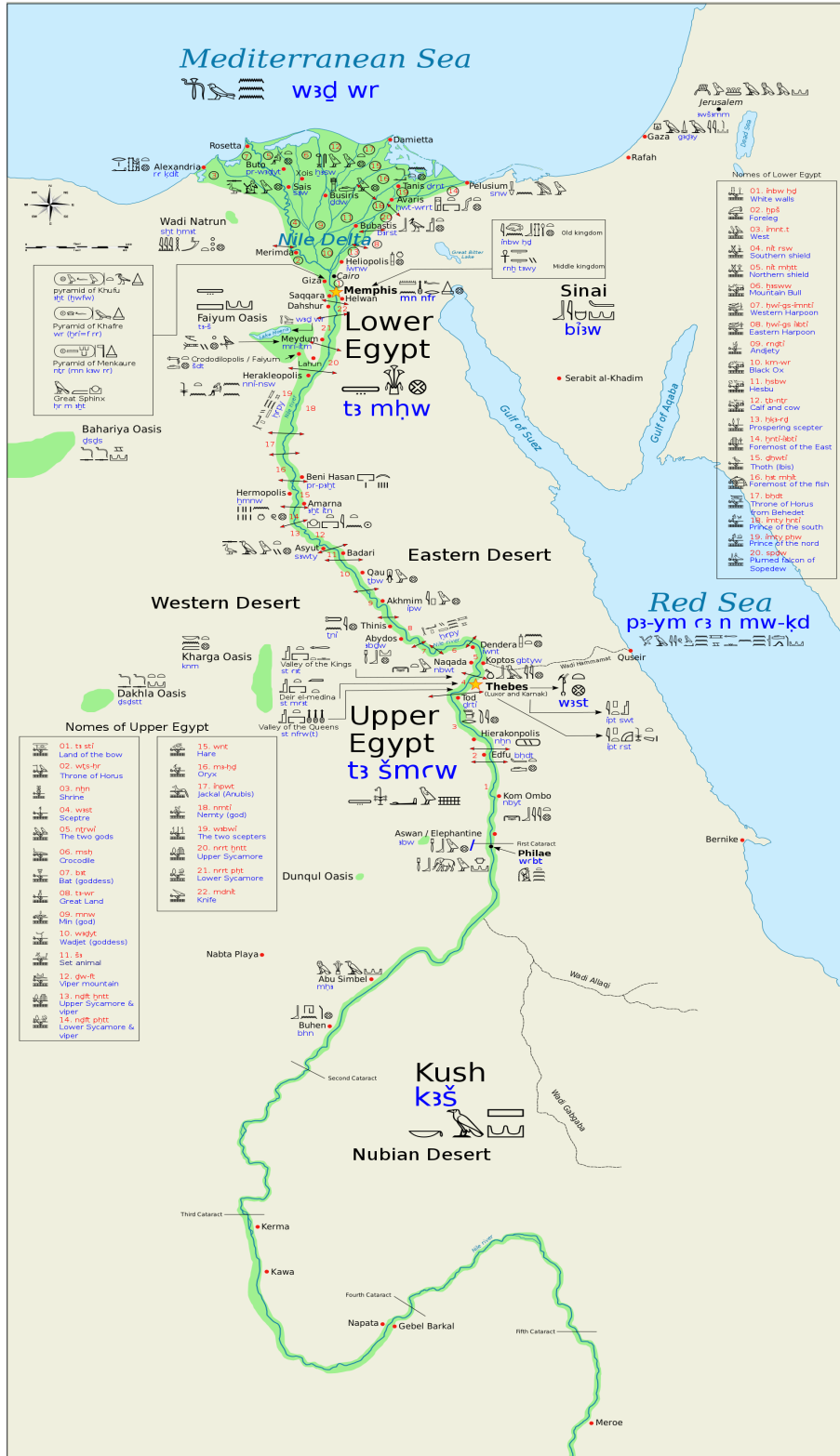


Exploring Magical History: Egypt – II Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom

By Josephine McCarthy



As we now begin to look at various ancient cultures, it is wise to remember that what we today call magic, in its more advanced and mystical aspects, was an inherent ingredient of many ancient religions. It was the power and skill to protect and guard what was sacred and precious, it was used to keep the powers of nature in balance as much as possible, and it was also used in a mystical sense to keep the worlds of the gods and the humans close together.

This weaving of magic and religion, which in the ancient world were one and the same thing, was evident in both Ancient Egypt and Ancient Sumer/Mesopotamia. These two very ancient civilisations both independently developed magical religions that still have a strong bearing on our magic today. Because of that, it is important if we are going to understand the development of magic, that we look closely and try to spot in those distant past cultures, the roots of today's magical behaviour.

Old Kingdom Egypt was a highly developed cultural and religious society, where religion, and the magic within the religion kept all the plates spinning, and the chief plate spinner was the king. On one hand, the health and prosperity of the land and people were his main focus, and on the other hand, the passage through death and the subsequent soul transformation was of the utmost importance, and this was achieved by tending the gods properly, and by living to the laws of Ma'at.

The aspects we will look at in this essay are not all the magical religious or political aspects of the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom, of which there were many, rather I have chosen key concepts, and dynamics that have their roots in the distant past and are still alive in various ways in magic today. By understanding these key concepts in their early forms, it will help you to understand the other aspects of Old Kingdom religion and magic should you wish to study them further. You will find some of the things we look at as obvious roots to present magical behaviour, and some things we will look at will not be so obvious, but with careful thought, you will start to understand their significance.

And a warning – when we are looking at these incredible ancient cultures, be very wary about romanticising them. From a distance they can look astonishing, powerful, knowledgeable and mythical. But when you look closer, you will see that even though these cultures achieved great things, they all had their dark sides, their stupid sides, and eventually the weakness and fragility of the human personality becomes the Achilles heel that can bring a nation to its knees. Human nature never really changes, and we can learn a lot about ourselves and the societies we live in by looking at the greatness and also the destructiveness that were the two pillars of these great nations.

Background to the start of the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom Periods

From around 3,500BCE three main territories emerged that would set the stage for the later unification of lower and upper Egypt – Abydos, Naqada, and Nekhen (Hierakonpolis), each ruled by a hereditary nobility. Abydos became the centre for funerary cults, and the first dynasty kings were buried there. Examples of the first written records were found in the Abydos tomb U-j¹, labels inscribed with the figure of a scorpion (not connected to the Scorpion king of the Nekhen Macehead).

¹ Dryer, G. 1992. Recent discoveries at Abydos Cemetery U.

Thinis in Upper Egypt appears to have been an early administrative and power centre, but by the first dynasty, under king Narmer (Menes), Memphis began to emerge as a capital for unified Egypt.

The king of the unified country was seen as being the force of unity, the protector of Egypt from the forces of chaos. This was a time when a strong Egyptian identity and a sense of nationalism emerged. During this very early period in the history of Dynastic Egypt, we find some interesting crumbs of evidence, that point to apparent early magical thinking, and may have been early forms of what later developed as magical concepts.

Nekhen Tomb 100

The Nekhen tomb number 100 is the earliest known painted tomb in Egypt (about 3500 BC - Naqada II). Nekhen (Hawk City or the Red Mound) was a political and religious centre in Upper Egypt, thought to be one of the three main centres to have emerged at this time. Nekhen was the centre of the cult of Horus of Nekhen and remained a cultic centre for Horus long after its political and general religious power waned. It was where archaeologists found the Narmer Palette and the Scorpion Macehead. Bear in mind that Horus was often a representation of the king.

The tomb painting itself is a riot of activity that seemed to centre upon a procession of boats. Among the imagery we find such interesting fragments such as a man or woman holding two lions under control, a motif that was also found in Mesopotamian and Indus Valley cultures, a man smiting with a mace, which would later become a motif of kingship, and the boats themselves, some showing what appear to be priests (male or female) protecting a boat, and some appear to have what looks like shrines upon them. The motif of the boat and shrine was something that would become central to the religious and funerary cults throughout the ages of dynastic Egypt. Here is a section of the tomb painting (Cairo Egyptian Museum).



Boats

Boats became a major focus in the burial customs and funerary rituals, texts and myths in Dynastic Egypt, carrying on ritual behaviour that was evident much earlier in Egypt. It is likely that the appearance of boats in the funerary myths is partly to do with the Nile (Egyptians knew boats carried you places), but these boats were not intended to sail across or up/down the Nile, but upon the 'other Nile': The Milky Way. During the spring and autumn equinox, the Milky Way and the rising and setting of the sun lined up together – Ra, the sun, rode across the Milky Way². In the Egyptian pantheon, the Milky Way was connected to

² *Searching for ancient Egypt: art, architecture, and artifacts from the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*, University of Pennsylvania. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, David P. Silverman, Edward Brovarski, p. 41, Cornell University Press, 1997

Hathor, the cow goddess, so we start to see the interweaving of the very old motifs that emerged in the prehistoric ideas of the people in the region, i.e. cattle cults.

With the boats painted on the walls of the Nekhen tomb 100, and also predynastic rock art in the desert to the east of what is now Luxor, we see that the boat was a major aspect of not only practical thinking, but also mythical thinking, and that underlies a lot of Egyptian thinking in religion and magic: the practical mundane and the religious magical thinking were fused together. The Egyptians were very pragmatic in their approach to the mysteries, and as the religion developed, so layer upon layer of meaning was woven together in quite astonishing ways.

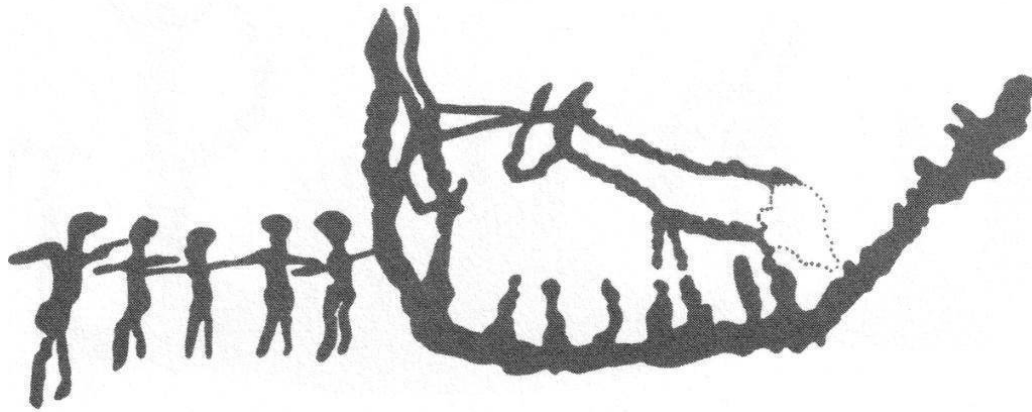
Here are two images from the Eastern Egyptian predynastic desert rock art. A large area of the eastern desert, and not close to water, is littered with rock art depicting boats. The first image displays a developed mythos with Horus the falcon at the prow and a bull prominently positioned.



The second image is a drawing of a rock art boat that is being *dragged* – a motif that would repeat many times in funerary images and is also likely the meaning behind the gripped hands of kings when they were depicted in statues: they are holding the prow ropes of the god in his barque (as the Developing Ones as depicted in the Book of Gates).^{3 4}

³ <http://www.eastern-desert.com>

⁴ Lankester, F.D. 2013, Desert Boats-Predynastic and Pharaonic Era Rock-art in Egypt's Central Eastern Desert: Distribution, Dating and Interpretation, BAR 2544, Archeopress, Oxford



We also find boat burials at the tombs and pyramids of kings from the 1st dynasty right through to the 12th dynasty middle kingdom⁵. These are the ‘solar barques’ that carry the king on his journey to the heavens, and they were often buried in their own graves, for example the early First Dynasty fourteen Hor-Aha boats at Abydos. They averaged 75ft long and were buried in their own graves in the Abydos necropolis.⁶ Nineteen boat burials in elite tombs were found at Helwan, a necropolis site close to Memphis, and are thought to be early dynastic⁷. A stunning boat burial was found at the foot of the great pyramid of Khufu, with the boat sealed into a pit. It shows signs of having been in water, and it has been assumed that the boat was a royal ceremonial barge that brought the dead king to the tomb. However, it is worth noting that an ancient way of sealing a boat and making it water worthy, is upon completion, to place it in water until the wood swells and seals the joints. So the water evidence may have simply been a part of the production process.

The use of boats as a travelling vessel in death appears in death mythos around the world, for obvious practical reasons. But the use of a boat in this way, over thousands of years, has impressed that imagery within the collective consciousness. When a magician works in vision, particularly in the realms of death and the underworld, a boat is one of the first things that appears for the magician to work with. In Western Hermetic magic this often appears as the boat as the ferry, with the ferryman who carries the visionary magician across or down the river of death. The roots of the Ferryman in the river of death can be found in the Pyramid Texts of Old Kingdom Egypt.

It is often not a conscious decision to work with a boat in a visionary context, rather, it is simply what appears when the magician works in vision, particularly with visionary work connected to death and the underworld. Thousands of years of use of a particular thing creates a visionary inner interface that magicians can tap into and work with in their inner explorations.

This is true of all of the very ancient motifs that carried on in use over thousands of years. Often modern magicians who are not well versed in history or have not been exposed to ancient cultural images or ideas, still come across these structures while working in vision, and this in turn raises interesting questions regarding how our consciousness works, and how collective consciousness works over time.

⁵ Solar barque burials for Sensusret III (r1878-1839BCE) and Amenemhat III (r1860-1814BCE) at Dashur

⁶ Matthew Adams, Associate Director for the Abydos Boats project, Egyptian Section, University of Pennsylvania Museum, and the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

⁷ Zaki Youssef Saad (1901–1982),

The Narmer Palette (predynastic 3,100BCE)



The Narmer Palette was found in 1898 during an archaeological excavation at the temple of Horus, in Nekhen, Upper Egypt, and is a two foot highly decorated palette made of grey green siltstone. It was found along with the Scorpion Macehead and the Narmer Macehead.

The 'smiting' side of the Narmer Palette caught my magical eye for a couple of reasons. The first being the issue of the king's sandals, and the other being the mace used for smiting.

Sandals and feet

The feet of a high priest or king⁸ (male or female, many titles were not gender assigned) were a little special. The king and certain high priests would not touch their bare foot to the ground unless there was a specific reason. This was not unique to Egypt⁹ and is something that we find in ancient cultures around the world, with echoes of the practice showing up in later royal personages in Europe.

In the case of Egypt, the *foot to the ground* was the direct connection between the king and Geb, the land power: they became as one. The king could magically draw upon that power in times of war in order to destroy his enemies, if he was a king who upheld the laws of Ma'at. We see a demonstration of this in the Narmer Palette, where the king puts his bare foot to the ground, his crushed enemies beneath his feet, and his sandal bearer waiting patiently behind him, sandals in hand.

The mythos of the bare foot upon the land in order to draw power from the land is something that has remained in magical practice to this day, in various different forms, where the magician draws power up through their feet in order to link to the land and become one with the land.

There is also a large amount of magical mythos around the foot, and the foot print, where the mark of the foot was thought to leave a presence within a sacred space. In a sacred setting, the bare foot not only left the dirt of the outside world behind on the sandals left outside, but the bare foot put the body of the person in direct contact with the sacred substance/land beneath their feet. Here is an example from the Qur'an where God told Sayyidna Musa (Moses) to take off his sandals before communing with God.

*Verily I am thy Lord! Therefore in My presence put off thy shoes: thou art in the sacred valley Tuwa.*¹⁰

Note that it is not just the presence of God that is the reason for taking off the shoes, God points out to Moses that he is in a *sacred valley*. The physical direct contact between the human foot and the land power is an ancient and powerful magical act.

Ames Sceptre and royal staffs

The other thing about the Narmer Palette that caught my eye is the use of the magical mace, or Ames Sceptre. At a first glance it just looks like a practical weapon, but each thing that the king holds also has magical relevance: the king was the carrier of magic for the nation, and everything the king used was infused with magic.

While I was rummaging around the archaeological findings of 5th dynasty Giza, I came across a stela from the tomb of Rewer, a Sem (funerary) priest of Ptah who was with king

⁸ Sheldon L. Gosline. Female Priests: A Sacerdotal Precedent from Ancient Egypt. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring, 1996)

⁹ Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941). *The Golden Bough*. XVII the Burden of Royalty 1922

¹⁰ Sūrat Tā-Hā - the 20th sura of the Qur'an 20:12

Neferirkare (5th dynasty king) for the ceremony of *taking the prow ropes of the God's boat*, and the king had his ritual mace with him. The king was blocking the way with his Ames sceptre and accidentally touched Rewer with his mace. The king had to utter 'you are well' to him to protect him from the power of the mace:

..Neferirkare appeared as the king of Lower Egypt on the day of taking up the prow rope of the God's barque. The Sem priest Rewer was at the feet of his majesty, and the Ames Sceptre which the king was holding touched Rewer. The king said: "It is the desire of the king that he be well, and that no blow should be struck against him". The king commanded that it be placed in writing in the tomb of Rewer in the necropolis, and his majesty had a document written in his presence to that effect.^{11 12}

As we can see from this inscription, the Ames was not just a ceremonial or practical weapon, it was a magical weapon that could destroy anyone that it touched. The king had to not only utter at Rewer that *he would be well and no blow should be struck against him*, but he also had to ensure for posterity that it was known that the king did not harm Rewer, that the king uttered in order to protect Rewer from the power of the Ames.

This might seem irrelevant, but it is not, rather it gives us a deeper insight to the magical structure around the king.

The king is governed by the laws of Ma'at, and upon his death, he would be accountable for his actions, which would be judged by the gods. He had to stand before the judgement of the gods and declare that he committed no crimes.

By accidently touching Rewer with the Ames, he had potentially harmed the priest, and thus would be judged for it, but he would also be judged upon the remedying of the situation: the crime had been negated.

Writing upon a stela in the tomb of Rewer that the accident was immediately remedied, not only 'cleaned the kings harvest', it also alerted the gods to the fact that Rewer was touched accidently and not because Rewer was an enemy of the State. It would also protect Rewer's judgement in death.

This is interesting for magicians, as it tells us that the staff can not only strike a person magically, *it can also mark that person as having being struck*. That mark would have potentially stayed with Rewer as he walked through the Duat after death and stood before the gods in judgement. The 'mark of destruction' is something that is still known about in magical workings to this day.

The Ames sceptres were often very highly decorated and beautiful, and were made from various materials including limestone, gold, and wood. Here is an example of an early Ames Sceptre found in Nekhen, from Scorpion II a predynastic king. It shows him harvesting.

¹¹ Translation Baines 1999:23-4 1997 138-140

¹² Willeke Wendrich 2010 Egyptian Archaeology. Wiley-Blackwell



The motif of harvesting and harvest are strongly embedded within Egyptian religion and culture, with a many different levels of meaning. On the surface it is the king harvesting and providing for his people, but on a subtler level, it is the king harvesting Egypt's enemies on behalf of the people: remember it is on a weapon that destroys all whom it touches.

If you dig around New Kingdom Egypt and the funerary texts, you will see how the harvest motif appears in sacred magical texts for the evolution, death and ascent of the human soul. This cutting, threshing and weighing of harvest as mystical symbolism appears in other ancient cultures too.

The various royal ceremonial and magical sceptres that appear prominently throughout dynastic Egypt had their roots in Pre-Dynastic Egypt, and appeared in royal tomb excavations, particularly at the Naqada II Abydos tombs. Each different type of staff had a specific function or power, and what hand it was in also made a difference (left/life/world, right/Duat/death).

Archaeological finds include first dynasty staffs made of wood but carved to resemble a bundle of reeds made into a staff¹³ – the use of one material carved or painted to make it look like an older more primitive material is something that the Egyptians did a lot of: older is always better! There was also an ivory label found that depicted the king Den (1st dynasty) holding a long staff (a Mekes).

There are many examples of different royal religious staffs/sceptres from the earliest phases of Egyptian culture, and it is useful to note, in terms of why we are looking at this (magical history), that the various types of staff/sceptres were not only magical, but were considered powers within themselves.

They were considered sentient beings that had a specific power that could be wielded by the king or high priest, and were at times depicted with arms or legs, showing that they could act independently of the holder.



When you look back at the incident with the Ames mace, and how its power could have harmed the Sem priest Rewer, you can start to see how these staffs contained their own power that was kept in check and focused into action by the king. This sense of a staff being an independent being or power is something that still operates in magic to this day.

¹³ 1st dynasty, found in a mastaba at Saqqara

The most prominent sceptres and their powers

Sekhem, Heqa and Nekhakha



The Sekhem looks a bit like a paddle, and with early dynastic kings, the Sekhem was often held in the right hand, with the Ames mace in their left hand. The Sekhem was ‘might of power’ and was connected to the goddess Sekhmet. In funerary ritual the Sekhem was often depicted being waved over the Ka of the dead king.¹⁴ The Kherep sceptre (the power that directs) and the Aba (the power that commands) look very similar to the Sekhem but play different ritual roles.

The Heqa is a short ceremonial shepherds crook that is the symbol of the ruler. In Egyptian culture, the king was the father, guide and shepherd of his people, and was responsible for the welfare of the land and the nation by way of keeping all the deity powers in balance: Ma’at.

The Nekhakha or flail was often depicted being held alone in early dynastic imagery, such as King Den, a first dynasty ruler, where he was shown holding the flail while running during his Heb Sed trial.

The Mekes (*mks*) was a long undecorated staff with a nodule in the middle of it. It has been hypothesised that it was a defensive weapon, or a ceremonial depiction of a defensive weapon, which is very possibly true. However, the long staff has an ancient and distinguished history as a magical staff that was often connected to the power of serpents, and was used magically to strike, touch or point at something. As is found with a lot of Egyptian religious, magical, ceremonial objects and imagery, they often have combined practical, ritual and magical uses.

¹⁴Shaw & Paul Nicholson. The Princeton Dictionary of Ancient Egypt 1995

*The flail is in your hand, the mekes is behind your other hand. And those of the night time fall on their face to you, the Imperishable stars kneel to you*¹⁵ - Pyramid Texts Pepi I

I find this segment of text interesting, where the Mekes is *behind* the hand – in adept magic today, the staff which is a long wooden unworked and undecorated staff which is magically linked into serpent power, is often placed behind or to the side of the magicians left arm/shoulder when it is passively working (guarding) and held in the left hand when it is active. It is also worth a close look at that quote from the Pyramid Texts – note the specific mention of power over the spirits of the night (and thus Duat). In magic, the serpent power is most commonly connected with the underworld and night.

Was, Djed, and Ankh



Was

The Was staff (far right in the image) is a curious magical staff with the head of the Set animal on the top, and a fork at the bottom (like Set's tail which is forked). The power of the Was is 'power of dominion' or power over the land. Set, child of Nut (the heavens) and Geb (the earth) is one of the oldest gods in the Egyptian pantheon and is often widely misunderstood. By the New Kingdom onwards, Set had become everything that was possibly 'bad', likely as a result of the Hyksos invaders who took up Set as their main deity.

Before that fall from grace, Set was a complex and powerful deity, who was connected to storms, earthquakes, and the desert, and was considered powerful and dangerous. But he was also connected to the power of the ladder of ascent for the king in the Pyramid texts and was the protector of Re as he passed through the Duat in his barque. Set stood on the prow of the boat and struck Apep with his long staff, sending the serpent of chaos back down into the depths of the underworld.

When you look at the complexity of Set, you then start to understand the power of the Was staff. Set was created from the heavens and the earth, i.e. a root ancient deity, who through his disturbing power was capable of suppressing the vast force of chaos (Apep) that periodically rose from the underworld to affect the land of the living. Apep was depicted as a giant serpent, and again, the destructive giant serpent in the underworld is a theme found throughout the northern Hemisphere's ancient cultures. If you want to knock a giant

¹⁵ Pyramid of Pepi I, PT 578

underworld power of chaos back into its hole, you don't want a nice polite deity, you need something that is powerful and dangerous that is also on your side.

With that in mind, when you look at the Was sceptre, a staff with its own inherent power and being, you see from its head that it wields a power similar or the same as Set, and the bottom of the staff, the fork, is the same shape as the snake catching staffs we still see in action today in Egypt. The forked bottom of the staff pins the snake down so that it can be handed and dealt with.



Going back to the meaning of Was, when you think about the 'the power of dominion', you start to understand that this staff was a tool/companion being that the king worked with in order to keep the natural powers of chaos in check so that the king 'had dominion over his realm'.

Djed

The Djed, 'the power of stability', is depicted both on the top of a staff and also as a symbol on its own. It is the shape of a pillar and is the spine of Osiris, and also strongly connected with Ptah, and thus with the king.



credit Jon Bodsworth cc

It appears in funerary art in the depiction of the 'raising of the Djed' which is a part of the Osirian resurrection: Isis assists the king as he raises the Djed. The raising of the Djed was also a part of the Heb Sed festival, and also appeared in agricultural festivals. It is the renewal

of stability, the resurrection and rebirth. There is an interesting mythic story about the Djed and Osiris – there are various different forms of this story that appeared over the history of ancient Egypt, and here is a summary of one of the versions:

Osiris was tricked by Set to climb into a coffin that was a perfect fit for him. Once he was in, Set quickly slammed the lid shut and cast it into the Nile. The coffin eventually washed up on the shores of Byblos. A sacred tree grew rapidly around the coffin, trapping the coffin and Osiris in the trunk of the tree. The king of that land was in awe of the tree's rapid growth and ordered that it be cut down to become a pillar in his palace. In the meantime, Isis, wife of Osiris had been searching for him. She heard the tale of the sacred tree and the pillar in the palace, and also that the wood was strangely blessed with a beautiful perfume: she realised it was probably Osiris. She travelled to Byblos and became friends with the king and queen, and when the king decided to grant Isis anything she wished, she asked for the pillar in the palace. The king could not refuse, and Isis returned to Egypt with the pillar, and with Osiris inside it. It became known as the pillar of the Djed.

Ankh

The Ankh was a symbol of life, and like the Djed it appeared both on the tops of staffs and was also held as a symbol in its own right. It is the most widely known of Egyptian symbols, and various versions of it appeared around the ancient world, such as the Cyprian Chalcolithic cruciform figures found in Lemba, Cyprus.

Which hand the deity holds the Ankh in, shows life in life, or life in death: life in the left hand is life within life, and when it is held in the right hand, it is life in death. When a deity or king is shown holding the Ankh in the right hand, it shows that they have of life within death, i.e. they are a part of, or active in, the process of the passage of the soul through the Duat on its way to ascent with the barque of Re.

The three staffs or symbols together, the Ankh, Was and Djed, when combined show the power of life, dominion and stability.

The use of staffs or sceptres as a magical tool is something that has stayed in magic right up to the present day. It appeared in many different ancient cultures, including Semitic, and Greek mythos, for example 'Staff of God' given to Moses by God¹⁶ - the Nohestan, a staff with a bronze serpent upon it that resided in the temple, which was made by Moses¹⁷, and the staff of Asclepius¹⁸.

The magical religious staff was also prominent in Sumerian culture, known as the *gidru*¹⁹. The Sumerian royal sceptre was considered a gift from heaven and a deity in its own right.

When you look closely at the use of wands or staffs in western magic through the ages, when they appeared, what they were used for etc. you start to see how these tools have very deep and ancient roots indeed.

¹⁶ Book of Exodus 4:2 KJV

¹⁷ Book of Numbers 21:8-9 RKJV

¹⁸ Greek god of healing, son of Apollo, and associated with the Egyptian Imhotep

¹⁹ Andersson, J. 2012. Kingship in the Early Mesopotamian Onomasticon. 2800-2200 BCE Uppsala

The Apis Bull



Credit: Brooklyn Museum NY USA

The bull or Auroch²⁰ has been a part of human ritual behaviour for thousands of years before the Old Kingdom was born.

For 40,000 years humans have been drawing, burying and worshipping large bulls and Aurochs, and we can see those ritual behaviours in cave paintings, for example in the Altamira caves in northern Spain, to ancient ritual burials of cattle such as those found in Nabta Playa (Upper Egypt), and the clay models of cattle from the Naqada I period in Upper Egypt (el Amra).

The Nabta Playa cattle burials²¹ were found in the most northern part of the stone alignment site, in a group of tumuli (mounds) that were on top of burials. One particular large cattle tomb was lined with clay and contained a young cow that had been ritually placed.

In El-Amra in Upper Egypt during the Naqada I period we find examples of cattle sculptures such as the small cattle model (ceramic) found in graves. This archaeological find dates to the Amratian culture (c 4,000 – 3,500BCE), a society based in what is now desert, west of the Nile in Upper Egypt.

²⁰ Now extinct species of large wild cattle

²¹ Fred Wendorf Romuald Schild. Nabta Playa and Its Role in Northeastern African Prehistory *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* Volume 17, Issue 2, June 1998



By the early dynastic period we see a fully developed bull cult in the form of the Apis Bull. The Apis Bull was a bull chosen for its very distinct and specific markings: A white triangle mark upon its forehead, a white vulture wing outline on its back, a scarab mark on the tongue, a white crescent moon on its right flank and double hairs on the tail.

The centre of the Apis cult was at Memphis (Ineb-hedj), an early dynastic centre that quickly became the capital of the unified Egypt under King Menes (Narmer).²²

The bull was chosen for its marks and was subsequently housed in a special enclosure within the south west corner of the Temple of Ptah, the Memphite creator god²³. There was only ever one Apis Bull at any one time, and it was considered to be a physical incarnation of the god Ptah. The bull was also deeply connected to the king: often one of the king's titles would be 'strong bull of his mother (Hathor)'.

The Apis Bull was also considered a herald or oracle of Ptah, a symbol of kingship, and a symbol of the king's power – A part of the king's Heb-Sed was to 'run the bull': the king ran alongside the bull between markers to prove his strength and fitness.

In the Narmer Palette, if you look closely, you can see that the king is wearing a bull's tail, something that was a part of the royal regalia.

The mixture of the strength of the bull, the king, and the deity Ptah is a very interesting one magically. Besides the obvious connection between a dominant bull and the king, the connection with Ptah is one worth looking at.

²² Michael Jones. The Temple of Apis in Memphis. *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* Vol. 76 (1990)

²³ Nenad Marković. A look through his window: the sanctuary of the divine Apis Bull at Memphis. *JAEA* 1 (2016)

In the hymn to Ptah²⁴, the deity is *the one who formed the earth by the providence of his heart*.

When we think of the heart, we think of emotions, but the Ancient Egyptians had different and more profound ideas about the heart – the heart was the true voice of the spirit that would speak the truth on behalf of the person when the dead stood before the scales of Judgment.



In the Memphite theology, the heart of Ptah uttered the truth of Divine creation and brought everything into being.

The partner of Ptah is Sekhmet, the fierce lioness goddess who is the destroyer of chaos and protector of Ma'at, truth. In turn Sekhmet is the raging fierce side of Hathor, the cow goddess, 'mother' of the king.

Ptah's epitaphs include: *Lord of Truth, Master of Justice, He who listens to prayers*.

In the Memphis enclosure that contains the sanctuary of Ptah, the enclosure walls have large ears carved upon them: *He who listens*.

Ptah was the master of ceremonies for the Heb Sed, thus overseeing the trials of the king, and the deity's power tools were the three staffs

combined, of Ankh (life), Djed (stability), and Was (dominion).

Today, in the lines of magic that work with the Egyptian system, Ptah is the overseer of the transformation of the adept, where the adept completes their training by way of trials. Many modern magicians see Ptah as simply the deity of craftsman and artists, and thus connected into the Masonic structure.

But Ptah is far more than that even today, and the influence and connection of this deity upon the adept, and that influence upon the Ancient Egyptian king is very similar.

When you connect the powers of Ptah to the Apis Bull, which is pure strength, you get an extraordinary mix of qualities.

The sacred bull and its connection to kingship (and later, magic) appears around the ancient world, and survived into Christianity in the form of one of the four sacred animals outlined in the Book of Ezekiel.

²⁴ Berlin Papyrus 3048



A 13th century Cluniac ivory carving of Christ in Majesty surrounded by the creatures of the tetramorph

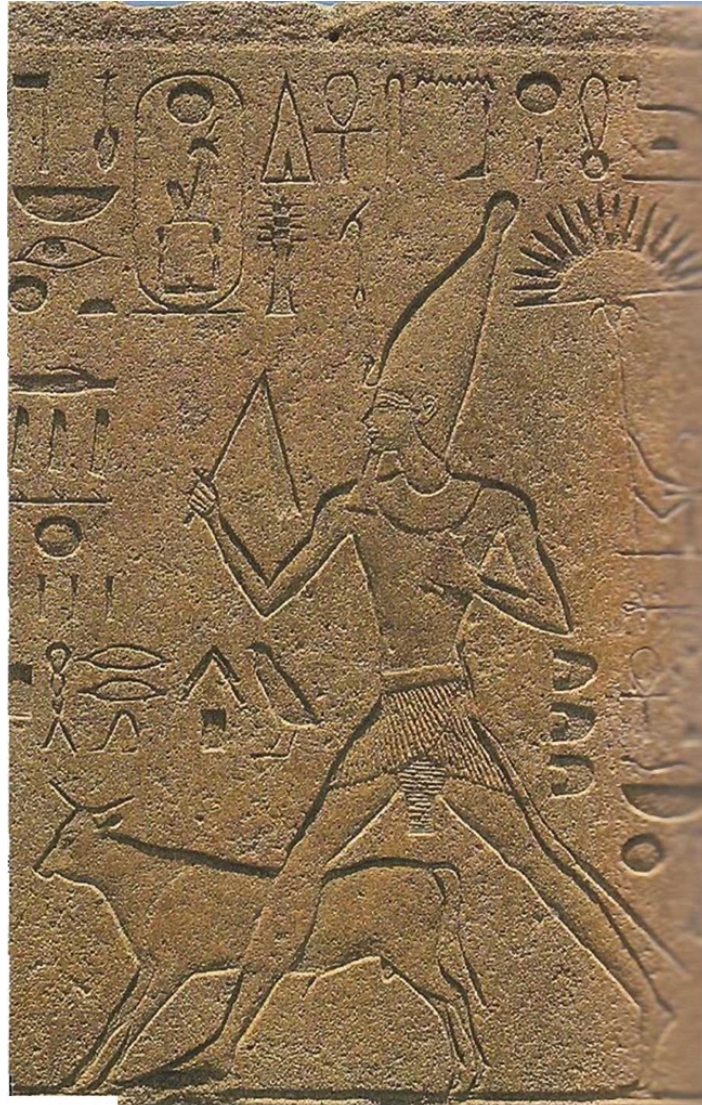
Interestingly the four creatures – man, raptor, lion and bull are creatures that are also closely associated with the Egyptian Old Kingdom monarchs: Horus of Nekhen, Sekhmet the lion goddess, and the Apis Bull.

The symbolism of the hawk and the bull as royal powers dates back to the Pre-Dynastic era if not earlier: the two images appear in the eastern desert predynastic rock art of boats, with Horus at the prow of the boat, and the bull over the top of the boat²⁵. Sekhmet is often depicted stood behind the king, protecting him. The other lion deity strongly connected with the king was Maahes, ‘Lord of the Massacre, helper of the wise one, patron of the king’.

You begin to see how certain imagery and powers travel down through time and emerge later in different religions, and different cultures. Sometimes it is coincidence, sometimes it is cultural/religious cross fertilisation, and sometimes new religions and cultures co-opt imagery or magical structures from older cultures and rebrand them.

²⁵ Lankester, F.D. 2013, Desert Boats-Predynastic and Pharaonic Era Rock-art in Egypt’s Central Eastern Desert: Distribution, Dating and Interpretation, BAR 2544, Archeopress, Oxford

The bull in particular emerges all over the ancient world as a power connected to kingship, and in magic appears in visionary work as a power that acts as a bridge, guardian or interface between the Divine realm and the human realm. When you look back at the powers of Ptah and the Apis Bull, you can start to see where that structure came from.



When looking at ancient cultures for the roots of magical thinking, it pays to be careful, to not skip through the history looking for something you can instantly recognise: sometimes it takes careful thinking outside the box to unearth the treasures. The key to such research is to look at functions and actions – names and projections may change, but functions and actions rarely do.

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