

# The Directions in Western Magic

## A brief journey through history

By Josephine McCarthy

*Personal experience is the genesis of true learning*  
- the Agamemnon of Aeschylus (c. 458 BCE)

In modern western magic and also in some religious patterns, the directions are the thresholds and boundaries that define and focus the power and contact that flows from inner to outer, from none physical realms into the physical ones. How we use those directions and why we use them differ according to the tradition or system we work within. In this essay, I want to look at certain people/s and points in magical history to look at how different people in time approached the directions and directional concepts.

Using that overarching subject matter of the directions, I also want to look a bit closer at some of the people and cultures, to get a better understanding of who they were, what they were interested in, and to understand why they did what they did.

### Background

The main difference in the use of directions is the difference between religion and magic. In religions the directions tend to be used in order for passive prayer and ritual to be 'sent' to the deity or to celebrate the deity, and for the passive acceptance of what flows from the deity. In magic the flow from the magician is active, and triggers the powers/deities/spirits of that direction to an active interface which is then combined by the magician for a specific purpose.

In the last 150 years or so in the west, magic has slowly opened out to a wider amount of people, and in the last 100 years various traditions have come into form, often drawing from a wide variety of older practices. Some of those magical practices have subsequently branched and developed down a path to form Pagan or mystical religions. Others have stayed as purely magical traditions and have similarly morphed and evolved in to specific systems and traditions: how we approach magic and the mysteries is a constantly evolving process.

This is important to think about when we look into the history of these practices, as someone approaching the directions in a magical sense is going to be different from someone approaching those same directions from a religious stance. It may appear similar or the same on the surface, but the inner dynamics are often going to be different, even when the religion relies heavily upon magical expression.

In modern magic, practitioners are often influenced by the culture they grew up in and the religious pattern that is most prominent in their society. While this is slowly changing in younger generations, the generations who formed or informed a lot of western traditions were very much influenced by Christianity and Judaism. This can be an interesting mix when it is done with full awareness, but more often than not, founders and developers were often not aware that what they brought to the magical table drew heavily upon their Christian upbringing.

This is a complex subject all on its own, and may warrant its own essay in the future, but for now it is simply useful to keep in mind that the cultural lens and filter can sometimes cloud

what we are looking at if we are not careful. Sometimes the embedded religious and cultural patterns are so deeply buried within our psyche, that we are not aware that they can still bring an influence to bear upon our magical work.

### The magical directions

The confinement of directions (east, south, west, north) in a magical working space appears in most western magical forms, and is either worked with as a foundation ritual pattern, and at other times as a simple focus for intent.

I am often asked why a magician must face a particular direction, and why the directions are approached in different ways in different systems. To answer those questions, we must dig deep into the past and also pause to think about how we view magical actions today.

Europe for the most part today is a culture that has been heavily influenced by more than a thousand years of Christianity, and that influence has played a major role in how we think, act and analyse everything around us. Similarly, since the fifteenth century in Europe, rediscovered Classical Greek philosophy, particularly the work of the Platonists, also played a major part in influencing how we approach learning and thinking, not only in education in general but specifically in magic.

The only problem with such a cultural and educational lens, is that once we start looking at the ancient world often our current model of thinking does not match up with the model of thinking in ancient cultures. Also, something very important when looking at magical history is to realise that our modern-day mystical concepts often do not match up with those of ancient cultures, and this is important to realise – if we are not careful, we can end up trying to shoehorn an ancient way of looking at the universe into our own modern way of thinking and vice versa.

This becomes apparent when historians and theologians move out of their comfort zone and start to look at ancient cultures like Egypt, which was a culture that was vastly different to our own today. It can be painful to watch someone trying to fit the religious complexity of Dynastic Egypt into the neat box of monotheism, and while it does not appear on the surface to have anything to do with magic, in real terms this is of the greatest importance to magicians. These ancient complex cultures were the cauldrons of what we call magic today – as is mentioned in the Jewish Kiddushin<sup>1</sup> 49b:

*Ten measures of magic were given to the world – Egypt received nine, and the rest of the world got one.*

Magic is about drawing power and contact into a defined pattern (ritual, vision, magical action) and giving it boundaries that the magician can operate within. Those boundaries can be anything from a drawn image or words, to utterances, vessels (statues and tools) or a defined space such as the directions. Such boundaries in a space make it a vessel that can ‘receive’ in a contained way, and the acts of the magician as a bridge of power from inner (non-physical) to outer (physical) create a pattern of action or intent. That pattern is woven and harmonised by the magician using his or her tools, utterances, vision and action. The pattern (the magical act) is then released into the flow of time in order for it to go do its job.

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish marriage betrothal: the first stage of the Torah-mandated wedding

## Present day magical use of the directions

There are dizzying amounts of magical systems today, with new ones or recycled ones emerging on a regular basis. Some of this is driven by innovation and the evolution of magic, and some is driven by marketing and ego.

When you look at modern day systems the first thing that can often become apparent is the use of 'boxes', i.e. everything is slotted into lists and categories etc, and while this can be useful, it can very easily 'lock down' the understanding and practice of the magician if it becomes too dogmatic. What can happen is that the magician rote learns lists of attributes connected to specific directions: it becomes knowledge without understanding. Or to put it another way, it becomes a recipe book when the person doesn't know how to turn on an oven or blend ingredients.

This has become far more apparent in recent years by way of the internet: there are an abundance of websites and E-schools where the directions are presented with lists of attributes, and these are copied over to other websites ad nauseum with mistakes also copied over, but no one actually learns anything in a practical sense.

In different magical systems the directions are used in different ways for different reasons – some systems use the directions to focus upon a mythic land construct connected to the elements and solar cycle, and as such the most common 'list' is east/air/morning, south/fire/midday, west/water/dusk, north/earth/winter. This is a northern hemisphere land cycle and can be used to draw upon the inner dynamics of the elemental and solar powers.

Some systems dig a little deeper and also lap over into Christian and/or Judaic patterns to draw upon specific angelic beings in the directions such as east/Raphael, south/Michael, west/Gabriel, north/Uriel.

There are some systems that draw upon the 'four winds', planetary dynamics that flow with the winds, and some draw upon specific planetary powers, 'earth-belt' spirits, etc.

Sometimes all of the different layers of powers are used directionally depending upon what the magician is doing. In more commercially formed systems, everything but the kitchen sink is assigned a direction along with a product to buy for each direction.

Keep in mind the earlier comment I made about religion versus magic in terms of the directions, and that the directions are used magically in an active way, which means contacted ritual, inner contact, vision, and so forth. Learning attributes is simply like learning an alphabet, you have to actually do something with the letters to make poetry, song, stories, etc – just learning and reciting the alphabet is meaningless.

As you dig around history, you will come upon points in magical history where systems devolve down to intellectual exercises or dogmatic lists that move the directional 'alphabet' from being a useful starting reference, to being an end point of knowledge.

Just for your reference; when we look at magic in the nineteenth and eighteenth century, there is a huge amount of historical writing that has already been done, so I do not need to go into too much detail – you can use the information in this essay, should you wish to dig deeper for yourself. It is a rich complex and at times messy period in magical history.

## Nineteenth century Europe

### The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Founded 1888)

The biggest (though not the only) influence on twentieth century magic in Europe was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Founded in 1888 with three temples in Britain, it formed a structured education system for magical training, the three founders being Dr W Robert Woodman, William W Westcott, and Samuel Liddell Mathers.

As a cohesive organisation it fragmented within a few decades but it became the grandparent to many spin off magical groups and subsequent new schools. It influenced many of the great magical thinkers of the late nineteenth and twentieth century either directly or indirectly, from Gerard Encausse (Papus) and A E Waite, to magical thinkers such as Aleister Crowley and Dion Fortune.

The system used in the GD was a mix of, or influenced by, Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Kabbalah, and Theosophy. It was a broadly Christian system with added influences from other cultures which were likely brought to the table by one of the founders, Dr W Robert Woodman. Woodman had wide ranging interests such as Kabbalistic philosophy, Egyptian antiquities, and Rosicrucianism as well as being a Freemason.

The GD system is essentially a patchwork of different strands of magic brought together, and when you look closely at the various parts of the system, you can spot the actual books that Mathers had studied in the British Library collection.

The founders of the Golden Dawn were true innovators of their time, and did the very best they could with what they had and with what was within their capabilities. It was also deeply shaped by the Victorian industrial mindset and the need for order, ceremony and coherence. It also came out at a time when 'revels' were becoming popular, where re-enactments were fashionable, and where a stonkingly good costume was everything. All of these influences brought to the group by various members made their mark in one way or another.

The magical system itself was very formal and highly organised. The directional system that was used reflected that sense of coherence, and was as follows and is largely a pattern that is still worked with today:

East/air/sword,  
West/water/cup  
North/earth/pentacle  
South/fire/wand

Each of these directions was assigned an archangel: Raphael, Gabriel, Uriel and Michael. Colours and letters were also assigned to the directions, as also planets, zodiac signs, and names of God.

The Golden Dawn approached the ritual pattern by use of theatrics, scripts and symbolism: it was a heavily externalised pattern that had its roots of action and symbolism in freemasonry, and Rosicrucianism— these were drawn from the experiences of its founder members who used what they recognised in order to build a magical system. It was approached in a very

systemised, structured and hierarchical manner which reflected the times and society it was created in.

The directional attributes were also very apparent in the tarot symbolism used by and recreated by members of the Golden Dawn, and this act more than anything else, in my opinion, anchored the pattern deeply in subsequent generations of magical seekers who came after. The tarot deck developed by A E Waite and painted by Pamela Coleman Smith (published in 1910), known as the 'Rider Waite Tarot' became a major tool for people seeking magic.

So where did those directional concepts and attributes come from? To answer that question, we have to keep digging further back in time, and observe how ideas, concepts and learning morphed from generation to generation. I will not take us through every step in the developmental journey, as that is not the point of this exercise, however let us look at a small amount of people who cast an influence over their subsequent generations.

**Eliphas Levi (born Alphonse Louis Constant 1810-1875)**

Eliphas Levi was a French occultist with a strong enquiring mind and an eccentric personality. Levi's writings had immense influence on various members of the Golden Dawn including A E Waite, along with other occultist groups and individuals, such as Papus, in Europe.

Levi initially trained as a Catholic priest, but failed to take holy ordination when he fell in love and left the seminary in 1836. Levi began to delve deeply into socialism as an expression of true Christianity, and considered the Roman Catholic Church to be spiritually and morally corrupt. It is worth pointing out here, particularly for readers in the USA, that what Levi considered socialism, and what is often the popular understanding today in the USA as socialism are two very different things.

Without digressing too much, it is worth being clear about this as it gives us insight into not only the mindset of historical and contemporary occultists, but also how easy it is to misunderstand something in history due to a lack of history education. In popular media in the USA today, socialism is often equated with Hitler and the Nazi's, which is incorrect: Nationalsozialismus (German for 'national socialism') was an extreme political experiment that became Nazism and has very little in common with the vision that Levi and subsequent thinkers ascribed to.

Socialism and social democracy as Levi and others saw it can be described thus: *a political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.* It was experimented with by various nations in the twentieth century, and to this day many European capitalist nations have elements of social democracy within their national political structure (Germany, France, Spain, Britain etc.).

Understanding the time that Levi lived in can also help to understand his marriage of politics and magic. France was rapidly changing politically and economically from its first revolution less than fifty years earlier where the people of France overthrew the monarchy and nobles, and subsequently threw their nation into a blood bath of executions, restrictions, and war.

After that revolution, France went through a series of rapid changes from the First French Empire (Napoleon I) of 1804-1815, to the restoration of Monarchy, and then to the second revolution/Republic (1848-1852). The time of the second Republic was when Levi, still using

his birth name of Alphonse Constant, became strongly active in socialist thinking and also magic. In 1848 he wrote and published *Le Testament de la liberté*, and by the 1850's he was openly giving talks on the mix of socialism and Kabbalistic philosophy.

He was immersed in occult studies and in Kabbalah, and mixed them together with Catholicism and socialism. By the 1860's he was writing magical books and was probably the first person to incorporate the use of tarot into magical training. He was a major influence on magical thinkers in the late nineteenth century onwards. Today he is still considered one of the 'grandfathers' of modern magic.

Levi wrote extensively on ritual patterns and occult philosophy, and revelled in lists (of powers, attributes, directions etc). His actual magical writing is odd in that in places it hits on points of wisdom and insight, and in other places is disordered and fragmented. When looking closely at his work, it becomes obvious that for the most part, he didn't know what to do with the magical lists and information he had acquired from various sources: he was mostly theory and thinking, and less of an actual practicing magician.

We will look at his version of directional attributes, as his work was subsequently taken up by other magicians: it gives us major insights into the potential influence he brought to bear upon modern occultism.

### Levi's directional system

In his extensive work, *Transcendental magic: its Doctrine and ritual* (1854) Levi outlines directional theories and powers, which can be summed up for the purpose of this subject matter in his treatment of the directional powers in the section 'Conjuration of the Four Elements'. They are as follows, and I have included his various elemental, emotive, and talismanic attributions as they throw an interesting light on the methodology which subsequently influenced generations of magicians:

East: Air, Sylphs, Eagle, Bilious (argumentative), gold and silver, morning  
South: Fire, Salamanders, Lion, Sanguine (optimistic) iron and copper, noon  
West: Water, Undines, Aquarius<sup>2</sup>, Phlegmatic (unemotional), mercury, Dusk  
North: Earth, Gnomes, Bull, Melancholic (sadness), lead, night.

The attributions of the emotive states are interesting, and many would (wrongly) assume that these are emotional powers that 'rule' the direction, and would thus try to use those emotions in directional magical work, or expect that type of person to find a natural home in that direction. However, to do so would be to misunderstand why those attributes are there and what the list is telling the magician (and the emotive qualities for west and north are mixed up in Levi's listing, they should be the other way around). They show how the powers flowing from each direction can trigger and amplify certain emotions within the magician.

The listing of the emotive responses triggered by elemental powers in the directions is there to inform the magician what to watch out for in their emotive responses to the magical work: if they begin to manifest a specific emotion strongly during or shortly after their magical work, it is to be taken as a symptom of a magical imbalance or stasis somewhere in their work, or within themselves. The magician can then by nature of the emotive response to the work,

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<sup>2</sup> Aquarius listed here refers to the 'Enlightened Man', the pinnacle of humanity.

identify which directional power working might be unnecessary or unbalanced. It can also be an indicator of a major power imbalance within the magical system itself.

For that information alone, Levi sent a great gift down the path of time for us today (and likely has its roots in the writing of Luria, whom we will look at). I have observed this emotive response issue countless times during my decades of magical practice with groups and teaching, and learning to pay attention to such details and responses in magical work enables the magician to adjust and adapt their work accordingly.

Such power issues are part and parcel of working with external powers in a defined containment, and while it is virtually impossible to do magic to any great degree and avoid such issues, there are many things we can do to adapt and evolve practice to mitigate such emotive triggers in our work. One such adaptation, which I use extensively in the Quareia training, is to create a filter for the magician themselves by placing them in the stream of time while they work.

This method directly draws upon the magical wisdom in the Egyptian pattern, which we will look at later in this essay, and essentially makes the magician ‘sovereign in their space’: it is akin to putting a fuse box on the power inlet. Let us return to Levi and see what else he has to say in his directional listings.

In his elemental listings, he also includes magical tools to be used to ‘command the spirits’, and they are:

North/bull: sword

South/Lion: Forked wand

West/Aquarius<sup>3</sup>: Cup of Libations

East/Eagle: Pentacle

This list caught my attention in his work: one little detail in the list is a fragment of a much older magical tool that hides a potentially interesting history. His lists and consequent conjurations reveal quite clearly that he did not have full understanding of either the lists nor the ritual: he was using another source, a magical book, and using the lists and rituals like a recipe book.

Here is an excerpt of the explanatory text and then a part of the ritual:

*We most observe that the special kingdom of the Gnomes is at the North; that of the salamanders at the south; that of the sylphs at the east; and that of the Undines at the west. They influence the four temperaments of men (i. e., the Gnomes, the melancholic; the Salamanders, the sanguine; the Undines, the phlegmatic; and the Sylphs, the bilious). Their signs are as follows: the hieroglyphs of the bull for the Gnomes, and we command them with the sword; of the lion for the Salamanders, and we command them with the forked wand, or the magic trident; of the eagle for the Sylphs, and we command them with the holy pentacles; finally with Aquarius for the Undines, and we evoke them with the cup of libations.*

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<sup>3</sup> Aquarius as listed in Levi’s work is the ‘Man of the New Dawn’ i.e. the ‘developed’ man in a mystical sense. It does not stand for the zodiac sign Aquarius as is often assumed today.

*When an elementary spirit comes to torment, or at least to annoy the inhabitants of this world, we must conquer it by means of air, water, fire and earth, blowing, sprinkling, burning perfumes, and tracing on the earth the star of Solomon and the sacred pentagram. These figures should be perfectly regular, and made either with coals from the consecrated fire, or with a reed dipped in diverse colors which we mix of pulverized magnet. Then, while holding in the hand the pentacle of Solomon, and taking by turns the sword, the wand, and the cup, we pronounce in these terms and in a loud voice the conjuration of the four<sup>4</sup>.*

Let's just take a little time to have a look at this text and see how it equates magically, and also what its possible roots are. Most magic that comes to us from the last few centuries has its roots in a mix of Greek, Egyptian and Persian thinking, and the various concepts were picked up, mixed about, passed on and ended up in various magical texts.

North: Earth, Gnomes, Bull, Melancholic (sadness), lead, night.

Gnomes are earth, and magically earth is equated with the north in the northern hemisphere. Why? From a magical perspective, earth is the element that houses all that has long since died – the dead are buried, and all that lives upon the earth eventually is absorbed by the earth. It is also the direction of winter, the direction where the sun never peaks as it does in the south, and where the further you go north, the colder and often darker it gets. Winter is a time of death and struggle, so when you put all of these practicalities together, you start to get a pattern where the directions are equated with certain qualities of life and death, and of the elements.

Mythically the element of earth is connected to the north probably by way of Greek, and Egyptian mythos. In Greek mythos, Boreas, the god of the north wind was one of the four Anemoi (gods of the four winds) and he was the god of winter. He was also the north wind that blew down from the northern mountains of Thrace, bringing the cold of winter with him.

So where does the bull come in? Most people when looking at magical roots trace the bull to one the four holy creatures (Chayot)<sup>5</sup> from the Book of Revelations and the Book of Ezekiel, and that would be correct to a certain extent, except that those creatures have much older roots, and also have none Biblical roots. The bull as the power creature/angelic being of the north very likely comes from Egypt.

Since the first dynasty of the Old Kingdom in Egypt, the bull has played a major part in the state religion (bulls in general were considered magical power animals in the ancient world). The early appearances of the bull in the Egyptian state religion were based at Memphis (the most northern 'power city' of the time in Egypt) in the form of the Apis Bull. The Apis Bull was considered a form of the kings' courage, power and vitality (I am simplifying this to be brief) and as the Osiris Apis, the bull was the triumphant king power in the underworld/realm of death. Memphis was for the most part the ancient centre of administrative power in Egypt, and was very close to the royal necropolis of Saqqara – Memphis/Saqqara was 'north' in Egypt, which also had connotations of the long dead/the underworld, which we will look at later in this essay.

Osiris Apis was something that was embraced in Egypt by Alexander the Great once he invaded Egypt in 332BC and threw the Persians out. Osiris Apis as the Bull in the

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<sup>4</sup> Eliphas Levi (1854)– The Conjuration of the Four Elements from Transcendental magic: its Doctrine and ritual

<sup>5</sup> Bull, Lion, eagle and man – from Book of Ezekiel, Merkabah texts and the Book of Revelations.



underworld, and Apis as the Ka of the king, had a strong draw for Alexander as a kingship symbol which he took up and used to great effect. Apis was also a major deity in the town of Rhacotis on the north coast of Lower Egypt, a town which later became the site of the city Alexandria. The subsequent ruler after Alexander, Ptolemy I, also took up the Apis<sup>6</sup> and particularly Osiris Apis, and eventually the concept of the bull was fused with a humanesque deity which was subsequently called Serapis<sup>7</sup>. Serapis became a major feature in the cultic community in Alexandria<sup>8</sup>, a community that was a mix of Greeks, Hellenised Jews, Egyptians etc.

When Alexander died in Babylon in 323BC, Ptolemy, his general, had his body taken to the temple of Ptah at Memphis for embalming, the same temple where only a year earlier, he had been crowned king. Also bear in mind that the temple of Ptah was also the home to/enclosure of the Apis bull – the power of the king. Alexander was then entombed in Alexandria, the city where Serapis eventually became the main deity.

So you can see how the image of the bull became connected with power, kingship, death, and the north. It is very likely that the cult of the Apis bull is also the root of the bull in the Chayot, something we will come back to in a moment.

The connection of the sword with the north and the bull had me puzzled for a while, as magically and historically/mythically, the sword from a magical perspective tends to be an east tool. East, magically, is connected to utterance, the dawn of new powers/actions, and the power of protecting/limiting/prophecy, and that probably comes into magic from Biblical sources where we have instances of the sword guarding in the east, or the sword and word being ‘one’.<sup>9</sup>

I have come across such things before where tools and powers are in directions you would not expect, and often there is no magical logic nor historical context for such placing (where there is a magical logic, you can learn a great deal by analysing what someone has done). When I come across such things and it is clear that the writer is not a practicing skilled magician, I have to assume they used common sense to place the tools if the original information is not available to them or is missing, or they are copying from another text. In terms of the Bull – kingship, it would make rational sense to place the sword there, but it doesn’t make magical sense.

When you work with directional powers in magic, certain tools and powers do switch on strongly in certain directions, hence it is important to place things carefully and make informed choices as to how to work directionally. I do not fully grasp whether these natural homes for powers and subsequent tools are the result of human focus over millennia, or if there is some other deeper dynamic going on – I just don’t know. But what I do know is that when the sword is used in the north, it has a different and lesser effect than if it is used in the east.

If you apply working magical logic to the tools in directions and the natural powers that flow through magical directions, then for example with the sword you would trigger:  
East – sword – limitation/guarding of utterance, new action, new power

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<sup>6</sup> Diodorus Siculus (1<sup>st</sup> century BC) Book I Bibliotheca Historica 84.8

<sup>7</sup> Mckechnie P, Guillame P, (2008). Ptolemy II Philadelphus and his World. Leiden, Boston.

<sup>8</sup> Bevan E. (1927 – reprint 2015) A History of Egypt Under the Ptolemaic Dynasty. Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> Revelations 19:15 sword/utterance, Genesis 3:24 sword in the east of the Garden of Eden.

South – sword – limitation/guarding of the future, or the fire of battle

West – sword – limitation of harvest/people, or the act of culling

North – sword – limitation of ancestors or a past power, or the sword pinning that which is in the earth.

Going back to the directional elements list, there are whole rabbit holes you can vanish down should you wish to work on tracking the roots of each one – I will leave that up to you so that this essay doesn't turn into a book. However, it is worth noting that a lot of what appears in the grimoires from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century can be traced back to Alexandria in Hellenistic Egypt, where the old Egyptian religion, the Hellenised Jews, the Persian influence, and later the Romans and early Christians all rubbed shoulders.

For example, if you are looking for a source of the four creatures/Chayot in the magical text and also Biblical texts, it is a curious point to note that the temple of Ptah in Memphis, which played such an important role in the founding of the Ptolemaic dynasty, was a temple that also featured Sekhmet (lion), wife of Ptah, who in Old Kingdom Egypt was considered to be the mother of the King<sup>10</sup> and was a protector/consecrator of the King in the New Kingdom<sup>11</sup>

Ptah himself who was also often equated at that time with Imhotep (the 'perfect man') the Old Kingdom architect and scholar who later became glorified as a demi god. His statue would appear in shrines to Thoth and Ptah, and later, in shrines of Thoth Hermes during the Ptolemaic period. He was considered the 'greatest among men' for his wisdom and knowledge – a man of Aquarius indeed. Another god that featured at the temple of Ptah was Nefertem, son of Ptah and Sekhmet, a deity that would also have featured as the 'Aquarian man'.

Horus, the raptor bird (falcon) was considered Lord of Lower Egypt and during the Ptolemaic period, the second biggest temple in Egypt after Karnak was built to Horus. Horus was also strongly connected with kingship and was the protector of the king, and was also the dawn/sun/eastern horizon/future as Ra-Horakhty<sup>12</sup>.

And finally the Apis bull whose cult was centered at Memphis, in an enclosure at the temple of Ptah, Memphis.

I find it curious that the lion, the bull, the falcon and the man figure so strongly in magical and mystical symbolism, and that these figures would have also played a major role in symbolism in Alexandrian Egypt, which later became the centre of magical, religious, and philosophical thought for seven hundred years. Alexandria became a melting pot for Greek, Egyptian, and Roman thought, and was a major early centre in Christianity and early Christian gnostic thought. It was also the melting pot that gave us magical classics like the Greek Magical papyrus.

This could be pure coincidence, and when you look for patterns, you are likely to find them. But knowing the complexity of the community in Alexandria at the time and for the next few

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<sup>10</sup> West Gable of the Anti Chamber, Pyramid of Unas, Utterance 248. Faulkner R.O. (1969) The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts. Oxford University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Ramses II Mortuary Temple at Thebes : smaller hypostyle hall wall relief of the King burning incense to his guide, Ptah, and protector/consecrator Sekhmet. New Kingdom 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty.

<sup>12</sup> Ra-Horakhty, "Ra, who is Horus of the Two Horizons".

hundred years, and knowing that a lot of magical texts and ideas that travelled across Europe emerged out of Alexandria, it is an interesting hypothesis.

Levi's listing and system has many such interesting correlations to Dynastic Egypt, Ptolemaic and Greco Roman Egypt and it would be an interesting exercise one day to take it all apart and trace each concept back to its roots.

Just to demonstrate this, for example, Levi's listing of *Undines water, west, Aquarius, cup*, is interesting and when you know the dynastic Egyptian religious and magical system you spot something interesting straight away. The mix of west, the perfect man, and the cup, along with water, it brings to mind one of the central pillars of the Dynastic Egyptian magical religion: The Justified One (human who has conquered death and been judged before the gods) who resides in the west, and the cup that provides his 'cool refreshment' (water).

In the funerary texts and in particular the Book of Gates, as a person develops more and more through the death transformation process, they are offered *cool refreshment* in the form of water, along with bread and wine, as part of the Osirian transformation (which sounds very Catholic). This was also done at the mortuary temple of a dead person: water, wine, and bread would be offered to the spirit of the dead.

The connection with water pouring or offering and the dead also appears in some areas of Islam and is likely a pre-Islamic practice –

*Jabir narrated that the Prophet's grave was sprinkled and that the one who sprinkled the water over his grave from a water-skin was Bilal bin Rabah . He began where the head was and sprinkled it to his feet.*  
Imām al-Bayhaqi (994AD)

And just before we move on, there is one last thing that caught my eye in Levi's listings, which was the mention of the forked staff. That confirmed for me that Levi had been reading the Grand Grimoire, a magical grimoire that was doing the rounds in the early part of the nineteenth century. The forked staff appears in Chapter III of the Grand Grimoire:

*On the eve of the great undertaking you will search for a rod or wand of wild hazel tree that has not yet born fruit, at the highest point of the sought-after branch there should be a second little branch in the form of a fork with two ends; its length should be nineteen and a half inches.*<sup>13</sup>

It is very likely from his work that he read the Grand Grimoire and the Grimoire Verum, both early nineteenth century texts that purported to be much older than they in fact were. Declaring great age and mysterious sources was highly fashionable in 'magical society' from the sixteenth century onward. Thankfully, although Levi obviously immersed himself in whatever magical texts he could lay his hands up, instead of simply copying them and giving them a new name and even greater age, which is something that happened a lot, Levi picked out bits here and there and tried to create a more coherent magical structure with them.

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<sup>13</sup> Grand Grimoire aka the Red Dragon: (early 19<sup>th</sup> century) Chapter III Book One

So why did the forked staff catch my eye beyond dating Levi's work? Because it is an ancient tool indeed and has an important role to play in magic. When we see ancient fragments emerging in later texts, it tells us that someone along the line had access to information or texts that had their roots in an ancient source – whether they understand them or not is irrelevant, what we are seeing is how magic can move down through time, hiding in plain sight. And where there is one fragment, there are often more lurking around.

Later on we will come to understand quite how old the forked staff is, and what it harks back to, so take a mental note of this tool for later.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century we see a glut of grimoires: a few are magically interesting and hide a real magical practice, and the rest, the majority, are mainly collections of folk spells with smatterings of Hebrew, Latin and made up words with some drawing from what the author/s thinks is Hebrew and Latin. They are interesting in terms of magical history and folklore, but in real magical terms they are for the most part simply babble. Their popularity waxes and wanes with fashions, and are no different from today's glut of fake 'channelled' books or ones that are cobbled together from various sources and given a shiny pedigree in order to sell them.

Then, just as now, these books were presented to make money, open doors of influence and to prey on the magically illiterate. Saying this is deeply unpopular but is something that needs saying, and I am likely to attract a lot of howls of protest and yet more hate mail as result of this stance. A female magician poking at the most treasured toys in western magic is definitely not going to be popular.

For the purposes of this historical analysis of directions and magic, it is vitally important that students learn to separate the wheat from the chaff not only in practice but also in historical studies. Discernment is an important skill in magic, and learning to look closely beyond glamour is an important exercise in developing that skill.

Although we cannot know what went on in the head of Eliphas Levi, we can see from his writings that he undertook what was then a herculean task of moving magical focus away from the empty glamour, and attempted to inject a more serious and in parts mystical treatment of magic. For that, we must always be eternally grateful to him.

## Sixteenth century

If we step back in history before Levi, the next big waving flag in regards to assignments in the magical directions can be found in the work of Luria, and just before him, Agrippa. The sixteenth century was a truly blossoming time for magical texts, and although it was an absolutely fascinating time to read about, for the purpose of this essay, we must move through these time lines swiftly. It is also not necessary to include every retrospective step in the development of directional magic, as this article is about the actual magic itself, not the history of those who developed and passed things along.

### Isaac Luria (1534-1572)

Isaac Luria also known as Yitzhak Ben Sh'lomo Lurya Ashkenazi, and also known as Ha'ARI Hakadosh (the holy lion). Luria was a highly learned and deeply visionary Jewish mystic who essentially overhauled how Jewish mysticism was approached. When we as magicians look at

the Tree of Life, the powers of the Sefirot, and the powers of the directions (among many other things), we are looking at the Divinely inspired work of Luria.

Luria brought the loosely connected knowledge that was scattered across the Zohar and put it into order, Reflection, and correspondence. It is important to point out at this time that Luria was not a magician, but a kabbalist, and his whole being was focused towards the Divine expression through mystical understanding. His most famous gift to modern magicians today was the Tree of Life and the Sefirot as an organised pattern.

His work appeared at a time when the magical minds of Europe had spent decades digesting the Greek philosophical and Hermetic texts that had been translated and narrated by Marsilio Ficino (1433-99AD), and the mass of inspired magical books that had emerged in Italy, Spain and Germany. From the mid fifteenth century onwards in Europe, there had been a massive influx of magical, sacred, philosophical and mystical texts that been carried in to Europe as a result of the strengthening new Ottoman Empire and the eventual conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed the Conqueror in 1453AD.

These texts varied widely in age and content, and were for the most part Greek, and Greco Egyptian texts that had come from Alexandria and the Near East. They were in Greek, Latin and Arabic – many texts of classical and ancient origin were translated into Arabic a few hundred years earlier which preserved them. The great libraries at Constantinople were basically grabbed and shipped out as much as possible, in the face of the advancing Ottoman army.

There was also rather a glut of cynically produced magical grimoires that essentially were cobbled messes of correspondences, demon names and mysterious sigils. For those who searched deeply through the dross, and found the magical and philosophical writings that touched their magical souls, the work of Luria shone a bright light for those who had laboured in the shadow of confusion. Here is just a small a glimpse of Luria's work:

*It is important to know that all worlds and all creatures that inhabit those worlds were created through permutations of the holy names. The supernal root of all the names is the name Havayah<sup>14</sup>.*

*It has 4 letters and 12 permutations, 3 for each letter. Thus, from 4, we obtain 12. Corresponding to these, there are four banners (angelic camps) in the Supernal Merkava (Chariot). They are: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel. Each of these 4 consists of 3, again making a total of 12. Corresponding to these, there are 4 basic directions (South, North, East, West) from which 12 sub-directions emerge. Each basic direction has two sub-directions.*

Lurias correspondence directions:

*South: kindness (chesed).*

*North: discipline (gevurah).*

*East: harmony (tiferet).*

*Up: perseverance (netzach).*

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<sup>14</sup> And Elokim G-d spoke to Moses and He said to Him, I am Havayah!" (Ex. 6:2)

HaVaYaH: the Tetragrammaton, G-d's Divine Name of the four Hebrew letters yud-hei-vav-hei, expressing His transcendence of time and space.

*Down: submission (hod).*

*West: connection (yesod).*

*Bringing the four species towards the heart: communication (malchut).*

Luria's work remains a major part of Kabbalah to this day, and in the following comment, quoted from an article on the Jewish custom of extending the lulav and etrog<sup>15</sup> to the directions, we can see a faint fragment of the magical ritual pattern of facing east and working the directions.

*Our sages explain that the manifestation of the Divine Presence in this world - the Shechinah, stems from the west<sup>16</sup>. If the Shechinah is in the west, figuratively, when facing east, south would be to its right and north to its left<sup>17</sup>.*

The facing east as a default magical position in ritual tracks back much further (probably a great deal further back than Christianity), and we find mention of it in the writing of an early Christian author Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus.

*Others with a greater show of reason take us for worshippers of the sun. These send us to the religion of Persia, though we are far from adoring a painted sun, like them who carry about his image everywhere upon their bucklers. This suspicion took its rise from hence, because it was observed that Christians prayed with their faces towards the east.*

– Tertullian (160-220 AD)

For those of you reading this essay who have practiced Hermetic magic, you will start to see the roots of some ritual actions and patterns used within various Hermetic systems. The Kabbalistic patterns that emerged in Hermetic magic all stem from the work of Luria, and were passed on by various writers/thinkers/practitioners such as Levi.

His work was revolutionary, and in keeping with the European magical communities of that time, his concepts, ideas and developments were absorbed, digested and incorporated in to the swiftly growing corpus of magical knowledge.

## Henry Cornelius Agrippa 1486 –1535

The work of Agrippa in this Three Books of Occult Philosophy, can in many respects be viewed as one of the cornerstones of modern western magic. Agrippa was a German theologian and occult writer, and one of the great polymaths of his time.

He studied at the University of Cologne as a young man (13 to 16yrs old) where he was deeply influenced by the work of Albertus Magnus (1193-1280)<sup>18</sup>. Magnus was a German bishop who

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<sup>15</sup> The etrog is a Citrus fruit/lemon/lime (Etz Hadar), and the Lulav is palm branches (Kapot t'marim) – used during Sukkot.

<sup>16</sup> Midrash Rabbah on Numbers 11:2. The Talmud (Bava Batra 25a) points out, from the verse (Nechemia 9:6) “and the hosts of the heavens bow down to you” that the heavenly bodies move westward because they are bowing down to G-d whose presence is manifest in the west.

<sup>17</sup> Chabad - Rabbi Eliezer Shemtov: the Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in Montevideo, Uruguay

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke: The Western Esoteric Tradition (2008)

had a deep interest in a wide variety of subject matter from philosophy and theology to alchemy, astrology, botany and mineralogy. Magnus translated Aristotle and a variety of Arabic writings, and delved into the writings of the Neoplatonists.

In his early twenties Agrippa studied with Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516), a Benedictine Abbot, cryptographer and occultist, at Würzburg in northern Bavaria<sup>19</sup>. This was also the time that Agrippa began working on his first draft of De Occulta Philosophia (The Occult Philosophies). When you look at Agrippa's work, you see straight away it is the lists, categories etc, and also see that although Agrippa studied intensively every text he could lay his hands upon, he was not a practicing magician. This is a pattern that repeats heavily in the history of western magic and is a pattern that is important to bear in mind – magic being passed along in texts from one generation to another by people who did not really practice magic and didn't really understand it, and it was often married to mystical texts, such as Luria.

However, although mysticism and magic often meet upon the road, the actual power system is different: it is easy for oddities and blind alleys to be introduced accidentally in to magical systems when mystical or religious elements are woven into magical systems without practical understanding or forethought from direct experience. I am sure that comment will illicit howls of protest from many quarters, but it is something that magicians need to seriously keep in mind and think about carefully.

To get back to the directions, here is an excerpt from book II chapter seven of Agrippa's The Occult Philosophies<sup>20</sup>. It looks at the numerical pattern of four and the directional attributes. You will see immediately where subsequent magical writers and grimoires drew their attributions from, and also the names, powers and Hebrew patterns.

### The Scale of the Number four, answering the four Elements

The name of God יהוה  
with four letters.

|   |                                    |                                     |   |                                       |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Four Hierarchies                                  | Seraphim.<br>Cherubin.<br>Thrones. | Dominations.<br>Powers.<br>Vertues. | Principalities.<br>Archangels.<br>Angels. | Innocents.<br>Martyrs.<br>Confessors. |
| Four Angels ruling over the corners of the world. | מיכאל<br>Michael.                  | רפאל<br>Raphael.                    | גבריאל<br>Gabriel.                        | אוריאל<br>Uriel.                      |
| Four rulers of the Elements                       | שרף<br>Seraph.                     | כרוב<br>Cherub.                     | תרשיש<br>Tharsis.                         | אריאל<br>Ariel.                       |
| Four consecrated Animals                          | The Lion.                          | The Eagle.                          | Man.                                      | A Calf.                               |
| Four Triplicities of the tribes of Israel         | Dan<br>Asser<br>Nephtalim          | Jehuda<br>Isachar<br>Zabulum        | Manasse<br>Benjamin<br>Ephraim.           | Reubin<br>Simeon<br>Gad               |

<sup>19</sup> W J Hanegraaff: Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism (2006)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.esotericarchives.com/agrippa/agrippa2.htm#chap7>

|   |  |  |   |  |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Four Triplicities of Apostles                   | Mathias<br>Peter<br>Jacob the elder    | Simon<br>Bartholemew<br>Mathew         | John<br>Phillip<br>James the younger      | Thaddeus<br>Andrew<br>Thomas             |
| Four Evangelists<br>Four Triplicities of Signs. | Mark<br>Aries.<br>Leo.<br>Sagittarius. | John<br>Gemini.<br>Libra.<br>Aquarius. | Mathew<br>Cancer.<br>Scorpius.<br>Pisces. | Luke<br>Taurus.<br>Virgo.<br>Capricornus |
| The Stars & Planets, related to the Elements.   | Mars, and the Sun.                     | Jupiter, and Venus.                    | Saturn, and Mercury.                      | The fixed Stars, and the Moon.           |
| Four qualities of the Celestial Elements        | Light.                                 | Diaphanousness.                        | Agility.                                  | Solidity.                                |
| Four Elements.                                  | אש<br>Fire.                            | רוח<br>Air.                            | מים<br>Water.                             | עפר<br>Earth.                            |
| Four qualities.                                 | Heat.                                  | Moisture.                              | Cold.                                     | Dryness.                                 |
| Four seasons.                                   | Summer.                                | Spring.                                | Winter.                                   | Autumn.                                  |
| Four corners of the World.                      | The East.                              | The West.                              | The North.                                | The South.                               |
| Four perfect kinds of mixed bodies.             | Animals.                               | Plants.                                | Metals.                                   | Stones.                                  |
| Four kinds of Animals.                          | Walking.                               | Flying.                                | Swimming.                                 | Creeping.                                |
| The Elements, in Plants.                        | Seeds.                                 | Flowers.                               | Leaves.                                   | Roots.                                   |
| What in Metals.                                 | Gold, and Iron.                        | Copper, and Tin.                       | Quicksilver.                              | Lead, & Silver.                          |
| What in stones.                                 | Bright, and burning.                   | Light, and transparent.                | Clear, and congealed.                     | Heavy, & dark.                           |
| Four Elements of man.                           | The Mind.                              | The spirit.                            | The Soul.                                 | The body.                                |
| Four powers of the Soul.                        | The Intellect.                         | Reason.                                | Phantasy.                                 | Sense.                                   |
| Four Judiciary powers.                          | Faith.                                 | Science.                               | Opinion.                                  | Experience.                              |



|   |                 |                  |                  |                    |
|---|-----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Four moral virtues.   | Justice.        | Temperance.      | Prudence.        | Fortitude.         |
| The senses answering to the Elements.                       | Sight.          | Hearing.         | Taste and smell. | Touch.             |
| Four Elements of mans body.                                 | Spirit.         | Flesh.           | Humours.         | Bones.             |
| A four-fold spirit.   | Animal.         | Vital.           | Generative.      | Natural.           |
| Four humours.   | Choller.        | Blood.           | Flegme.          | Melancholy.        |
| Four Manners of complexion.                                 | Violence.       | Nimbleness.      | Dulness.         | Slowness.          |
| Four Princes of devils, offensive in the Elements.          | סמאל<br>Samael. | עזאזל<br>Azazel. | עזאל<br>Azael.   | מהזאל<br>Mahazael. |
| Four infernal Rivers.                                       | Phlegeton       | Cocytus          | Styx.            | Acheron.           |
| Four Princes of spirits, upon the four angels of the world. | Oriens.         | Paymon.          | Egyn.            | Amaymon.           |

As you look at Agrippa's chart of the powers of four, you can immediately see the various sources that have been drawn together, Christianised, and then shoehorned into a system. And you can also see what an influence this listing had on subsequent generations of magicians up to present day. Agrippa's work also cemented the idea of 'lists' and tables in magical work, something that continues to this day.

Rather than continue to go back further in time in sequence, as we have what we need now to see the basis of the modern directional patterns, I think now is a good point to look at what is actually going on here in magical structure terms.

### The Modern Structural approach

When I say modern, I include everything from present day right back to thirteenth century Europe, which in turn has its roots in Greco Roman Egypt.

This approach in its foundations works from the perspective of everything *outside* of the magician. This reaches from the landscape, the elements, the stars and planets, the underworld and so forth, and this externalisation between the magician and the 'four' has informed and influenced western magicians over long periods of time to the extent of it becoming the orthodoxy of directional ritual patterns. If you look at any western magical system today, you will see some or all of the 'four' powers and qualities emerge into the ritual pattern.

The 'four' as a patterned structure is very much about the earth, the Kingdom (Malkuth) and the universe in relation to the magician. The magician stands as the controller of the orchestra; there is a clear separation between the magician and his magic.

When you jump back much further back in time, further back than Greece or Greco Roman Egypt, and start to look at Dynastic Egypt, you start to see a different pattern emerging, but one that subsequently influenced, informed and underpinned the later patterns that emerged as a result of what I call 'The Alexandrian Soup': the mix of Semitic, Egyptian, Greek, and Persian influences. It was the 'Alexandrian Soup' that was the parent of what we call magic today, but the Great Grandmother of the AS was Egypt. The Alexandrian (but actually wider, including Thebes) Soup is an article all by itself as the components that made up that soup were complex and had many branches, so I will address that in a future article.

What I will say is that one of the major ingredients in that soup was the cultural and religious pattern of dynastic Egypt, remnants of which made a base for the magical and religious patterns that emerged out of that time period. A lot of the elements that survived from Dynastic Egypt were heavily misinterpreted or misunderstood, and those misunderstandings carried forward into the newer religions and magical patterns in various and not obvious ways. However, some fragments also remained true to their roots and continued to be passed down from priest to magician, to alchemist to priest, and so forth.

So let us look at one small aspect of that of those surviving fragments: the use, knowledge, and understanding of the directions in Dynastic Egypt.

## EGYPTIAN SECTION

### Dynastic Egypt

Before we delve into the directional patterns of Dynastic Egypt, it is worth pointing out to you that in Egypt, magic was part and parcel of the religion and culture. Magic was used within the temples to maintain the laws of Maat, to protect the king and nation, and to heal.

It was also used to heal and protect everyday people, for example the healer priests (male and female) who operated out of the temple 'House of Life', which was the library, archive and place of training/knowledge. Some were *Swnw* who were general doctors, and some were *Sau* who were the magical doctors. This role was later taken up by the Hekau (magicians) in the first millennia BC. The Lector priests also played a major role in magical activity as they were the ones who could read and recite the magical texts.<sup>21</sup>

Protection spells were worked not only by priests but also 'wise women' and seers who were usually connected to temple life in one way or another. Many of the priests, both male and female in a temple, often served only for a few months of the year and the rest of the time they worked out in the community either in a trade, or as a scribe, or as a healer, seer and so forth. This likely laid the foundation for the much later 'community magicians for hire', a dynamic that we have no evidence for until the Ptolemaic and subsequent Roman period of Egypt.<sup>22</sup>

One thing that all the dynastic Egyptian magic had in common was how they used the directions in relation to their magic. On the surface it can appear to be similar to western magic in many respects, but in fact it is a whole other dynamic that separates it from later directional magic, and from the directional magic of the Greeks, Romans and Persians.

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<sup>21</sup> David, R. Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt - Penguin Books, 2003

<sup>22</sup> JF Borghouts. Witchcraft, Magic and Divination in Ancient Egypt' in Civilizations of the Ancient Near East edited by JM Sasson - Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995

The big fundamental difference in the directional system, is that Dynastic system was based around the human and the Divine within the human, not so much the universe around them, which is the system that the west is more used to: the magic of Dynastic Egypt *was magician centred and not environment centred*. You can argue the point that the modern magician in general western magic is indeed the centre, the Divine within, but that is simply one of the fragments of the Dynastic system that survived.

Because this has such a strong bearing on magic today, we will look at this in detail – if you understand those ancient fragments, and subsequently how they remain in modern magic, and then understand it within its own context, you will have a much greater understanding of the magic of today, and of yourself as the magician.

This in turn enables you to make choices – in a way, we as modern magicians have inherited two core principles: the magician as controller, and the magician as the centre of magic. That allows us elbow room to decide what to use, when and how – we have a freedom of choice that was not so much of an option in times past.

## Magic, Egypt, and the directions

Note: This section is long and at times convoluted – because Egyptian history is long, complex and at times completely different in its concepts to modern thinking, there needs to be various digressions in order to establish context, content and meaning. However, I have attempted to approach this in a way that will also give you the reader a wider understanding of Dynastic Egyptian magical and religious/cultural thinking, and shine lights in corners of the Egyptian ‘Mysteries’ that will help many readers reflect upon how these ancient concepts appear in various forms to this day. These concepts were carried out of Egypt by various waves of new religious thought and embedded in various ways into new magical and religious streams that still influence us to this day.

It is wise to bear in mind that unlike later Greco Roman and much later western magic, Egyptian magic and the texts of such were not recorded for the common man. The Egyptian sacred magical texts do not have bullet points, recipe lists/spells, and easily understood references: if you were trained and active, you were expected to understand the basics of what you were looking at. If you were not trained and active, but were a noble looking for a funerary text for your tomb, then a pre-prepared funerary scroll with your name inserted in it was essentially handed to you to place in your tomb or coffin, a text that most likely you would not understand.

Saying that, when you look at funerary texts over the huge span of Dynastic Egyptian history, you can tell when the education levels in the priesthood went up and down, or when such texts were used for the tombs/coffins of rich nobles who had little or no education. The complex texts start to acquire pictures, or are at times almost all pictures, though you would need to understand the process and mysteries to decipher what was happening. But by the end of the New Kingdom, the Late Period and beyond, we do see basic ‘picture book’ funerary text that is about as simple as you can get for such concepts.

It is also worth knowing should you wish to research further, what form of Egyptian hieroglyphs you are looking at, as in terms of spotting magical signifiers, that there are big differences in the texts at certain periods in time. Anything from the Old Kingdom is going to

be in Old Egyptian<sup>23</sup>, which is markedly different from Middle Egyptian which emerged c 2050BC in the Middle Kingdom period.

Middle Egyptian continued to be used as a form of high literature through the New Kingdom right up to Roman times for sacred and important texts, stelas and funerary writings, but its spoken form was only used for hymns, spells and important utterances once Late Egyptian emerged around the Amarna Period (c 1300BC). And then there are other forms of Egyptian scripts such as Late Egyptian<sup>24</sup>, hieratic<sup>25</sup>, demotic<sup>26</sup> and Coptic<sup>27, 28</sup>

Knowing what script it is you are looking at tells you a great deal about the information contained within that script, whether it was administrative, secular, sacred or magical. It can also tell you roughly what period in Egyptian history it was from. And also bear in mind the common misconception that the culture and religion of Egypt was one coherent history throughout its four-thousand-year history – nothing could be further from the truth. It was a mixed bag, just like any other nation of such age. Most of what we will be looking at has its origins in New Kingdom Egypt, the so called ‘Golden Age’ of Egypt, and the Third Intermediate Period.<sup>29</sup>

By looking at texts, images and wall paintings, we can discern from the directional positions and symbolic nature of the imagery, what was going on and often, why. As the magic was embodied within the magician/priest/king, the positions of the body in images tell us what dynamic they were working on, and also if they dead or alive or working in death or life. Left leg forward is striding into life or through life, for example, and right leg was striding through death. And ankh in the left hand is life in life, and in the right hand, is life in death.

So you start to see the subtle but major difference in how magic was approached in dynastic Egypt. The western magician seeks outside of him or herself to draw in the power, the Egyptian magician generated it from themselves outwards.

Most Egyptian writings are multi layered in their meaning, so that high priests, kings and magicians could read one thing, and the lesser priests and scribes read another: hiding it in plain sight. And I presume that, knowing the pragmatic culture within ancient Egypt, those who knew, knew, and didn’t need to point it out or need it pointing out to them. When a modern western person looks at a map, they automatically assume the top of the map is north, because that is how we align our maps; it rarely needs pointing out.

The first dynamic to understand before we look at directions, is a pattern that still emerges in western magic today though in a different form and at times is heavily misunderstood. That pattern is one of *creation, stasis, and destruction*, and all three of those dynamics are considered to be within the natural order of balance, or in Egyptian terms, governed by the rule of Maat – balance. Outside of that balance is chaos which destroys order. In western magic,

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<sup>23</sup> For example, the Pyramid texts

<sup>24</sup> Late Egyptian became the spoken and general written language (c1300BC)

<sup>25</sup> Simplified cursive form of Old and Middle Egyptian

<sup>26</sup> Cursive variant of hieratic that developed in Lower Egypt during the 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty (c600BC)

<sup>27</sup> Based around the Greek script (c100BC)

<sup>28</sup> Allen, James P. (2000), Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>29</sup> New Kingdom and Third Intermediate period (c1550-712BC)

destruction, death etc is often considered ‘bad’ or chaos, this is expressed through modern terms like white/black magic.

The second dynamic that is foundational in Egyptian magic is ‘seed’ and ‘harvest’. This dynamic runs through everything in Egyptian magic: something is ‘seeded’, it grows, does something, and then its actions are harvested and weighed. The harvest is then ‘judged’ (weighed or counted) and what is good of the harvest is then renewed.

This not only applies to the actions of the magician/priest/individual but to their life also. We see aspects of this in the Egyptian funeral texts where the deeds of the person (the harvest recorded by the heart spirit) are weighed<sup>30</sup> and if the harvest is sufficient, the soul of the person is considered ‘developed’.

There is a deeper octave of this dynamic where the dead priest/magician/king is tested in death to ‘*become the scales*’<sup>31</sup> – if they pass this test, they are considered ‘Justified in death’.

The most important dynamic of Egyptian directional magic is time. With time, and seed/harvest as two foundational dynamics, the Egyptian magician stands in the flow of time and operates through the input/output dynamic, with themselves as the vehicle through which the magic develops and flows.

The deity/spirit involvement is not the same as western magic, though it can appear so on the surface to an untrained eye. In western magic, the deities, spirits/beings are called to the magician and asked, forced, or instructed to do something – the magician as controller. In Egyptian magic, the nTr<sup>32</sup>, pronounced in modern terms as Netjer<sup>33</sup> are the ‘gods’, and the Egyptians looked upon the ‘gods’ in very different ways to how we perceive them today.

Where modern magic has hierarchies of angels, demons, planetary spirits and so forth as well as deities and God, the Egyptians did not differentiate in the same way. For the most part, excluding things like hungry ghosts, almost everything was nTr. This is a very subtle but important difference in directional work – the Egyptian did not see the gods as the Greeks did (the basis of Roman and subsequently Western view) as squabbling Divine humans (i.e. human behaviours) in a literal sense, but more as powers and dynamics that manifested in everything around them (powers and creatures of nature), and this was played out in stories which were surface presentations of much deeper power dynamics.

By the end of the Dynastic era, the Persian and Greek ideas of the gods as squabbling Divine humans had integrated itself into Egyptian thought and we see this manifesting in the Ptolemaic period and beyond in Egypt.

This is all very important to understand, as it shifts how the magician views power, works with power, and how that all relates to the directional work. And please bear in mind I have simplified this complex dynamic view right down, so that this article does not digress too much from the subject at hand. There is no simple way to present magical information from Dynastic Egypt as unlike the Greco Roman Egyptian period, the Dynastic Egyptians didn’t leave ‘spell books’.

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<sup>30</sup> Book of Coming Forth By Day, an Egyptian New Kingdom Funerary text

<sup>31</sup> Fifth Hour in the Book of Gates, an Egyptian New Kingdom funerary text

<sup>32</sup> nTr – singular deity, nTrt – singular female deity, nTrw plural ‘gods’

<sup>33</sup> The J has a guttural sound similar to ‘ch’

## The directional pattern

The Egyptian directional pattern, which governed everything in magic *and the magician themselves* is as thus:

East – input, birth, seed, rising, left

South- future, in front, life, tomorrow, the new day

East and south are inextricably linked to each other in a poetic sense: east is a ‘gate’ and south is a ‘path’. The same is true for west and north.

West- output, threshold of death, dusk, harvest, descending, right

North- past, behind, dead, yesterday

Centre – fulcrum/heart spirit

The most important thing to think about once reading that list, is the understanding that for the most part the directions were viewed as dynamic powers not geographical points. For example in sacred (and thus magical) texts the term ‘south’ can often denote a state or inner/non worldly state or location, not an actual physical one. South can also mean moving forward, the future and the path ahead.

The directions in Egyptian text are also identified with the body: remember, with Egyptian texts one thing can have various different meanings *all at the same time*. It was a very similar way of approaching sacred information that was later used by Jewish Kabbalists (PaRDeS), and that Kabbalistic method most likely had its roots in Egypt.

## The directions

The words/hieroglyphs of east and west are used to denote a geographical location, a sacred/inner location, a state of being, a goddess, the side of a body or object and the hand/foot on the body. Here are the emblems, transliterations and meanings for east and west in Middle Egyptian.<sup>34</sup>

 east:

*i3by* (adj): left side, east, eastern. Will have suffix of an arm or foot to denote left/east side of the body, or a suffix denoting place.

*i3bt*: The East (i.e. the power of the east) personified as the goddess Iabet, She of the sunrise.

 west:

*imn* (adj): right side, west, western. Will have suffix of an arm or foot to denote right hand/foot, or a suffix denoting place

*imnt* The West, (i.e. the power of the west) personified as the goddess Imentit, She of the necropolis.

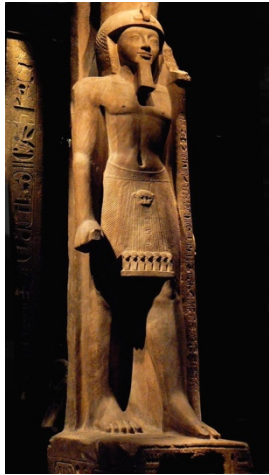
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<sup>34</sup> Faulkner Dr Ramond. A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian 1962 Griffith Institute Oxford.

You start to see how the directions are inextricably linked with the body, with powers, inner locations and also physical space. With the left-hand default position as being east, you can then begin to understand the concept of south being forward, and north being behind.

Let us just looked briefly at how these body directions played out in statues and painting. Once you understand the directional qualities of east/left/life, and west/right/death, you can then begin to understand any underlying narrative presented.

### Seti II<sup>35</sup>



This nineteenth dynasty statue of Seti II shows him with left leg forward, which tells us it was made while Seti II was alive – he is striding forward into his reign. Also note the utterance is to the left of him.

As an aside, when you look at statues of some Egyptian kings, some scribes, and priests, you will notice that their hands are often curled around something. For years Egyptologists have hypothesized that they are holding scrolls, and sometimes they clearly are, and often have a tool in the other hand. But there are many times when it is clearly not a scroll, rather they are depicted as holding the *prow ropes of the barque*.

There is a whole narrative that appears in some of the funerary texts, where the Justified living and dead pull the Barque of Re in the Duat, and they are considered developed ones or developing ones – people of great learning where their heart speaks a truth, and they are considered ‘Justified’ before the gods. Pulling the prow ropes of the Barque of Re was a great honour and also a terrible burden. This is clearly outlined in the New Kingdom text The Book of Gates.

In this smaller image below, from the tomb of Tuthmosis IV<sup>36</sup> note how the king has his right leg forward, as he is in death, and is receiving *life in death* from Hathor, and *life and dominion* from Osiris.



Now let us look in depth at a particular and famous funerary text, often called the Egyptian Book of the Dead. It is littered with imagery and texts that give us various insights into how directions were used to signify powers, places and actions.

<sup>35</sup> Statue of Seti II, 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty, Egypt. Displayed at the Museo Egizio, Turin, Italy.

<sup>36</sup> Tuthmosis IV tomb KV43, Valley of the Kings.

## Papyrus of Ani – The Book of Coming forth by Day

So many people look at these texts through a cultural lens of western thinking which involves issues like monotheism and geographical location, and that immediately locks them out of the understanding of the text. A good example would be a section of the Papyrus of Ani<sup>37</sup>, the funeral text of Coming Forth by Day for Ani, spell seventeen:

*I go on the road which I know in front of the Island of the Just.  
What is it? It is Rosetjau.  
The southern gate is in Naref  
The northern gate is in the Mound of Osiris.  
As for the Island of the Just it is Abydos.  
Otherwise said: it is the road on which my father Atum went  
When he proceeded to the Field of Reeds.*

When you look at this from a point of geographical location, the eye is drawn to Abydos which is an ancient sacred enclosure and temple complex. It is one of the oldest settlements in Ancient Egypt and is the eighth nome<sup>38</sup> of Upper Egypt. From that, many people, both lay readers and some academics have tied themselves in knots trying to figure out where Naref is geographically, using Abydos as a location indicator. This is how a modern western person would think, but to an ancient Egyptian, a sacred inner location, a person, and a state of being can all be the same thing.

Naref and Osiris<sup>39</sup> Naref are mentioned numerous times in funerary texts, stelas, statues and tombs certainly in the New Kingdom through to the Late Period. The words can be used for a location, a person or a state of being. Here is an example from the 30<sup>th</sup> dynasty, titles found on a statue of a priest at Herakleopolis Magna:

*Revered before Heryshef, king of the Two Lands,  
ruler of the Two Banks,  
Revered before Osiris Nareref<sup>40</sup>.*

If we go back to spell seventeen and look at it from a magical Egyptian perspective, we can hypothesise that Naref being *southern* is before the dead person and the *northern gate* is behind the dead person.

*The southern gate is in Naref  
The northern gate is in the Mound of Osiris.  
As for the Island of the Just it is Abydos<sup>41</sup>.*

When you then think about Rosetju and that it is a *desert* pathway through one of the deepest sections of the Duat, and the gates of the Duat open for the dead traveller according to their ‘harvest’ or life deeds/state, then you start to understand that Naref as a gate is a state of being

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<sup>37</sup> Faulkner Dr Ramond (translation 1974) The Egyptian Book of the Dead (spell 17) Chronicle Books USA 1994 first edition.

<sup>38</sup> Territorial area of Ancient Egypt.

<sup>39</sup> Osiris is not only a god, but a term for someone who is dead and has passed many of the trials of the Duat

<sup>40</sup> Díaz-Iglesias Llanos, L. (2016). Naref and Osiris Naref. A Study in Herakleopolitan Religious Traditions. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter

<sup>41</sup> Faulkner Dr Ramond (translation 1974) The Egyptian Book of the Dead (spell 17) Chronicle Books USA 1994 first edition.



(i.e. the gate is within that state of being) – by passing successfully through the gate of Naraf they stand a good chance of safe passage to the next stage of their development journey.

When we look at that text and see ‘*the northern gate is the Mound of Osiris*’ it is referring to a state: where the body has been embalmed and wrapped, and the dead spirit has gone through the first stages of the process in the Duat. The *Northern Gate* is the gate behind, it is in the past, the spirit is now moving away from one stage of death/destruction process, and is preparing to move forward into renewal and the ‘afterlife’.

*I have established offerings in Abydos. Open the way for me in Rosetjau because I have relieved the sickness in Osiris. I have painted his perch. Make way for me so that he might shine in Rosetjau*<sup>42</sup>.

The northern gate as the Mound of Osiris talks in terms of the Osiris mythos of death, dismemberment, reconstituting the body parts, and resurrection. In the process of the Duat challenges as outlined in the funerary texts, a similar theme emerges of death, trials that take the person apart/the destruction of their self-image, the healing of wounds, the judgement/weighing of the heart, and the path to resurrection.

There is also a dynamic whereby the dead person heals/reconstitutes Osiris by *becoming Osiris* – as the person emerges, so does Osiris. This mythos is heavily interwoven with the themes of seed, grain, threshing, harvest and weighing the harvest.

If you wish to look deeper into the magical aspects of the inner desert paths of Rosetjau I suggest you read hours four and five of the AmDuat.<sup>43</sup> If you are familiar with Egyptian magical concepts, these two sections can be very interesting.

Before we move on, here is another extract from spell seventeen of the Papyrus of Ani that has a directional fragment in it. In the spell it is talking about an image which we will look at in a moment:

*Who is he?*

*It is Re who created his names and his members,  
it means the coming into existence of those gods who are in his suite.*

*I am he who is not opposed among the gods.*

*Who is he?*

*He is Atum who is in his sun disk.*

*Otherwise said: He is Re when he rises in the eastern horizon of the sky.*

*To me belongs yesterday, I know tomorrow*<sup>44</sup>.

Note that the action is east/west, the passage of the sun, and the time is yesterday (north) and tomorrow (south), which are the names of the Aker, the two guardian lions of the horizon which we will look at in a moment.

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<sup>42</sup> Ogden Goelet. A Commentary on the Corpus of Literature and Tradition which constitutes the Book of Going Forth By Day.(San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998)

<sup>43</sup> Warburton D, Hornung E, Abt T. (2014) The Egyptian Amduat: the Book of the Hidden Chamber. Zurich. Living Human Heritage Publications.

<sup>44</sup> Faulkner Dr Ramond (translation 1974) The Egyptian Book of the Dead (spell 17) Chronicle Books USA 1994 first edition.

To summarise briefly, for Egyptians the directional pattern from a mythic (not geographic) perspective was born/east, lived/south, died/west, passed into history/ north. The same pattern also unfolds in the Duat, the Egyptian underworld.

A good example of the east/west/south/north dynamics on Egyptian thought can be found in the Old Testament (or the Jewish Book of Prophets) in Isiah 43-5/6:

*Fear not, for I am with you;  
I will bring your seed from the east, and gather you from the west;  
I will say to the north: 'Give (them) up,' and to the south: 'Keep (them) not back*

This extract from Isiah is one that is sometimes used by magicians today in order to establish and protect the path ahead.

You see the similar concepts straight away, and when you look closely at the first section of chapter 43, if you are very familiar with the processes outlined in the Egyptian funerary texts you will also recognise what is going on in that first section, and where that imagery comes from.

The east/left is life (that moves south) and in life we ‘do’, we act, think, create, destroy and so forth – we participate in all the trials, lessons and joys of life. The east is the seed that grows and flourishes as we move forward (south) through life: hence the command in Isiah ‘*I say to the south keep them not back*’ – it is protecting the person’s future.

If we learn well, evolve from our mistakes, and develop/mature, then we are said to be ‘winnowing our harvest’ while in life: we take the best of the grain and discard the stones, husks and stalks. This leaves our harvest lightweight. In terms of the seeds that remain, there is a whole mystical magical rabbit hole you can vanish down when it comes to the depiction of the weighing of the harvest (the heart) and how much seed is left (must be lighter than a feather of Maat).

Upon death that ‘harvest’ is examined, and weighed upon scales. This concept appears to have emerged in New Kingdom Egyptian thought, and also appears in different ways in Judaic scriptures. Here is a good example from Proverbs 21 -<sup>45</sup>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| א פִּלְגֵי-מַיִם לִב-מֶלֶךְ,<br>בְּיַד-יְהוָה; עַל-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר יַחְפֹּץ יִטְוֶה. | 1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD as the watercourses: He turneth it whithersoever He will. |
| ב כָּל-דֶּרֶךְ-אִישׁ, יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו; וְתוֹכֵן לְבוֹת יְהוָה.                 | 2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the hearts.                        |
| ג עֲשֵׂה, צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט-- נִבְחַר לַיהוָה מִזְבֵּחַ.                       | 3 To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.                        |

The root תכן, is widely used in second temple literature in the context of weights and measures<sup>46</sup>, and it’s use in Proverbs, applied to human ethical conduct, is strikingly similar to

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2821.htm> Proverbs 21. Retrieved 17/4/2019

<sup>46</sup> Shupak, N. (2015). Weighing in the Scales Fs.Talshir. From Author to Copiest: Essays on Composition, Redaction and Transmission of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Zipi Talshir

the Egyptian concept. Also note, *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD*: in the Egyptian pattern, the heart of the individual is the voice that speaks the truth upon judgement – the heart speaks to the scales upon judgement, telling the gods what this person has done in life. Note that the 'LORD' is holding the king's heart in his *hand* to weigh/judge. This is mirrored in the magical use of the right hand to weigh, complete and compose a magical action.

In New Kingdom and subsequent funerary texts<sup>47</sup> it appears as a judgement scene where the heart of the individual (the spirit of the heart that speaks truth) is weighed against a feather of Maat. In Egyptian thought the heart spirit listens and watches, and recounts our actions and lessons to the judge when we are being 'weighed'.

What remains of the harvest becomes our *west*. If the harvest has been winnowed in life to a great degree, there are little or no seeds left, the heart passes judgement and the soul moves deeper into the process of the Duat, later to rise with the sun and be in the company of the gods.<sup>48</sup> Remember that the west is also the right hand/right side.

Just to move briefly from history and into esotericism, the right-hand harvest contains seeds (new potential – the fruit of the harvest) and also learned wisdom from experience – the light of evolution. That is the lantern held in the right hand by the adept, depicted as the Hermit in the tarot. The light of our evolution guides us forward in life, and in death lights our way through the darkness of the underworld/Duat as we navigate its trials on our journey.

This esoteric understanding which flows from this ancient pattern is also very likely the root of understanding behind the 'right hand of God'. Remember that many of the philosophies and thinking behind very early Christianity was partly seeded in Egypt<sup>49</sup>, as was a fair amount of Jewish philosophy.

To qualify that statement adequately would take an essay on its own. But there is enough archaeological, historical and textual evidence to demonstrate Egyptian thought and ideas mingling with Hellenistic Jewish communities in Egypt (along with Greek and Roman communities in Egypt) to the point whereby long fading Egyptian influences were taken up by the newer communities and absorbed into their mythos, philosophies and magical/religious thinking.

## The continued adventures of Ani in the underworld

A good example of learning how to decipher images and text, specifically for these fragments of magical concepts in Dynastic Egyptian funerary texts and literature is spell 17 from the Papyrus of Ani, which we have already briefly looked at. Now we will look at an image from that papyrus and apply what we know of Egyptian concepts of time, state and direction to decipher a specific famous picture.

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<sup>47</sup> Book of Gates hour five: the dead appear *as* the scales. The Book of Going Forth By Day (Book of the Dead) Spell 30B

<sup>48</sup> The Book of Gates – New Kingdom text

<sup>49</sup> Choat, M. "Christianity." 2012. The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt edited by C. Riggs. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



In Egyptian sacred imagery<sup>50</sup> everything has meaning, from the stance of the person, to the banners, flowers, animals and hieroglyphs. And remember that Middle Egyptian hieroglyphs in important literature, sacred/funerary texts and important stela often had layered meaning not only with the words, but also actual images, and the pictograms of the hieroglyphs.

### Aker – Yesterday and Tomorrow

Aker is a power of the horizon between the otherworlds/Duat and the physical world. Aker is most often depicted as two lions sat back to back, and between their backs the sun is depicted either rising or falling. The sun, Atum (Ra/Re upon rising), is nestled between two peaks in a stylised hieroglyph named Djew<sup>51</sup>.

The two peaks are east and west, the two positions where the sun rises and falls. The image of the sun nestled between the two peaks is called the Akhet<sup>52</sup> - Akhet means the place the sun inhabits just before it rises over the horizon to flood the world with light. Interestingly the same word is also used for the inundation of the Nile.

So we have an image of Atum that also combines both east and west (Djew). Above the Akhet is the sign/hieroglyph *pt* for sky or heavens. The image of the Akhet can depict the sun either rising or setting.<sup>53</sup>

On either side of the Akhet, also under the *pt*, sits the two lions – Aker. The image of Aker is one of the most misunderstood ones when people get interested in Egyptian images and symbolism, and the internet is rife with misunderstandings in articles that are then copied on ad nauseum. To look at the directional keys of the Aker, you need common sense and a basic knowledge of Middle Egyptian language (hieroglyphic) and symbolism.

The names of two lions are Duaw and Sef, who together make up the Aker, *He who guards the Akhet*. Duaw can be a difficult hieroglyphic word to translate at times, as it can mean today (as in the day ahead) or tomorrow, and is translated in correlation to the context. And this is where you have to be careful about how language can shape thought – Duaw is a word that denotes moving forward, and would not be used in its context of ‘today’ as we would use it. For us, we would say, now, today, meaning this present moment in time. Duaw is always moving ahead, and the Middle Egyptian word for ‘now’ would be *ꜥt* (*at*).

<sup>50</sup> Statues, funerary texts, tomb walls.

<sup>51</sup> The two peaks of the primordial mountain are Djew are Manu/western, and Bakhu/eastern

<sup>52</sup> 𓆎 - horizon

<sup>53</sup> Magli, G. (2013). The lords of the horizon. In *Architecture, Astronomy and Sacred Landscape in Ancient Egypt* (pp. 57-104). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

In the context of Aker, Duaw means tomorrow and Sef means yesterday<sup>54</sup>. Aker as a collective of the two lions was at times titled *He who is looking forward and behind, Yesterday and Tomorrow*, or *He who is beneath* (the horizon).

When you look at images of the Aker lions in funeral texts, also look at what is around them. In the papyri of Ani<sup>55</sup> the lion Duaw which is to the left in the image, has before its nose, two lotus flowers which are symbols for Upper Egypt /south<sup>56</sup>. Beyond the lotus flowers are the Ba birds of Ani and his wife standing on top of their mortuary shrines, and beyond them is an image of Ani playing Senet: the game of Passing.<sup>57</sup> Ani is depicted sitting playing the game in his 'shrine' or 'enclosure', which means he has passed the trials of judgement and is now 'eternal'.

On the right of the Akhet is Sef, yesterday. Before Sef is the Benu bird, *He who came into Himself*<sup>58</sup>. In the Heliopolis<sup>59</sup> creation myth, the Benu bird flew over the waters of the Nu before creation. He landed on the emerging BenBen stone and the cry of the Benu broke the primeval silence, determining what was or was not to unfold in creation. He is connected with Ra/Atum and Osiris, a symbol of the early beginning of regeneration (the midnight before the dawn) and likely the source of the later mythic Phoenix.

The hieroglyphs beneath the Benu bird say, *I am that great Benu bird which is in Heliopolis, the supervisor of what exists.*

Before the Benu bird is the Lotus flower of the south attached to the south end of the shrine, and beyond the flower is Osiris Ani in his shrine, flanked by Isis and Nephthys (the two birds) guarding the embalmed body of Ani.

The whole line of images for spell seventeen run right to left, and signify the transition from Osiris Ani to the resurrected Ani. The images tell of Ani as Osiris, his body 'healed' and wrapped (embalmed) in his shrine protected by the two goddesses, and the Lotus flower signifying 'south', i.e. the direction in which Ani is to go in his travels through the Duat. Notice that 'north' of Osiris Ani is Nephthys who is the goddess of the death process, and south of Osiris Ani is Isis, goddess of life.

*Ascend and descend; descend with Nephthys, sink into darkness with the Night-bark. Ascend and descend; ascend with Isis, rise with the Day-bark*<sup>60</sup>. " - Pyramid Text Utterance 222

## Egyptian summary

What does all of this tell us about the Egyptian magical directions? By careful study of the texts, wall images and texts, and looking at them through the eyes of a magician, we start to see a pattern emerging that reflects the foundation of a lot of magical approaches today.

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<sup>54</sup> Faulkner Dr Ramond (translation 1974) *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (spell 17) Chronicle Books USA 1994 first edition.

<sup>55</sup> A copy of the Book of Coming Forth by Day for Ani, Theban Scribe 1250BC 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Egypt

<sup>56</sup> McDonald Dr J. Andrew PhD. 2018. "Influences of Egyptian Lotus Symbolism and ritualistic Practices on Sacral Tree Worship in the Fertile Crescent from 1500 BCE to 200 CE," Basel: *Religions* 9

<sup>57</sup> Dunn-Vaturi AE, De Voogt A, Crist W. (2016) *Ancient Egyptians at Play*. Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic.

<sup>58</sup> Hart, George (2005). *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (Second ed.). New York: Routledge. pp. 48–49.

<sup>59</sup> Iwnw (Iuna)

<sup>60</sup> Faulkner R.O., 1969. *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*. Oxford University Press

Like most western magical directions, one element of the pattern is solar – the sun rises in the east, peaks in the south, sets in the west and is the weakest in the north. The Dynastic Egyptian magic, as opposed to later Greco Roman Egyptian magic, was centered around the individual – the directional pattern was an operation of the human passing through time, not an operation of interaction with the geography around them.

The passage of the sun into the Duat through the western gate and rising the following morning through the eastern gate is a pattern of death, trial and resurrection, where the magician in life and in death forges forward into the south for the future.

The left hand/east as a life/action direction and right hand/west/harvest direction shows clearly a method of operating whereby the magician in the centre of all things, and walks a path of triggering life, action and consequence, and simultaneously a path of ending, completion, harvest, the judgement of that harvest, and evolution. All of this is under the influence of Maat, the striving to keep balance, justice and order.

In Ancient Egypt, if the actions and intent of the priest magician were necessary in order to re-establish balance or Maat then the powers would work with and flow through the magician. This is not about only doing ‘good’ magic, but *necessary* magical actions, which could at times be violent or destructive if that was needed to defeat Isfet and re-establish Maat. Note how this centre of balance uses both creative and destructive magic in order to maintain balance and suppress chaos.

### Right hand path/left hand path

In modern occultism/magic, people often identify themselves as either right hand path or left hand path. The RHP path was considered ‘good and holy’ and the LHP was considered ‘bad’ and evil. This duality was introduced (as far as I can tell) by Madame Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical society in 1875, and who coined the terms in her book *Isis Unveiled* (1877)<sup>61</sup>. She drew upon Indian Tantra for the ideas and posited the concept that LHP magicians/practitioners were followers of Black Magic and were a threat to society.

I find it ironic that someone who drew upon East Indian concepts, and named her book after an Egyptian goddess did more to separate future magicians than anyone else from the powerful and complex pattern that had emerged out of Egypt.

When you mix Blavatsky’s duality with the Christian understanding of ‘The right hand of God’ as being good/just, you can see how quickly this not only distorted an ancient magical pattern, but also contaminated magical thinking from that time onwards.

She didn’t just get it from Tantra, the right hand/good, left hand/bad had already been kicking around for a thousand years in Christianity and Islam, and she would have grown up with the concept as it is in the New Testament. But it is far more glamorous to say you got the concept from Tantra, and it was familiar to people in the west – you accept something far more if your consciousness has already been exposed to its essence. Here it is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, written sometime between 70 – 100AD.

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<sup>61</sup> Evans, Dave 2007. *The History of British Magick after Crowley*. Hidden Publishing

*All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.*<sup>62</sup>

In Islam, it also appears in the ninth century writings of Abī Dāwūd<sup>63</sup> in *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, one of the Kutub al Sittah (six major Hadith collections).

*It is narrated that 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: The right hand of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was for his purification and food, and his left hand was for using the toilet and anything that was dirty. Classed as saheeh (which is narrated by men of good character) by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.*

And yet, to give Blavatsky her due, what she was expressing and that she discovered in Tantra and would have echoed Christian thought, were ideas that also appeared in the old religion of Iran<sup>64</sup> and were also found in the Indian Vedas<sup>65</sup>.

When you merge the two concepts of the Persian and Egyptian together (remember the Persians conquered Egypt in 525BC) you get a weird mix that right hand/death/harvest is good, and left hand/life/action is bad. This weird meld indeed emerged in esoteric and religious thinking in early Christianity and spread out across Europe during the first millennia AD.

Now think about how that strange union of ideas affects magic and directional magic to this day, and how it locks the magician out of a sense of time, and of union with everything around them. It also causes a conflict within the magician not only in their magical thinking, but also their day to day lives. It separates the magician from their own magical sovereignty, and as a result, the magician can only draw from around themselves, not from within themselves, as there is a constant inner subconscious battle going on between what should and should not be.

This can then spill out into magical ritual action whereby it can define which base direction the magician faces to work, how they use their hands and thus their tools, and how it locks them out of the stream of time. Instead it locks them into a battle of either good or bad, as opposed to the balance of creation, destruction and chaos. The RHP magicians sneer at the unravelling and destruction work of the LHP and the LHP magicians sneer at the self-righteous smugness of the RHP magicians.

When a magician works within a ritual or space, for the most part there are actively working directional power in one form or another, whether it is to 'face east' which has become the default position in magic, or to circle the directions, also usually starting in the east. When you think about the long directional attributes list of Agrippa in the fifteenth century which was uptaken by nineteenth and twentieth century magicians, add in the dualism, and also the seasoning of the soup that was provided by Luria, you start to understand the problems that many modern magicians find themselves in.

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<sup>62</sup> Matthew 25:31–46

<sup>63</sup> Abī Dāwūd - a Persian Islamic scholar based in Basra. Died 889AD

<sup>64</sup> Zoroastrianism 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Persia

<sup>65</sup> 1200-200 BCE for present form, introduced into India by Aryans

Luria, interestingly, picks up on the south/tomorrow, north/past in his attributes of power for the Sefirot Chesed and Gevurah, but that has largely been missed or ignored by later magicians.

All of these ingredients that have been drawn together, serve collectively to lock out the magician from their power within as they seek it outside of themselves ritually. By not rooting the magician in the flow of time, and creation/destruction, the magician becomes reliant upon the powers around him or her, and not the ones within.

Instead, the internal power/Divine of the magician becomes something that must be psychologised over, or striven for in a semi religious way without rooting it firmly into the magical practice as an anchor. This is not to say that the powers, beings and patterns that flow from the directions are not to be used or be a major component within magic, they are. However, if the magician is not first rooted within their own fate, time, and divine self, they are essentially trying to use software without an operating system.

When you add in the concept of the duality/hand paths, you further limit the magical potential for power and balance within the magical work. The simple act of always facing east, which predominates in some magical systems, locks the magician himself out of time – why? Why does not a created pattern work when by rights it should?

If the facing east system was created around the inner power flowing out into the physical world from the ‘inner east’, and the ritual system and physical actions of the magician were a holism designed to take that power and use it across their system, then yes it would work. But that is not what has happened.

Instead you have a patchwork of ideas and concepts stitched together, where related systems flow through those concepts – so for example you end up with a magical system where Egyptian, Greek, Romano Christian, Persian, and Kabbalistic concepts are thrown into rituals and systems *without understanding what each component is doing and why*. Every single part of an old system that you use brings with it all the rest of the system into the magic if it is not filtered. When you have clashing components inserted without real magical understanding, you also end up with whole clashing systems flowing into a ritual act.

This is not to say that you cannot mix in components from different sources, you can, and it can work brilliantly *but only if those components are complementary and the mixing is done with true gnosis of all the different systems and their power flows*. This is where the magician is anchored in a particular format, and weaves the power flows while limiting/filtering the rest of the various systems ‘idiosyncrasies’. They become the composer, the source and the landscape, as opposed to an operator who doesn’t understand the machinery that they work on.

Before I finish, I want to just demonstrate how easily something ancient ended up in much later magical texts, but its knowledge was lost.

Remember when we looked at the nineteenth century, Eliphas Levi and the Grand Grimoire, I asked you to take note of the forked staff?

*On the eve of the great undertaking you will search for a rod or wand of wild hazel tree that has not yet born fruit, at the highest point of the sought-after branch there should be a second*



*little branch in the form of a fork with two ends; its length should be nineteen and a half inches.*<sup>66</sup>

The forked staff has its roots in Ancient Egypt, the Was Sceptre/staff, which magically is used to ‘pin’ the head of the serpent Apep and his fellow serpents, and is used in iconography and hieroglyphs to denote ‘power of dominion’, i.e. by pinning the serpents of chaos, the gods and magicians have power and control over the land. Incidentally this concept of pinning underworld powers also emerges in Tibetan Buddhism.

The forked staff (without the head of Set on the end) is still used to this day in Egypt to pin and catch troublesome snakes – it has practical, magical and symbolic uses that have spanned thousands of years. In a practical sense, if you look up modern steel snake catching sticks, the handles often have a Setian shaped handle for a good angle grip, and the forked bottom to trap the neck of the snake. So it is possible that the Was staff head (Set’s head) not only had a power/magical/deity function, but also a practical one. Holding the Was staff by the head allows the holder to angle the staff in a way that gives maximum distance and maximum control.

Going back to the mention of the forked staff in the Grand Grimoire, yes there were venomous snakes in Europe (the Common European Viper) and the forked staff could have developed independently in Europe, but when you pay attention to the instructions on how to make the forked staff, it does not say ‘make it like a snake catching staff’, or a similar terminology that would have been used if they were familiar to the people of the time. Rather it has to give detailed instructions including looking for the fork in the branches, as if it were something unknown. I did look through images from the Middle Ages and Medieval period looking to see if a forked snake catching staff was depicted anywhere, and most images were of spears, and usually in religious icons.

Now have a look at these images. The first is from scene thirty-four of the sixth hour in the Book of Gates<sup>67</sup>, a New Kingdom funerary text that it packed within magical and mystical meaning.



The inscription with the image says:

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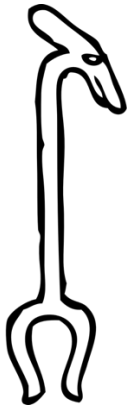
<sup>66</sup> Grand Grimoire aka the Red Dragon: (early 19<sup>th</sup> century) Chapter III Book One

<sup>67</sup> McCarthy J, Sheppard M, Littlejohn S. 2017. The Book of Gates: A Magical Translation. Quareia Publishing Exeter, UK.

*Receive for yourself your mortal grapples which you hold fast in your arms. What is yours is in the Absorbing One: Dispute you what should be in him, that what is best in him may come forth, and he retires.*<sup>68</sup>

Think about what the inscription is saying, and in context of the power of the Was staff and what it does. Note it is not depicted as a Was with the head of Set, it is simply a snake catching staff.

This image is the Was Sceptre, with the head of Set (the suppressor of Apep, Chaos) and the forked bottom. It appears frequently in Egyptian tomb wall paintings, and with temple statues and images/statues of the king. It denotes the power to suppress chaos and thus help the land, area or person maintain their Maat and protect Maat<sup>69</sup>.



And finally, in this Middle Kingdom stela<sup>70</sup> the Was sceptre/staff in the hand of the Goddess Isis (Aset). Note how the staff is held in the left hand, which means ‘power of dominion in life’, and the Ankh in the right hand which means ‘I give life in death’.



<sup>68</sup> Translation by Michael Sheppard 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Maat – truth, balance and justice – the underpinning concept of the Dynastic Egyptian religion

<sup>70</sup> Stela showing "Isis the Great Goddess" sitting and holding a was-sceptre. A man, the head of necropolis workers, adores her. From Egypt, Middle Kingdom. The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, London. With thanks to the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL.

I hope this essay has been of use to you, to help you think about where things come from, how they are passed through time, and how ideas form and change over millennia, and as they move from one culture to another.

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Image: Geb and Nut – The Gods of the Egyptians (1904) by EA Wallis Budge