

# Magic 1

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**Question #1: Discuss the importance of the action of the magico-religious function as it is seen within the context of general Indo-European culture. (Minimum 100 words)**

In many of the IE cultures of the ancient world, the first function in society, according to Dumézil, was a part of sovereignty and was divided into two parts, the magico-religious side and the legal-contractual side of the function (Winn, 82). Often, these two parts of the first function would be handled by different Gods (e.g. Varuna and Mitra in Vedic theology).

Usually, there would be a class of priests (i.e. *Druids* in the Celtic areas, *Flamen* in Rome, etc.) who handled the duties of this function, such as the sacrifices and magic workings needed by the people as well as those of contracts and legal judgments. This class thrived and was quite strong in most cultures, though it would seem that in the Germanic tribes the first function was absorbed by the second function, that of the warriors (Winn, 103). In the modern USA, the first function is primarily filled by the Supreme Court, as separation of church and state has (mostly) sidelined the various clergy in the country from direct influence in government.

Without the priests, sacrifices could not be made and the order of the cosmos would be in jeopardy. Cases of law would not be decided and the tribe would fall apart.

**Question #2: Discuss your understanding of the evolution of the magician from early to late periods within one Indo-European Culture. (Minimum 300 words)**

In ancient Greece, magic (*mageia*) was performed by the magician (*magos*). However, this points up the dichotomy of private versus public magic. In early days, magic and religion were the same thing. In the public arena, the priest of the city state or *polis* performed sacrifices for the public good and for the maintenance of the cosmos. This was seen as a good and holy activity. But from early times there had also been the private practitioners of magic, those people who lived on the fringes of society and catered to the smaller needs of individuals. By the classical era, these 'beggar priests' and 'diviners,' as Plato put it, were also 'wanderers of the night,' which meant that they performed secret rites (as opposed to the public, daylight rites of the *polis*). Plato, in his *Republic*, says, "For their part, beggar priests and diviners come to the doors of rich men and persuade them

that they have obtained from the gods, by sacrifices and incantations, the power to heal them by means of games and festivals, of some injustice committed by themselves or by their ancestors. And if one wishes to do harm to an enemy, they commit themselves for a small payment to harming a good man just like the wicked one by evocations and magic bonds, for, to hear them, they persuade the gods to place themselves at their service" (Graf, 22). With the coming of natural science and the practices of these "beggar priests", the old animistic religion (where, spiritually speaking, mankind and the Gods were joined by an easy communication between each other) fell apart and religion split into two separate forces: magic and religion. And *mageia* meant more than just magic. It also included Bacchic mysteries, ecstatic rites and all those magical and religious forms not found in the public religion (Graf, 34). Critics (religious) claimed that magicians were impious for claiming to be able to command the Gods, while others (philosophers) claimed that magicians were quacks who made money by deceiving people. City state after city state outlawed this private magic, not on religious grounds so much, but because the magical activity (bindings of enemies, etc.) violated civil law. Athens, interestingly enough, did not ban magic, which may account for all the lead curse tablets found there by archeologists.

Magicians remained on the edges of society, and faced official persecution. There are records of trials where people were accused of working magic to harm their neighbors. It was a good accusation to use against powerful enemies, if difficult to prove. Magicians were also often foreigners, from Persia or Mesopotamia, and therefore already suspect. And because of the common perception, at least in later years, that magic only was magic if it did evil, magicians ended up being held in very low regard, indeed.

***Question #3: Compare and contrast the culturally institutionalized position of the magician within at least two Indo-European cultures. (Minimum 300 words)***

As mentioned above, in ancient Greece the magician started out on the margins of society and managed to progress to the point of being outlawed and persecuted. A great distinction was made between the official religious practices of the polis as performed by the priests, for the benefit of all, and those underground, popular practices of the magicians, for the benefit of single clients. Official religious magic was usually of a theurgic sort, where the Gods would be implored to do this or that for the sake of the city, while the magicians claimed, at least in later times, to be able to command the Gods through the knowledge of their foreign names and through their own sacrifices and prayers.

The situation in ancient Ireland couldn't be any more different. There the Druids were at the top of the official hierarchy, known as great poets and bards, healers, law givers and judges, philosophers, historians, astronomers, seers and magicians (Ellis, 157-251).

Pliny mentions the druids as the *magi* of the Celts, and Hippolytus puts the two words together as the same thing. As magicians, the Druids were mentioned in the early Christian texts quite considerably, and they also mentioned the magical contests between them and the newly arriving Christian priests such as Patrick (who seemed to be better magicians). Druids were known to be able to do many remarkable things, such as in the creation of the *ceo druidechta*, or magic fog. This fog could be conjured up in time of war to hide from the enemy and was used many times in the mythology. Druids were also shape shifters, and were able to look like other people or animals as needed. They could bring about boils on the faces of their enemies merely by reciting a *satire* to them, for indeed, the bardic arts were also a form of magic. Druids were even supposedly able to 'rhyme either a man or beast to death' (Ellis, 250).

So we can see that although the magicians of ancient Greece and ancient Ireland were able to perform similar magical deeds, they occupied very different places in society. In Greece they were at the very bottom of the hierarchy while in Ireland they were at the very top.

**Question #4: Identify the terms used within one Indo-European language to identify 'magic' and 'magician' examining what these terms indicate about the position of the magician and the practice of his or her art. (Minimum 100 words)**

As I mentioned above, in ancient Greece, magic (*mageia*) was performed by the magician (*magos*). These words only appeared in the early classical era, and come from the Persian words for a priest or a worker in religion. In the early years the *magoi* are described as the royal sacrificers and diviners of the Persians (Herodotus) and by Xenophon as 'experts' in 'everything concerning the Gods' (Graf, 20).

It is Plato who lumps the *magoi* in with the *agúrtēs* (beggar priests) and *mantis* (diviners). And even in the play *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, Oedipus describes Tiresias as a *magos* (wizard) who is an *agúrtēs* (crafty beggar). And another word associated with *magos* is *goēs*, which refers to ecstatic healing and divination, and the word has a bad reputation when it first appears in the classical era. This word, however, comes from a much earlier one, *góos*, which was far more respectable. The word had changed with time and with the lowering position of the magician (Graf, 24-28).

**Question #5: In Norse culture we see magic divided into two primary methodologies known as Gald and Seidhr. Galdr is very much the formal magic of sound, word and poetry meaning literally to intone while Seidhr is the magic of the spirits and is used by the folk in their everyday lives to assist in their crafts and arts. Compare the**

**methodologies of spoken word magic and spirit magic and discuss their cultural significance within at least one Indo-European culture. (Minimum 300 words)**

Among the modern Norse or Germanic Pagan communities, these two methodologies appear to be the main ways that magic is performed, and they are very different. *Galdr* is Odinic and more masculine, while *Seidhr* is based on the magic taught Odin by the Vanic Freya, and has even been thought of as women's magic (Gundarsson, 211).

*Galdr* is where the magician reshapes the world in accordance with his will. According to Thorsson, the etymology of the word 'galdor' comes from the sound of the call of the raven, the "song of the ravens" (Thorsson, 15). This refers to the two ravens that sit on Odin's shoulders and whisper in his ears all that they know. One raven is intellectual thought and the other is memory. The magician needs to speak real words, often through the use of a runic system, to communicate his will to the universe directly.

In *Seidhr*, on the other hand, the magician, often a woman, acts like the modern idea of a shaman, who travels forth into spirit realms and often employs the services of a familiar, spirit animal or other type of spirit to do errands for the magician. The *Seidhr* magician sinks into her subconscious to find the answer to what she wants and to affect the universe (Thorsson, 16). The usual techniques used in *Seidhr* are traveling outside the body, often in the hide of an animal, or the sending out of a *fetch*, or spirit. While the magician is outside her body she may also attempt to alter the way someone thinks and she also has the ability to hold conversations with spirit beings (Gundarsson, 211-212).

Now days it's not a problem for either of these techniques to be performed by either sex, but that may not have always been the case. In the *Lokasenna*, Odin is taunted by Loki for behaving as a witch (Gundarsson, 211) and while female workers of *Seidhr* were respected and feared, male workers of this magical art were looked upon with contempt. The Germanic/Norse cultures in ancient times may have had a great distaste for homosexuality (unlike the Celts) and so probably feared any sort of magic that might make a man less manly (Jones and Pennick, 116).

**Question #6: Discuss the existence and relative function of trance-journey magic within at least one Indo-European culture. (Minimum 100 words)**

In the Norse tradition of *Seidhr*, the magician, often a woman, would use trance-like states to perform a number of possible tasks, either involving a journey to the Otherworlds or inducing a spirit to do so for her. The primary purpose of this technique was apparently divination.

The descriptions of this sort of work given by both Gundarrson and Thorsson paint a picture which is remarkable similar to the descriptions of shamanism in primitive cultures as given by Mircea Eliade. As the techniques are described for the Nordic cultures, the magician, or *vitki*, would go deep into a trance state with the aid of drugs, fasting, physical pain, a rhythmic instrument, singing, deep breathing or any combination of the above (Thorsson, 172). Once the mind has been cleared, the *vitki* would either take on the shape of some spirit animal, and fare forth into the Otherworlds, or enlist the aid of a spirit called a *fetch* which would be attached to the *vitki* for life. This technique of faring-forth could be used for divination or for altering something in the spirit worlds (Gundarsson, 211-215). Faring-forth for the purpose of contacting one's fetch is called *Útiseta* in Icelandic (Thorsson, 176).

**Question #7: Discuss the place of alphabetic symbolism (runes, Ogham, Greek letters, etc.) as part of the symbolism of magical practice within one Into-European culture. Examine how this alphabet may or may not relate to the earlier sound, word and poetic magical methodologies. (Minimum 300 words)**

In both ancient and modern Pagan Norse culture, the runes, a form of alphabet, were used for both writing inscriptions and for magical work. The word rune itself has a meaning of *secret* or *mystery* (Pennick, 130). In the Norse epic poem *Hávamál*, Odin is described as hanging on the world tree *Yggdrassill* for nine days and nine nights in order to learn the secret of the runes. Later on in the poem there is a description of what each rune means, and how Odin could use them for magic. Just knowing the name appeared to have made the God able to work magic. For example, the third rune is called *thorn* and means thorn or protection. The verse for this rune goes:

*I know the third: if my need grows dire*

*For shackles on my deadly foes, I dull the blades*

*Of my enemies – neither weapons nor tricks will work for them* (Pennick, 135).

This (and all the other descriptions) seems to imply that what he learned on the world tree gave him the power to, in this case, call forth protection by blunting his foes. In other cases, knowing the rune *gyfu* (talent, gift of the Gods) could help him save friends from a burning house and knowing the rune *Jer* (season, completion) enabled him to bring a hanged man out of a tree that he might speak with him, etc.

The oldest form of runes is called the *Elder Futhark*, with the word coming from the first six runic letters. These letters, or *staves*, number 24 and are the ones laid out in the *Hávamál*. Other cultures shortened the number of letters and others increased the numbers to fit the needs of their own languages – the Scandinavians only have 16 letters, while the Northumbrians increased them to 33 (Pennick, 132-133).

In ancient times and in modern Norse Paganism, the runes have been used primarily in divination, and modern Pagans have tended to use the *Elder Futhark*. The Christian church banned the use of runes and in seventeenth century Iceland one could be burned for using them. However, Paganism never completely died in Iceland and runes were rediscovered in the nineteenth century and their use within the Pagan community continues to grow to this day.

**Question #8: Discuss three key magical techniques or symbols from one Indo-European culture.** (Minimum 100 words each)

In ancient Greece there were three types of magic and spell working that were often performed, and which were mostly proscribed by the authorities. These techniques could be called ritual binding (by far the largest activity), divination and ritual coercion.

There were many types of binding that went on. Judicial binding was the spell used to keep people from testifying in court and was a very popular form of magic in Athens. Erotic binding was the practice of making people fall in love or lust with someone, or to alienate the affections of the victim. There were also agonistic spells which were aimed at crippling someone during athletic or (later) gladiatorial contests, spells against thieves and slanderers and spells against economic competitors (Graf, 120-121). The act of 'binding' was actually quite simple. The spell would be written on a sheet of lead or parchment and then deposited in a grave or other liminal place such as in the sea or down a well. The idea was to force the dead to act as intermediaries with the chthonic Gods so that the bindings would work. It was important that the phrase, "I bind" or "I bind down" appear in the spell.

While bindings were a form of taking control of the future, divination was also a very popular form. It paid to know the price of olives in two months or the weather tomorrow. There seemed to be five main methods of divining the future. First there were rites designed to contact the Gods so that information could be obtained directly. These were called 'direct visions' (Graf, p.197). Other ways of contacting the Gods directly included using some form of medium, often a young boy, as the go-between. The interpretation of dreams was also a form of divination, as were efforts to contact the dead. The use of an object submerged in a vase of water and oil could aid in dream interpretation or used directly in a divination ritual for 'direct visions'.

Another magical technique employed later in the Greek era was the idea of rituals that could actually coerce the spirits or Gods into doing what the magician wanted. This impiety was deplored by the philosophers and the popular opinion was that while religion relied on reciprocity and ritual sacrifice to gain the favor of the Gods, magic could actually force the Gods to do the bidding of the magician. How the magician could actually force a God or powerful spirit was accomplished a couple of ways in

ritual. One was the use of the foreign names of the Gods. The reasoning went that since the Gods had existed long before the time of Greece and Rome, they loved to be called by their original names, which were simply God-names from Egyptian or Assyrian pantheons. To know the Gods so intimately gave the magician great influence with them. To constrain the Gods was considered dangerous by the magicians, and only used as a last resort, but it was used. One way of doing so was through trickery, where the magician would claim to be the victim of an attack, or through slander, where the magician would tell the Gods a lie about something the victim had said about them. Extortion was another method, where the unsuspecting demon would be forced to give an oracle in order to, say, free a beetle, sacred to Helios, the God of magic, from the flames (Graf, 223).

**Question #9: Discuss the relative place and methodologies of magic within your personal religious/spiritual practice. (Minimum 100 words)**

For me, magic is a very broad term that means anything I do on a spiritual level that affects the universe. Just the careless use of words can have magical effects.

In my personal ritual practice, every act I do in the rite is a magical act. I exist both in this world and in the Otherworlds when I do ritual, and I see, in my mind's eye, everything happen in both planes. For instance, when I offer beer to the Outdwellers I hold it in my left hand and turn my eyes (both physical and spiritual) away, so that I don't create a *ghosti* (reciprocal) relationship with them. When I call on the Bardic Deity or Gatekeeper, I actually see them in my mind's eye as they come into the space with me. When I open the Gates between the Worlds, I see the Gatekeeper joining with me, and I echo His movements so that our magic will join, and I see the three Gates swirl and change and then the sky and ground both open up around me.

As for doing magic for its own sake, for my will outside of the rite, well, I don't do much. I do work weather magic on occasion (lack of rain is a real problem here) but even that is often done from a theurgic standpoint.

However, I am starting to do a Solar Devotional, written by a friend using the Carmina Gaedelica, to begin to prepare myself for delving into the world of thaumaturgic magic, or the magic of my own will. I'm not sure what I would use such magic for, other than prosperity and weather. I seriously worry about the ethics of much magic, as most of it seems to resemble the binding spells of the Greeks and Romans.

**Question #10: Into which basic categories would you divide magical arts and how do you see those categories functioning within the context of ADF? (Minimum 300 words)**

When I first read Isaac Bonewitz' book, *Real Magic*, I was struck by the distinction he made between theurgy, the magic of the Gods, and thaumaturgy, the magic of the will. I still believe that these are the two basic categories of magic into which all the other definitions can be placed. The standard ADF ritual of devotion and sacrifice to the Kindreds is a form of magic that is essential to ADF and combines both theurgy (asking the Gods and spirits for aid in return for our sacrifices – the basis of sacred reciprocity) and thaumaturgy (using our wills to create the Center of the Worlds and open the Gates).

In fact, all the other sub-categories can probably be performed either theurgically or thaumaturgically using different techniques. For instance, in weather magic for Tucson, the need is to bring the winter storms and the monsoon storms of the summer so that as much rain as we could possibly use actually falls. In the Grove we do this theurgically, by calling on a storm God (usually Taranis) and asking Him to bring the rains. But we have also added a thaumaturgic element by studying the weather patterns beforehand, and then using our wills to actually move that high pressure area stuck over the Four-corners out into the plains. This has actually worked.

The sub-categories I would consider as valid in ADF are healing, weather magic, divination, prosperity magic and exorcisms. At least, this is as far as I've heard of magic being done that isn't too unethical. There may be other forms I haven't thought of. Most bindings and sex magic are inappropriate for our religion (an exception could be sex magic done with the full consent of all parties involved to increase fertility, increase pleasure, release libidos, etc.). In fact, I think consent in magical healing is also necessary. Consent, in my opinion, is essential for any magical working. The grey area includes weather magic, since it could mean that to bring rain to Tucson, say, might require taking rain away from somewhere else that needed it. I don't think that prosperity magic is in a grey area, though – to gain it for one's Grove or Grove-mates need not mean that someone else has to lose prosperity for the spell to work.

But magic is central to what we do as Pagans, and central to our rites and worship. Magic helps us feel the incredible power of the Gods as well as make our lives better.

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