

Nine of Scepters: The Pugilist



Card Description:

The Pugilist is the world-weary spirit, bandaged, on bended knee, praying at the crossroads for Great Strength. A black dog howls to signify that She of the Earth and Underworld has arrived. Present before you is the Great One of Magic.

In the background, under the Necromancer's crescent moon, is the city of Uruk in Sumer during the Uruk period (4000 – 3100 BC). Sumer was one of the first civilizations, nestled in the Fertile Crescent. Sumerians called their kingdom Kengir, or Country of the Noble Lords and referred to themselves as the Black-Headed Ones.

The epithet “She of the Earth and Underworld,” or Chthonia, is a reference to Hekate, though it can also be a reference to the Sumerian goddess Ereshkigal, Ruler of the Underworld and Lady of the Great Earth. Throughout the Greek Magical Papyri, a collection of spells and charms written on papyri dated to some time between 100 BC and 400 AD, Hekate is referred to as “Hekate Ereshkigal.” Dogs, serpents, wreaths, keys, the herald’s wand, and golden sandals are associated with the goddess.

The “Great One of Magic” can also refer to Werethekau, an Egyptian divinity who is the personification of magic, sorcery, and also a protectress in the underworld.

“Hekau” means “magic” in Archaic Egyptian. Furthermore, according to the Greek Magical Papyri, Hekate is known by many names, and in one incantation, she is invoked as follows: “O Hekate of many names . . . O triple-headed goddess, who walks on fire, cow-eyed Bouorphorbe, Panphorba Phorbara Aktiophi, Ereshkigal, Neboutosualeth. . . .”

Magi identified the triple-headed goddess Hekate by the three names: Ereshkigal, Aktiophis and Nebutosualeth.

One prevailing theory among scholars is that Ereshkigal was imported into the Greek pantheon as Hekate some time during the Seleucid Empire (312 BC – 63 BC) by way of Egyptian magi—Egyptian high priests syncretized the underworld goddess into their magical traditions, then wrote about her in Greek.

Interesting tangent: Professor Gideon Bohak from Tel Aviv University has also written on the cross-cultural influences of Hekate-Ereshkigal, analyzing a Jewish magical amulet from the 6th century found in Nirim, a kibbutz located in northwestern Negev in Israel. The amulet featured the letters RSKY’L, a Hebrewized form of the angel name Ereschiel, originating from Ereshkigal, demonstrating a syncretizing of Jewish and Greek magical traditions with a shared invocation of Ereshkigal with the formula: HYESIMMIGADON.

Returning to the card imagery, here Hekate’s dress features a tufted pattern of overlapping petals called a *kaunakes*, a common dress style in ancient Mesopotamia.

Key 9: The Erudite and Key 18: The Necromancer reveal the Eleusinian Mysteries, and as the numerological rulers over the Nines, the Nine of Scepters continues those revelations.

The myth that inspired the initiatory rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries was the maiden, mother, and crone story of the maiden Persephone, who was abducted by Hades; her mother Demeter, the Olympian goddess of grains, fertility, and harvest; and Hekate, Titan goddess of magic, witchcraft, necromancy, and liminal spaces. In the Mysteries, Persephone, Demeter, and Hekate represented the triune archetype, the Triple Goddess.

The spirit of this Key is embodied by the story of an innocent one's unwilling, involuntary descent into an underworld and the great strength and love that it will take to restore that innocent one. Here in the Nine of the Scepters, the man on bended knee is The Pugilist and Hekate is the aspect of Great Strength and love manifested as the crone. The crone aspect is to represent Hekate's relation to Demeter and Persephone.

Card Meaning:

The RWS Nine of Wands depicts a bandaged, world-weary man leaning on a staff. Pair that with the Thoth Nine of Wands interpretation, titling the key the Lord of Strength. This card is one of great endurance, but the reason that attribute arises is because there has been great suffering and plague.

A pugilist is one who fights, specifically one who fights with fists. Its etymological root is in Latin, *pugil*, for a fist-fighter. Note the bandaged hand on the kneeling man. This is one who won't back down in the face of adversity. You confront the malaise. You stand your ground and you fight off intruders and interferences.

The Nine of Scepters is about discovering what you're made of, and learning just how strong you are. But that knowledge is attained only after weathering malaise. Hekate appears as a guide to help you navigate this difficult crossroads you find yourself at.

In boxing, fighting endurance is crucial, and any training program would include drills for bolstering stamina and learning to resist fatigue. The Nine of Scepters is the spirit of The Pugilist because this is the spirit of endurance, stamina, and resistance.

When the Nine of Scepters appears in divination, the virtue to embody is endurance. Cultivate the ability to withstand much toil without giving in to fatigue.

The Pugilist is a spirit that detects and reveals to you an affectation in the mental state: it indicates a condition of weakness, feeling feeble, a sense of profound discontent, and feeling both unfocused and hyper-defensive, which now needs to be addressed.

The spirit resident in this card is the personification of malaise, which can conjure a feeling of debility or weakening health. This is also the spirit of despair, pessimism, cynicism, and even acedia. It can cause apathy toward one's otherwise dynamic circumstances.

Yet recall that the Realm of Nines is the realm of the healer. The Pugilist is thus the spirit of a great strength, powerful and potent, which can be used to defend *against* debility, weakening, despair, and oncoming illness.

Given its primordial influences, The Pugilist is also a powerful spirit of defensive magic. The powers ascribed to this card will enable you to set firm boundaries as they are needed in your life. Hekate comes to help you with protection magic.

Artist Notes:

There's a passage in the Greek Magical Papyri that describes Hekate's appearance as follows: "with three heads and six hands, holding torches in her hands, on the right sides of her face having the head of a cow; and on the left sides the head of a dog; and in the middle the head of a maiden with sandals bound on her feet."

I did attempt a few thumbnail sketches to see if I could make something work, inspired by that description, but it was beyond my abilities. So I went with the depiction as the crone here in the Nine of Scepters, and then in mother form later in the Nine of Swords.

While Hekate would most likely have manifested in a more youthful form earlier in human history, I intuit that in the Age of this third millennium, which various apocalyptic literatures around the world prophesy to be the waning “crone” years of human civilization on earth, Hekate would appear to us now in this crone form.

Jungian psychiatrist and author Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen said of her work on Hekate, “It took me a while to write and know about Hekate, because you need to have lived long enough to do so.” I feel the same way about my depiction of Hekate—it is the best I can do at this point in my life.

And yet I’d like to share my sense of her, and please treat this as nothing more than that—a sharing of my impressions. Even among the realms of divinity, the force coming through upon the invocation of Hekate felt very “old guard,” and definitely “crone” energy. Nothing you do can impress her, so don’t even bother; instead, just respect her. I got the clear sense that this divine force was very powerful, but that she rarely used that power, not anymore—those days are now behind her.

That being said, she’ll exert small, individualized energy, meaning she still lends a helping hand to her grandchildren. She’s loving, doting even, and fiercely overprotective. She cannot help but to reach out and save those who cry for her—like the loving, fiercely overprotective grandmother. She has become world-weary of the human collective, and so instead, her presence here on the earthly plane is for individuals, as needed.

Hekate appeared during a total solar eclipse when both the sun and moon were at 23° under Sagittarius, in conjunct with Mercury and the south lunar node. Under a whole signs system, the arrangement occurred in House 12, the house of the underworld.

PRIMORDIAL INFLUENCES:

- Astrological: The Priestess, The Angel
- Numerical: The Erudite, The Necromancer

MATHERS ATTRIBUTION:

Great Strength

MINOR ARCANA



“And she [Phoebe] bore renowned Asteria, whom once Perses led to an ample palace to be called his bride. And she, becoming pregnant, brought forth Hekatē, whom Zeus, the son of Kronos, honored beyond all and provided for her splendid gifts, to wit, to hold a share of earth and of barren sea. But she has obtained honor also from starry Sky, and has been honored chiefly by immortal gods. . . . [W]hen anywhere some one of men upon-the-earth duly propitiates them by doing worthy sacrifice, he calls on Hekatē; and abundant honor very speedily attends him, whose vows the goddess shall receive, and to him she presents wealth, for she has the power.”

From Hesiod’s *Theogony* (J. Banks, Trans.)
Center for Hellenic Studies at Harvard University

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TO HEKATE: Lovely Hekate of the roads and of the crossroads I invoke. In heaven, on earth, then in the sea, saffron-cloaked, tomb spirit reveling in the souls of the dead, daughter of Perses, hunting deserted places, delighting in deer, nocturnal, dog-loving, monstrous queen, devouring wild beasts, ungirt and repulsive. Herder of bulls, queen and mistress of the whole world, leader, nymph, mountain-roaming nurturer of youths, maiden, I beseech you to come to these holy rites, ever with joyous heart, ever favoring the oxherd.

From the Orphic Hymns
(Apostolos N. Athanassakis and Benjamin M. Wolkow, Trans.)