* 49, no. 4 (1969): 315-29.

¹⁰⁹ Bruce Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 5.

¹¹⁰ Herodotus, *Herodotus*, 1.131-2.

¹¹¹ Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, Society*, 53-6.

¹¹² On love and strife, cf. Empedocles:

There is a double birth of what is mortal, and a double passing away; for the uniting of all things brings one generation into being and destroys it, and the other is reared and scattered as they are again being divided. And these things never cease their continual exchange of position, at one time all coming together into one through love, at another again being borne away from each other by strife’s repulsion.

Text and translation, M. R. Wright, ed., *Empedocles, the Extant Fragments* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 96-7, 166.

Research Notes

Although the JSM encourages longer articles, the following is an example of the type of succinct, thought-provoking and detailed shorter piece that we would be delighted to see in our new ‘Research Notes’ category: The symbolism of the pierced heart

Joyce Froome

The beginning of the 20th Century was the golden age of the greetings postcard, a time when this interesting popular art form reached extraordinary heights of tasteful sentimentality. A typical Valentine’s Day card of the period shows a charming, realistically childlike Cupid, with golden wings, seated on a wall. Attached to the wall is a target, with a heart as a bull’s-eye, with a golden arrow sticking out of it.¹

This is the image of the pierced heart at its most innocent. Indeed, a great deal of artistic skill has gone into creating that impression of innocence. It is all the more startling, therefore, to discover that at around the same time Margaret Murray (no less) was collecting a very different, and literally blood-soaked, example of heart symbolism:

“When you greatly wish to summon a person you must cut out a heart of red flannel, and thoroughly soak it with your blood. Stick a needle through it. At the stroke of midnight you must throw it into the fire saying:

‘It is not this heart I wish to burn
But the heart of (-) I wish to turn.
May he (she) neither eat nor drink nor sleep
Until with me he/she come to speak.’”²

Two different uses of the symbolism of the pierced heart, with clearly a huge gulf between them. How can the same basic image take such divergent forms?