

THE LUNAR FORMULA  
OF  
IAΩ



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BY *DERIK S. RICHARDS*

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# Dedication

Ἄρτεμιν ἀείδω χρυσηλάκατον, κελαδεινήν,  
παρθένον αἰδοίην, ἔλαφηβόλον, ίοχέαιραν,  
αὐτοκασιγνήτην χρυσαόρου Ἀπόλλωνος

– *Homeric Hymn to Artemis*

Dedicated to

Σεληνόφως, the shaft of Moon-light,

and to

the Archer of the Ashen bow.

# CONCERNING IAO

## AND THE

### Ogdoadic Mysteriess

The mysterious name “IAO” has for centuries been a ubiquitous feature of magical traditions. Many etymologies ascribe a Semitic origin to this name, finding its cognate in the name Yah or even in the Tetragrammaton. Still others conjecture that the name has its origins in Jove, or perhaps Iacchus. Our concern here is not with word origins, however, but with the practical magical application of this elusive formula. To that end, it will be helpful to conduct a brief survey of the usage of this word of power in the context of some modern magical systems. We will conclude by introducing the topic in the milieu of the Ogdoadic Tradition, which places a unique emphasis on IAO, in addition to providing a brief introduction to the Ogdoadic mysteries as a whole.

In the Golden Dawn system, IAO comes into play with the Lesser Ritual of the Hexagram, and specifically that section known as “the Analysis of the Keyword,” which is itself derived from the initiation rite of the Adeptus Minor grade. The Keyword presented is INRI, a notarikon for the name and office of Christ, the god-form with whom the Rosicrucian adept identifies. This is deconstructed into its corresponding Hebrew letters, yielding Yod-Nun-Resh-Yod, which relate to the Paths of the Tree and their equivalent symbols: Virgo, Scorpio, and Sol. These are then paralleled with the Egyptian god-forms of Isis the creator, Apophis the destroyer, and Osiris the redeemer, whose initials give us I.A.O. Hence, IAO in the Rosicrucian tradition is closely tied with the mysteries of death and rebirth, both of the Christ-Osiris figure as well as the initiate, firmly attributing a solar nature to its mysteries.

Looking to Thelema we find these same solar themes in their use of IAO, although Crowley has made some modifications. Crowley states that this is the principal formula of Osiris and, while characteristic of that Aeon, it has served different functions through all three Aeons of his system. In the Aeon of Isis, IAO represents the mysteries of the parthenogenesis and the birth of the Sun/Son. The Aeon of Osiris brings to the formula the mysteries of departure from the Mother, and the hero’s death and redemption. For the Aeon of Horus, Crowley modifies IAO to VIAOV: the addition of the two Vavs makes the gematric enumeration of his Hebrew transliteration total 93, and represents the inherent individuality of the Adept from beginning to end – for through the process of death and rebirth he discovers his True Will and the Star that he has always been. Crowley alludes to another usage of IAO in *Liber Samekh*, calling it “the Formula of the Magick of the BEAST whereby he wrought many wonders.” For the purpose of this study, the important thing to note is that Crowley also acknowledges IAO as a formula of Tiphareth.

The Ogdoadic Tradition is unique among modern esoteric systems by employing IAO as the Divine Name (or Atziluthic formula) used for the lunar sephirah of Yesod. In the course of this guide we will expound on this central notion and its rationale and implications, but for now it will serve to give a few explanatory remarks about the provenance and nature of the Ogdoadic Tradition itself.

“Ogdoadic” means, simply, “related to the number eight.” This term in this context was coined by practitioners of this system in order to provide a retrospective focus for their magical heritage. The Ogdoadic Tradition represents the magical theories and practices that were born from the fusion of Alexandrian Hermeticism, Neoplatonic Theurgy, Gnosticism, and Hebrew Qabalah. Regarded by many

practitioners as having a more pagan “flavor” than, for example, the Rosicrucian Tradition and its derivatives, the Ogdoadic Tradition was crystallized in its present form in the Order Aurum Solis. The Aurum Solis was first unveiled to the public in *The Magical Philosophy* series of books by Melita Denning and Osborne Phillips, and while the Aurum Solis exists today under new leadership it has shifted focus from the original teachings recorded in *The Magical Philosophy*. The Ogdoadic system originally presented by Denning and Phillips continues to be taught and manifested through the work of a succeeding group, the Ordo Astrum Sophiae. The present work is derived from the author’s personal experimentation, and serves as an example of how the Ogdoadic material can evolve and be developed in new and meaningful ways, all in consonance with – indeed, built on the foundation of – the original Aurum Solis teachings.

The reference to the number eight relates to what are termed the Mysteries of Regeneration, or “Palingenesis.” As many other mystery traditions over the ages have done, the Ogdoadic mysteries recount the story of the Sacrificed King – he who must seek his own death in order to attain New Life. The number eight has long been held to denote these regenerative qualities, evinced by its association with the Christian mysteries of baptism (derived from earlier Pagan sources), or the aural qualities of the octave – the rebirth of a musical note on a higher level. Accordingly, the Ogdoadic Tradition takes as its ensign of attainment the eightfold octagram – and so does each initiate of that tradition strive toward the continued interaction between the worlds of spirit and matter, both in order to sublimate the lower in the higher, and to bring the higher to manifestation within the lower worlds. The Ogdoadic mysteries also provide for methods to reach that attainment – the attainment of Adephood – which are based upon the structure of the psyche itself. This methodology forms the backbone of the Tradition’s initiation cycle, but also of each individual ritual technique – this is the Fivefold House of Sacrifice. In addition to the emphasis on these key structures of Eight and Five, the Ogdoadic Tradition has a number of other distinguishing features, including a “Constellation” of certain principle god-forms derived from the Hermetic mysteries, and reliance on Ancient Greek as its sacred language.

Though this study is concerned with one particular Greek name through the lens of the Ogdoadic practitioner, it will still prove valuable to initiates and students of other traditions of the Magical Art for the theory and ritual methods presented herein require no adherence to any given system. As such they may be validly employed by all aspirants who find a fit with their current program of practice. Here, then, are true and never before published keys to the Mysteries of the Lunar Formula of IAO.

# THE ANGUISH OF ACHAMOTH

As has been mentioned, the Ogdoadic Tradition traces some of its heritage back to the various sects of Gnosticism. It is here we must first turn to in order to understand why IAO is considered a formula of the Moon-sphere.

The Gnostic Valentinus taught of an intricate cosmology of Aeons, archetypal qualities in which godhead was reflected. These Aeons dwelt within the Pleroma, or “fullness” – the realm of utter divinity. For our purposes, the Pleroma may be considered equivalent with the Qabalistic world of Atziluth. The last of these Aeons in order of their creation was Sophia – “Wisdom.”

Sophia desired to create a being as she had been created – but she manifested a daughter who was forever outside of the Pleroma. This daughter of Sophia was known as Achamoth. Another Aeon within the Pleroma, Christos, took pity on the formless chaos that was Achamoth and gave form to her. Achamoth now yearned to gain entry into the Pleroma, but was restrained by the barrier known as Stauros, or “cross.”

In her utter distress, Achamoth pressed herself against the barrier and uttered “IAO”<sup>[1]</sup> – and from her overwhelming grief, anger, and fear, was born the physical universe. Here we see why IAO is considered a lunar formula: the letters have generative as well as deeply emotional connections. Generative as Yesod (and Yetzirah) are generative, birthing forth Malkuth (and Assiah) – and also as associated with the very lunar mysteries of motherhood. Yetzirah and the Nephesh are also the realms of emotion and instinct, which are likewise of the Moon.

# CLAVIS LUNAE

Understanding the myth that inspired the usage of IAO as a lunar formula, we may now proceed to elucidate some of the intricacies of this veritable Key to the Astral.

A teaching persists in the Hermetic Qabalah that the 29th, 31st, and 32nd Paths of the Tree of Life – the Paths of Qoph, Shin, and Tau – form a “bow”, of which the Arrow is the 25th Path of Sagittarius, the Archer. The origin of this teaching, aside from the relationship between the Path of the Archer and the Arrow, is that the Hebrew word formed by the letters associated with those three paths is QShTh (or Qesheth), which means “bow.”

This bow represents the aspiration of the initiate to Adephood, by the arrow path of Samekh. Thus the bow of Qesheth also symbolizes the mastery of the initiate over the forces of the Astral World, for the would-be Adept must indeed govern both the forces of his own Nephesh as well as become proficient in manipulating the plasticity of the greater world of Yetzirah.

By gematria, the Hebrew letters of Qesheth are numerically equivalent to 800, and 800 is also the value of the letter Omega in isopsephy, the Greek form of gematria. The letter Omega itself is a great bow, ready to be aimed upwards just as the bow of Qesheth:



One Greek word for “arrows” is *ἰός*. Capitalizing *ἰός* we easily arrive at a figure which very much resembles an arrow:



Taken in full, then, our assembly of bow + arrow = IAO. This important relationship to the bow of Qesheth, and the mastery of the Astral is echoed in the images of the lunar goddesses Diana, Artemis, and Selene, who were all huntresses to whom the bow and arrow was sacred.

IAO then can be seen as a formula expressing this Yetziratic governance – the function of Yesod as the Gate Sephirah of the world of Yetzirah – and yet simultaneously an aspiration to attain higher, just as IAO expressed the yearning of Sophia-Achamoth to return to the Pleroma.

We may turn to another venerable tradition of Hellenic and Alexandrian magic, the association of the seven Greek vowels with the seven classical planets, in order to further understand this arcanum. Omega is associated with Saturn, Iota with the Sun, and Alpha corresponds to the Moon. Here again is an important connection with the Bow of Qesheth, for in that formula the letter Qoph corresponds to Pisces (ruled by the Moon), the letter Shin to Fire (but also of Spirit, both of which relate to the Sun), and the letter Tau to Saturn/Earth. Therefore the formula of IAO, though it is rooted in the Yesod of Yetzirah, expresses the dynamic movement between the levels of the psyche represented by the Qabalistic “Parts of the Soul” as they exist in the Four Worlds.

At this point in discussing the Key we would do well to consider the ordering of the letters IAO. In this first form of the Name we have, relying on the planetary correspondences above, Sol (I), Luna (A), and

Saturn (O). In other words, here we have a picture of the descent down the Middle Pillar – the involutionary manifestation of the Worlds, from Tiphareth-Sun (I), to Yesod-Moon (A), to Malkuth-Saturn/Earth (O). Note that here the Omega correlates not to Saturn as Binah, but to its lower octave which is the Lesser Mother – Malkuth – mirrored also in the “Saturnian gloom” of the 32nd Path. This is the formula of IAO as Spear and Grail, as the following diagram depicts:



In this formula of descent, Yesod of Yetzirah (the Alpha) is the fulcrum by which the Magician may bring his will into manifestation, and implant the Seed of that Will into the Lunar Womb.

IAO is the divine name of Yesod in Atziluth, but is therefore particularly connected to and potent throughout the Astral World of Yetzirah: the Iota can be seen as the Tiphareth of Yetzirah, the Alpha as the Yesod of Yetzirah, and the Omega as the Malkuth of Yetzirah. Here we see that the impregnation of the Yesod of Yetzirah gives birth to the Malkuth of Yetzirah; and that which is wrought in the Astral Malkuth must inevitably find its manifestation in the Malkuth of Assiah.

This impregnation, albeit at the supernal level, is a central mystery of the Wand/Spear and Grail as celebrated within the Ogdoadic Tradition (viz., the ritual formula of “The Gnostic” in Denning and Phillips’ *Mysteria Magica*). This is the great alchemical coniunctio, and the perfect union of Melanotheos and Leukothea, the Children of HA, who shall themselves sire forth the Agathodaimon. Thelemites will also find relevance with regard to Liber XV, wherein the name IAO is likewise adored alongside the mysteries of Lance and Grail.

The averse formula, OAI, is the expression of the mysteries of bow and arrow which we have described. Whereas IAO is the descent through the sephiroth Tiphareth, Yesod, and Malkuth of the world of Yetzirah, OAI represents the ascent through the worlds of Assiah, Yetzirah, and Briah all within the domain of the sephirah Yesod. To put it another way, the domain of IAO is solely within the Astral – OAI ascends through the Astral as an arrow shot heavenward.

In OAI, the Omega – the bow – is Yesod of Assiah. Traditionally this is interpreted as the Moon as physically manifested in Earth’s satellite and, as we shall see, the crescent of the moon itself is indeed our bow in this regard. Again, the Alpha is Yesod of Yetzirah – the silver-headed arrow by which we may penetrate the Veil. Iota is Yesod of Briah, which may be interpreted as the higher aspects of “love,” ascribed at first by the Ruach in a confused manner to the as-yet-unknown contents of the Neshamah, but ever more gradually unfolding as the true love of the Beloved.

# BOW AND ARROW, SPEAR AND GRAIL

The Moon sphere both receives light and reflects it outwards. So too is the nature of IAO twofold: it is simultaneously a formula of ascending aspiration and a formula of descending inspiration. These two modes correspond to her waxing and waning phases, and these are the pinions of Shukla-Paksha and Krishna-Paksha, which flank the lunar orb and give her the title “Winged Plenilune.”

The formula of aspiration is that of Qesheth, the bow and arrow. Here the bow is the physical nature of the magician, which serves as a launching point into the higher and inner planes. This corresponds, then, to the waxing moon, and its growth towards fullness.

The formula of inspiration is the impregnation of the grail by the spear. This is the waning of the moon, which is involutionary at its essence. Thus from the “fullness” (Pleroma), the decline into the world of Saturnian matter is aptly figured by the seemingly impenetrable darkness of the womb. The cycle will be continued once the “child” is born under the new moon.

The implications of these formulae for the magician are vast. They may be employed simply to celebrate the Lunar Mysterium in its own right, or they may form an important component the would-be-Adept’s quest to Know his Genius. They are eminently suited as an adjunct to workings of practical magic, or may assist the magician in a Promethean task of bringing God-fire back for the benefit of all mankind.

The versatility of the formulae should foster experimentation, but the below rite is given as an example and has been found to be particularly effective in augmenting ongoing works of magic intended to produce a physical effect. The complete working occupies one full lunar cycle, from Shukla-Paksha to Krishna-Paksha, but the mage may find it effective to persist in the daily performance for as long as is deemed fitting; to do so emphasizes a valuable link with the ebb and flow of the Aestus Lunae. Further considerations, such as the Mansions of the Moon, may be incorporated into this sequence to great effect.

## MYSTERIA ARCUS ET CALYCIS

1. Let the Votary of the Sun perform this work during one full cycle of the Moon. Thus shall he penetrate beyond the lunar veil and manifest the wonders of the Winged Plenilune.
2. On each successive night of the waxing moon, he shall enter the Chamber of Art and light a single violet lamp upon the Bomos<sup>[2]</sup>.
3. Let the Adept take up the Great Wand<sup>[3]</sup> and, raising it up vertically, let him rise on the planes by vibration of the formula OAI: let the vibration of the Omega establish him within Yesod of Assiah, the vibration of the Alpha initiating the ascent beyond into Yesod of Yetzirah, and with the intonation of the Iota let him enter into the Yesod of Briah<sup>[4]</sup>. He shall remain within the Briatic ambience of the moon-sphere for as long as he pleases.
4. On the night of the full moon, let the Adept enter the Chamber of Art in darkness.
5. He shall aspire earnestly to the Supernal Mother in what form he will.

6. His aspirations shall conclude in uplifting the Grail, and making offering of his own being.
7. On each successive night of the waning moon, let the Adept enter the Chamber of Art and light a single violet lamp upon the Bomos.
8. He shall conjoin the Wand and Grail with intonation of the formula IAO: he shall vibrate the Iota as the Wand descends, the Alpha as the two are conjoined, and the Omega shall be intoned after the Wand is withdrawn.
9. On the night of the new moon, let there be silence.

## THE KEY ANGELICAL

The use of Enochian within the Ogdoadic system is the subject of a tremendous amount of research and ongoing experimentation within the Ordo Astrum Sophiae – and specifically the House of Adocentyn – and will be explored in depth in a forthcoming work to be titled *The Sword of the Sun*. For our present purposes, one aspect of that study in particular is relevant as it pertains directly to the formula of IAO.

Interpreted within this Ogdoadic redaction of the Angelical system, IAO is reflected upwards on the Tree to the supernal sephiroth in the words: “Iadnah Ananael Oma” which translates from Enochian to “Knowledge, Wisdom, Understanding.” Here we see the Lunar arcanum of IAO, but now elevated beyond the attainment of Tiphareth, which is shown forth in the Path of Gimel. Gimel, the High Priestess and Camel of the Moon, crosses the vast Abyss which “sunders noumena and phenomena,” and so journeys through the realm of Da’ath (Knowledge), and bringing the forces of Chokmah (Wisdom) and Binah (Understanding).

Thus here is the formula of inspiration translated to a higher plane. Rather than the masculine force descending into the feminine, as Wand into Grail, here is the descent of the Higher Feminine force into the now-receptive masculine, indicated by the arrow-head of Chokmah-Binah-Da’ath which points downward along the Path of Gimel. This is the Intuitive Mind or Neshamah disclosing itself to the Ruach directly.

Those wishing to explore this lofty concept, which is truly the domain of the Adeptus Plenus, may replace steps 5 and 6 of the rite previously given with the following:

5. He shall utter the second Enochian Key and make invocation of PAOAOAN as follows:

“Thus do I invoke you, PAOAOAN, whose garments of light are beautified with admiration, and who dwells within the radiance of the Eternal.”

The arms are folded, left over right, across the chest.

6. Then let him uplift the Grail and vibrate IADNAH – ANANAEL – OMA.

## PERORATIO

We have followed the arcing arrow-course to its height and the descent of the primal spear into the lunar womb, and throughout run the themes of ebb and flow, wax and wane: the tides of the self-renewing Moon. For she is both the Great Mother as well as her outer reflection, and that seed which she bears will ever be born, and that which is born may be uplifted beyond her veil.

Something of this mystery can be found in the following Gnostic hymn which was to be spoken by the soul of the deceased in order to escape the demiurge and his archons, and which may fittingly draw this work to a close.

Ἐγὼ υἱὸς ἀπὸ πατρὸς, πατρὸς προόντος, υἱὸς δὲ ἐν τῷ παρόντι. Ὡλθον πάντα ἵδεῖν τὰ ἀλλότρια, καὶ τὰ ἕδια· καὶ οὐκ ἀλλότρια δὲ παντελῶς, ἀλλὰ τῆς Ἀχαμὼθ, ἣτις ἔστι θήλεια, καὶ ταῦτα ἔσωτῇ ἐποίησε· κατάγω δὲ τὸ γένος ἐκ τοῦ προόντος, καὶ πορεύομαι πάλιν εἰς τὰ ἕδια, ὅθεν ἐλήλυθα.

*I am a son of the Father, the pre-existent One, a son of Him who was before all things. I have come to behold everything: that which is strange and that which is my own; though truly there is nothing strange, but only that which belongs to Achamoth, for her nature is feminine, and she has made all things. My ancestry derives from that which was before the world, and I come again to the place whence I departed.*

*Ireneaus, Adversus Haereses, I.21.5*

## FOOTNOTES

[1] In other accounts, it is Stauros who proclaims “IAO” to Achamoth.

[2]“An elevated place,” the term used for the altar in the Ogdoadic mysteries.

[3]The Great Wand is a shaft of ash-wood, surmounted by a gilded spearhead, approximately two feet in length. In the Ogdoadic Tradition, it is employed as representative of the Higher Masculine Vital Principle.

[4] As alluded to, the full form of this practice is intended for the Adeptus Plenus who accesses the Briatic intelligence upon reaching that World. Cf. the standard “Rising on the Planes” exercise given in *Mysteria Magica* by Denning and Phillips.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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