

Scripture Hebrew keshep Greek pharmakon Egypt rods became snakes

The historical and linguistic intersection of these terms centres on **Exodus 7:8-13**, the biblical account where Aaron's rod and the Egyptian magicians' rods turn into serpents.

The Scripture Account

When Moses and Aaron demand that Pharaoh release the Israelites, Pharaoh asks for a miracle. Aaron throws down his staff, and it becomes a serpent. Pharaoh summons his wise men, sorcerers, and magicians, who throw down their rods and replicate the feat—but **Aaron's rod swallows theirs**.

The Original Languages

Term & Language	Original Text	Role in the Narrative & Context
Keshep (Hebrew)	קִשְׁפִּים	Translates directly to sorcery, witchcraft, or magical enchantments . In Exodus 7:11, the Egyptian magicians who oppose Aaron are called <i>mekassepim</i> (sorcerers, from the root <i>keshep</i>), referencing those who manipulate hidden or occult dark arts.
Pharmakon (Greek)	φάρμακον	When Hebrew scribes translated the Old Testament into Greek (forming the Septuagint), they translated <i>keshep</i> and its derivatives using the <i>pharmak-</i> root (e.g., <i>pharmakous</i> for sorcerers). While <i>pharmakon</i> originally meant a drug, medicine, or poison , it carried a dual meaning in antiquity associated with potions, spells, and chemical witchcraft.

The Connection to Egypt and Rods

The use of the Greek *pharmakon* to translate the Hebrew *keshep* highlights how ancient peoples viewed Egyptian "secret arts".

Ancient Egyptian magicians were frequently priests of deities like Heka (the god of magic and medicine) or Sobek (the crocodile god). They heavily utilized a mix of pharmacology (herbal potions, neurotoxins, and anti-venoms) alongside ritualistic spoken spells.

Linguists and historians note that the transformation of the rods into snakes was deeply symbolic:

- **The Catalepsy Trick:** Scholars and zoologists note that the Egyptian cobra (*Naja haje*) can be rendered completely rigid—stiffened like a rod—by applying specific pressure to the nerve at the back of its neck. When thrown down, the impact wakes the snake from its cataleptic state, making it appear as though a wooden stick suddenly came alive.
- **The Toxic Connection:** The snake itself represents both deadly poison and its antidote (*pharmakon*), a concept that later migrated into Greek mythology via the snake-entwined Rod of Asclepius. By having Aaron's rod swallow the magicians' rods, the biblical narrative visually asserts that God's power completely consumes and neutralizes the toxic, occult *pharmakeia* (sorcery) of Egypt.