Appendix

IAO, Iota and the Origin of the Alphabet

If the first letter of the lunar zodiac is any indication of the position of the vernal equinox among its asterisms, then the astrological system from which the original eastern Mediterranean alphabet arose must date from a period prior to that of the four kings and may, therefore, be one of the roots from which the Tarot grew. This will sound like a rather peculiar statement to anyone who, like Robert Graves, has accepted the theory that the characters of the phonetic alphabet arose either from Egyptian hieroglyphic or posthieroglyphic cursive characters, or from the symbols of some ancient syllabary. Nevertheless, it was only with the publication of Hugh Anderson Moran's *The Alphabet and the Ancient Calendar Signs* that the light of true understanding began to shine upon the old question of the origin of the alphabet. I say "began" because Moran manages to drop the ball when he is within feet of the goal-line. In this appendix we will trace the path by which he develops his theory of "calendar signs" until we come to the point where he stumbles. We will then retrieve the ball and in a few brief paragraphs reach a solution to the problem—the result of an investigation of the alphabet, undertaken in parallel with my inquiry into the Tarot, based ultimately upon the application of the simplest principles of logic and analysis to the trailblazing effort of Dr. Moran.

Moran begins by presenting five requirements for the construction of a scientific theory of the origin of the alphabet. The first of these is an *organizing principle.*[1] His contention is that the alphabet cannot be a group of unrelated symbols, such as trademarks, that have simply been thrown together in any old way, but must have been generated according to fixed rules. He is not immediately clear as to whether this organizing principle would be a naturally occurring linguistic law or whether it could be some sort of man-made rule or set of rules. He simply makes

the analogy of a fabric woven together from individual threads. The first requirement is closely related to his fifth, *constant order,*[2] which he recognizes in the nearly universal term "alpha-bet," as well as the general tendency of all alphabets toward the sequence of some hypothetical original source from which the letters were drawn. The second, third and fourth requirements are *great age, widespread distribution,* and *correlation of form, meaning and phonetic value.* He cites the fact that the alphabet was already being used for writing by the 14th century B.C. and that the symbols themselves were in use much earlier. They have been found across a large part of Europe and Asia and have maintained a certain degree of consistency over long periods of time. His contention is that by examining these five requirements it is possible to solve the mystery of the alphabet.

Moran begins his analysis where we might expect him to; with the letter "A," or rather Hebrew aleph and Greek alpha. Hebrew is the only surviving alphabet in which the names of the letters also maintain their original status as actual names of objects found in the real world. "Aleph" means "bull" or "a bull's head," akin to Assyrian *alpu.* Moran cleverly associates this bull with the constellation Taurus,[3] which ruled the vernal equinox from before 4000 B.C. until finally replaced by the Ram sometime after the construction of Stonehenge. He points out that the bull was a sacred animal from Egypt and Babylon to the Temple of Heaven in China. In what can only be described as a kind of reversion to pan-Babylonianism, he ascribes this common bull worship to the spread of Sumerian astrological ideas across the Old World. Taking his cue from C.J. Ball, he sees in the ancient Chinese characters descendants of the same pictograms that evolved into the cuneiform writing of Mesopotamia.[4]

The theory that Dr. Moran believes singularly satisfies his five criteria may be summed up as follows. The 22 letters of the ancient alphabet were derived from those 22 of the 28 signs of the Chinese lunar zodiac that aligned with the 22 horary signs, or 10 heavenly stems and 12 earthly branches, on the *p'u pan (lo p'an),* or Chinese divining board. The reader will recognize most of these terms from our study of the Tarot deck. The 12 branches are the 12 signs of the solar zodiac, which include the previously mentioned *tzu,* whose character resembles the western symbol for Venus. The ten stems are circumpolar constellations. Though Moran's presentation of the above theory muddies the waters significantly, it is his misalignment of the Chinese lunar mansions with the solar zodiac that finally does him in.

Niu, "ox," is the 20th mansion, beginning with *mao* or the Pleiades,[5]

Arabic Manzil	*Chinese Hsiu*	*Indian Nakshatras*
1. ath-Thuraiya	mao	Krittika
2. ad-Dabaran	pi (net)	Rohini
3. al-Hak'ah	tsui (turtle)	Mrigasiras
4. al-Han'ah	shen	Ardra
5. adh-Dhira	ching (well)	Pumarvasu
6. an-Nathrah	kuei (ghosts)	Pusya
7. at-Tarf	liu (willow)	Aslesa
8. aj-Jabhah	hsing (star)	Magha
9. az-Zubrah	chang (extended net)	Purva-Phalguni
10. as-Sarfah	i (wings)	Uttara-Phalguni
11. al-Auwa	chen (chariot platform)	Hasta
12. as-Simak	chio (horn)	Chitra
13. al-Ghafr	khang (neck)	Svati
14. az-Zubanan	ti (root)	Visakha
15. al-Iklil	fang (room)	Anuradha
16. al-Kalb	hsin (heart)	Jyestha
17. ash-Shaulah	wei (tail)	Mula
18. an-Na'aim	chi (winnowing-basket)	Purva-Asadha
19. al-Baldah	nan tou (southern dipper)	Uttara-Asadha
20. Sa'd adh-Dhabih	niu (ox)	Abhijit
21. Sa'd Bula'	nu (girl)	Sravana
22. Sa'd as-Su'ud	hsu (emptiness)	Sravistha
23. Sa'd al-Akhbiyah	wei (rooftop)	Satabhisaj
24. al-Fargh al-Mukdim	shih (house)	Purva-Bhadrapada
25. al-Fargh al-Mukhir	pi (wall)	Uttara-Bhadrapada
26. Batn al-Hut	khuei (legs)	Revati
27. ash-Sharatan	lou (bond)	Asvini
28. al-Butain	wei (stomach)	Bharani

Table X: Names of the Lunar Asterisms

of the Chinese lunar zodiac. Hugh Moran insists on seeing this ox as the bull of Taurus despite every indication to the contrary. Even David Kelley, who adds a chapter on "American Parallels" to Moran's study, realizes that *mao* is the Pleiades and *pi* the Hyades.[6] Kelley, however, falls into the same trap when he accepts Moran's alignment of alpha with *niu*.[7] The result is one of the most incredible examples of missed opportunity in the history of scholarship: Moran knows that aleph is Taurus; Kelley realizes that the head of Taurus is *pi* (the Chinese lunar mansion, not the Greek letter!); and, wonder of wonders, it never occurs to either one of them that aleph, therefore, must be the Hyades.

Moran may be forgiven, though he is not entirely without blame. Kelley's chapter amounts to an appendix, an addition, which Moran

treats as such. In a transitionary chapter he defends his position that *niu* is Taurus on the grounds that the ox and the woman *(nu),* which he again identifies with aleph and beth, straddle the River of Heaven, i.e. the Milky Way, on a map from the *Yung Tai Ta Ch'eng.*[8] The trouble with his argument is that the map very clearly shows the branched and unbranched ends of the Galaxy. *Niu* and *nu* are on the branched end, which, as a glance at any good star map (including the one on page 60 of Moran's own book) will show, is the side of the sky *opposite* Taurus. It is not with a great deal of pleasure that I point out this fact. It looks too much like an attempt to tailor the facts to the theory. The sad part is that the tenacity with which he defended his theory prevented him from making the one slight modification that would have brought the theories of his opponents crashing to the ground.

Kelley cannot be absolved quite so easily. The extent of his knowledge of the various redactions of the lunar zodiac leaves one quite amazed that he never seems to have come across the affirmation of no less an astronomical luminary than Flammarion, who "assigned to [Aldebaran] the Hebrew Aleph."[9] The "early Hebrew zodiac" is no less forthright in its testimony that Taurus "was designated by A or Aleph, the first letter of that alphabet, coincidentally a crude figure of the Bull's face and horns."[10] (Coincidentally?) Could it be that Kelley and Moran are both suffering from the same affliction, the need to find the ultimate origin of all Western knowledge in the East? The most incredible part of the whole affair is that the Hyades are the most letter-like of all the signs of the lunar zodiac, and once the equation aleph = bull's head = Hyades is made, the entire archetypal Phoenician navigational alphabet falls from the sky into the palms of one's hands.

With the aid of a star map,[11] Kelley's lunar zodiac lists and those of Ebenezer Burgess,[12] and various tables of the earliest Phoenician and Northern Semitic alphabets,[13] it was possible fairly quickly to establish the basic framework of the stellar alphabet. A week later the finer details had been worked out. The following is a fairly accurate reconstruction of the logical progression that led to the identification of the asterisms represented by the letters of the Phoenician alphabet. As the pieces fell into place it became clearer and clearer how close Dr. Moran had come to solving the problem himself.

After establishing that aleph was the Hyades, the next step was to find another point of alignment between the two sequences; a second support, so to speak, for the span that would stretch from aleph to taw. By some non-Aristotelian process, Moran manages to determine that the Chinese *wei,* "tail," represented either as a complete or a broken

Aleph = ox,[1] bull[2]
Beth = house,[1] temple or daughter[2]
Gimel = camel[1]
Daleth = door,[1] bucket or to draw water[2]
He = dipper[2]
Waw = hook,[1] pin or peg[2]
Zayin = weapon or balance[1]
Heth = fence or barrier[1]
Teth = ball of wool[1]
Yod = hand[1]
Kaph = palm or open hand[1]
Lamed = rod of a teacher,[1] oxgoad[2]
Mem = waters[2]
Nun = fish,[1] serpent[2]
Samekh = fulcrum or support or fish[1]
Ayin = eye,[1] spring[2]
Pe = mouth[1]
Sadhe = step or nose or scythe or javelin,[1] arrow or justice[2]
Qoph = monkey,[1] surround or wound[2]
Resh = head,[1] chief[2]
Sin = tooth,[1] sheep or goat[2]
Taw = mark or sign[1]

1. Diringer, op cit., I, 168–169.
2. Moran, op. cit., pp. 64, 69–115.

Table XI: Meanings of the Letters of the Hebrew Alphabet

circle, was the origin of the Greek omega.[14] Omega, of course, does not appear in the Hebrew alphabet, which is usually assumed to be a direct descendant of, and to maintain the original order of, the first Northern Semitic alphabet. It is Moran's contention that the five "extra" letters in the revised Greek alphabet were derived from the six signs that remained when the 22 original letters had been used up. Yet Kelley reproduces an illustration of the Hindu-Jain lunar zodiac whose 17th sign (again counting from the Pleiades) is the Scorpion, pictured as a broken circle of stars.[15] This circle turns out to be made up of the stars of the tail of our own Scorpio.[16] Hence we have a lunar mansion sometimes represented as a broken circle, but also as a closed loop, 15 asterisms from the letter aleph, where the Hebrews placed their equivalent of Greek omicron, the forerunner of Latin and English "O." As for why it was called "eye," one need only look at the illustration.

To the right of ayin (in the sky), in the direction of aleph, is samekh, a vertical line crossed by three short horizontal ones. This would appear to be a rather complex image until *[continued on page 131]*

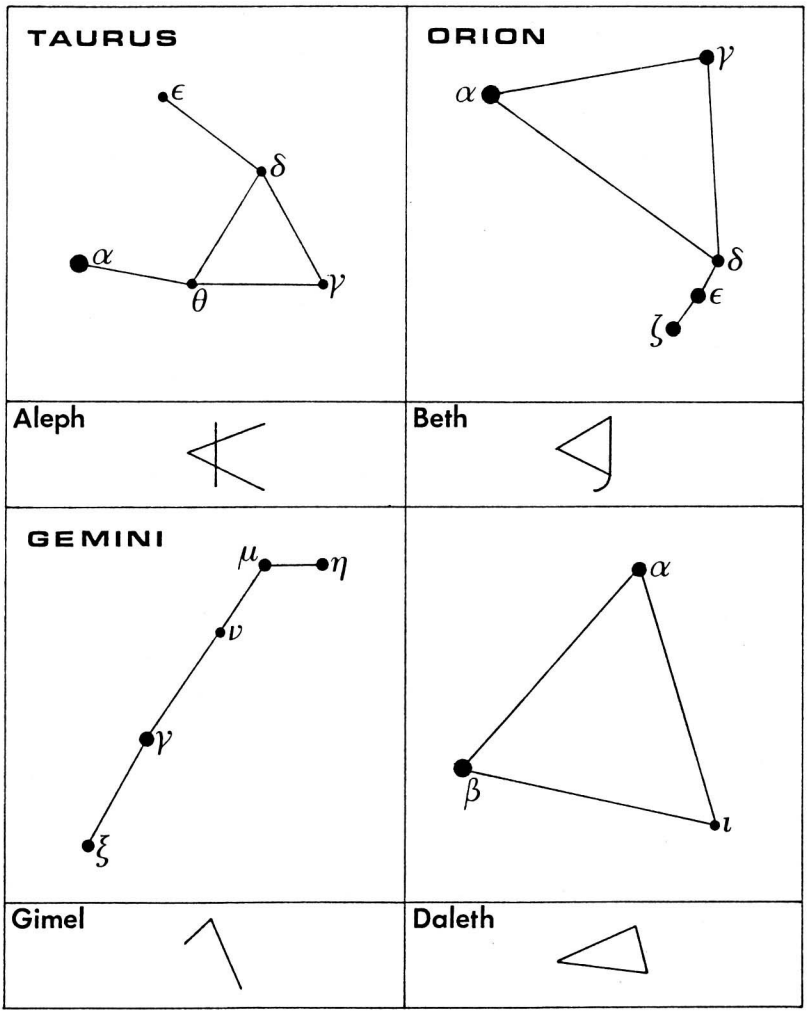
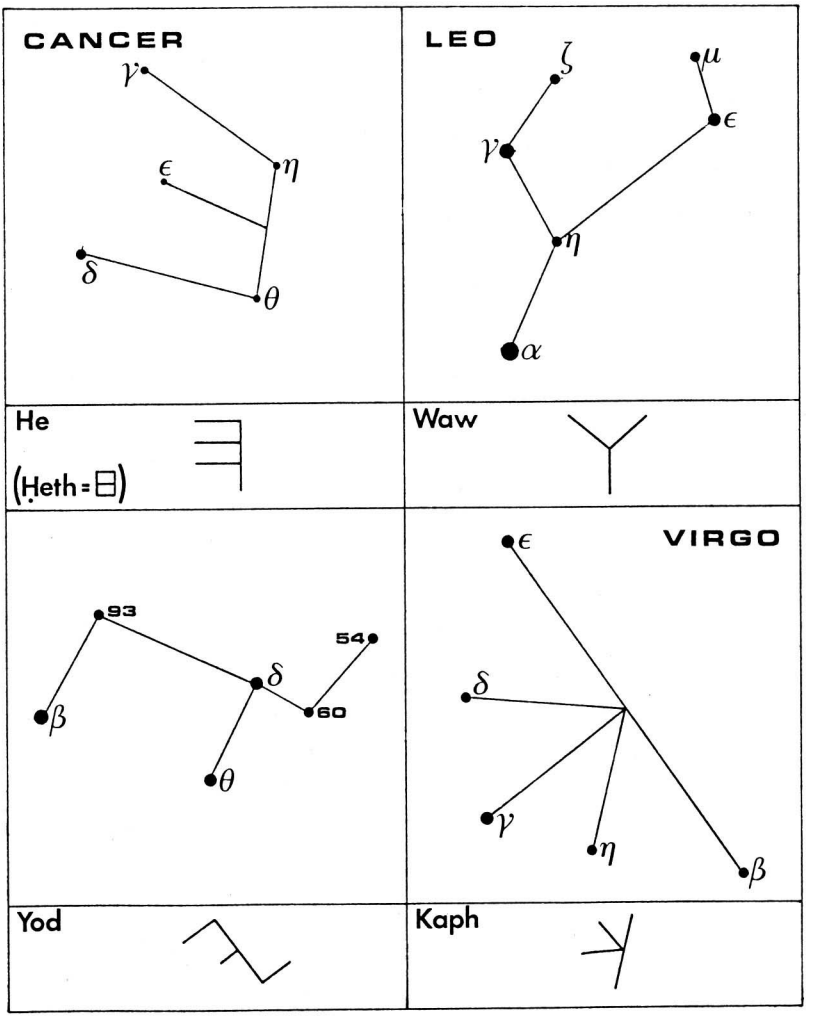
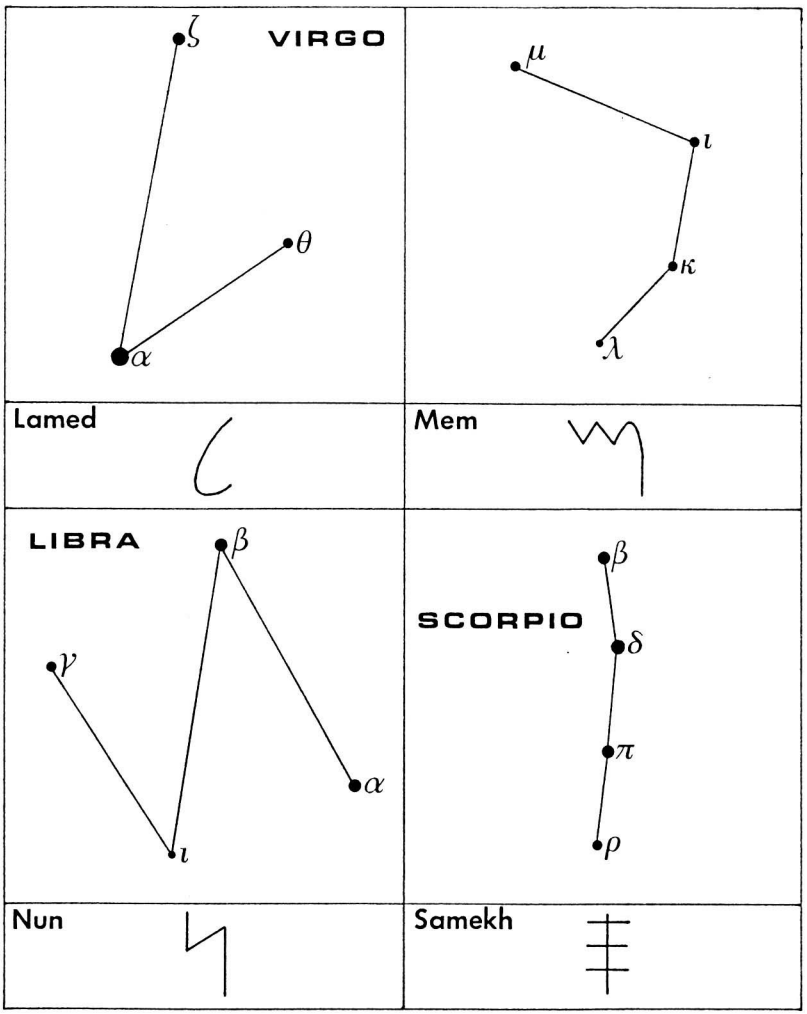


Figure 17 (pages 126–130): The Letters and Astronomical Prototypes of the Phoenician Alphabet


CANCER
γ
ε
η
δ
θ
LEO
ζ
μ
ε
γ
η
α
He
(Ḥeth = ⊟)
Waw
93
54
δ
β
60
θ
ε
VIRGO
δ
γ
η
β
Yod
Kaph


VIRGO
ζ
θ
α
μ
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κ
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Lamed
Mem
LIBRA
β
γ
α
ι
SCORPIO
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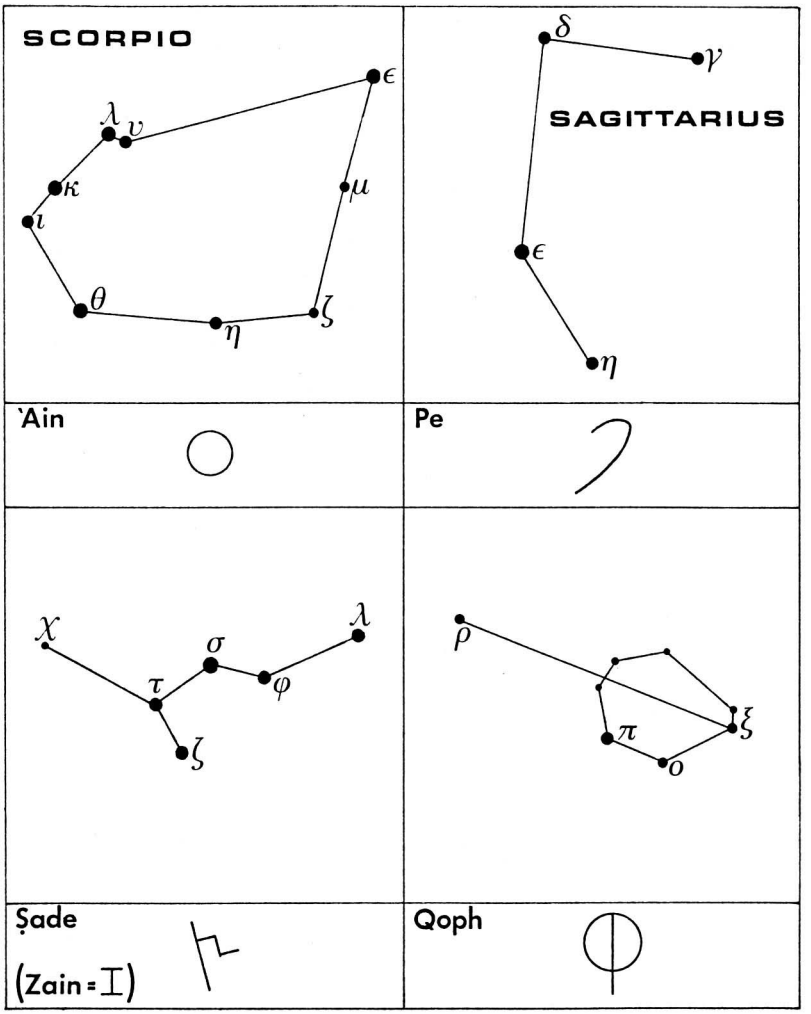
π
ρ
Nun
Samekh


SCORPIO
ϵ
λ
υ
κ
μ
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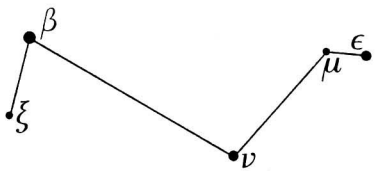
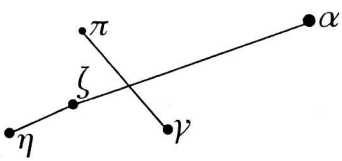
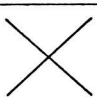
η
ζ
δ
γ
SAGITTARIUS
ϵ
η
ʿAin
Pe
χ
σ
λ
τ
φ
ζ
ρ
ξ
π
ο
Ṣade
(Zain = I)
Qoph

CAPRICORN 	**AQUARIUS** 
Reš 	**Sin** 
	
Taw (Ṭeth=⊗) 	

we realize that the short segments simply indicate the positions of stars whose symbol would otherwise be nothing more than an undistinguished vertical line. It is our old friend the Four-horse Chariot of Heaven, Trump 7 of the Tarot deck.

Next to samekh is nun, "fish" or "serpent." Richard Allen says of Zubenelgenubi[17]: "The two Alphas were the determinants of the 21st Babylonian ecliptic constellation Nuru-sha-Shutu, the Southern Light; and some have included Beta and Gamma with them in the Euphratean Entena-mas-luv, the Star of the Tail-tip, as though they marked that part of the enormous, but undetermined, ancient Hydra of Chaldaea, the very early Afr of Arabia."

Mem, "waters," is the most peculiar of all the letters and the least like its representative asterism. The letter gives a definite indication of waviness not found among the stars. A clue may be found in Moran.[18] It seems that the plural *mayim* not only means "waters" but "waters of enjoyment—of one's wife" and "stolen waters—of prostitution." A more obvious clue may be found in the name of the Chinese *hsiu,* "Kang, a Man's Neck,"[19] where "man," of course, is a neuter term. A glance at the illustration is enough to show us that the elusive "waters" must be the milk of the female breast, euphemistically referred to by the Chinese as the "neck."

Lamed is a "rod" or "oxgoad," a goad being a spiked stick. If we are still on the right track, we might expect to find that the next sign contains a sharp angle associated with the point of a tool. We will not be disappointed. Though Spica is usually thought of as the "spike" of wheat in the right hand of the Virgin, "Chrysococca called it . . . the Little Lance-bearer . . .; other names being the Persian Çpur, the Çparegha of the *Avesta,* the Sogdian Shaghar and Khorasmian Akhshafarn, all meaning a "Point."[20] "In Chinese astronomy Spica was a great favorite as Kio, the Horn, or Spike. . . ."[21]

Kaph is a "palm" or "open hand." The equivalent asterism is the palm branch in the left hand of Virgo. Though the Hebrew word refers to the palm of the hand, not the frond of a palm tree, the two words are related. In fact, in English, the palm tree was so named because of the resemblance of its leaves to a hand.[22]

Yod is another "hand," this time looked at from the side. The Greeks called it iota and assigned it to the sun when they increased the number of vowels to seven, the number of their "planets." This may not have been totally accidental. In the numerological system of the Gnostic Marcus, in what can only be described as a musical theory of metaphysics, the letters of the divine name are likened to musical notes.

The letters that make up the names of the letters themselves are then likened to other musical notes, and so on *ad infinitum.*[23] The interesting thing is that the letters yod (iota), ayin (omicron), taw (tau) and aleph (alpha) are equally spaced among what appears to have been an original twenty-four sign, or double solar, zodiac. If alpha marked the vernal equinox then iota would have indicated the summer solstice, the season of solar ascendancy, omicron the autumn equinox, and tau the winter solstice. Beginning with summer we have iota, omicron, tau, alpha; spelling out the name of the sun again: iota. Moran claims that yod also means "the hand of the Lord."[24]

Beyond iota the celestial waters grow murky. Not only is there no sign of teth but, to make matters worse, there seems hardly enough room to squeeze in eight more letters before we come again to aleph. Perhaps if we work forwards from aleph we will detect the source of the problem.

Beth is either a "house" or a "daughter." The early Phoenician letter certainly looks like the roof of a building but what could it possibly have to do with a young woman? The answer lies in the constellation Orion that falls to the left of the Hyades on the celestial sphere. Though usually represented as a male, a female figure is not unheard of. The Arabians called it Al Jauzah, which Allen assures us is feminine.[25] The belt stars were known as Al Nusuk, or String of Pearls, hardly a masculine item. The star Gamma Orionis, our Bellatrix, is "the Female Warrior, the Amazon Star."[26]

Beyond Orion is Gemini, where we find the letter gimel in the feet of the Twins. "Riccioli called it Elhenaat, but Alhena is now generally given to it, from Al Han'ah. . . . This word, usually translated a Brand, or Mark, on the right side of a camel's, or horse's, neck, was defined by Al Biruni as Winding, as though the stars of this station were winding around each other, or curving from the central star; and they were Al Nuhatai, the dual form of Al Nuhat, a Camel's Hump, itself a curved line."[27] Gimel is, of course, a "camel."

Daleth, a "door," also carries the idea of drawing water with a bucket, presumably from a well. This letter is even easier to find than the previous one. The two Gemini, Alpha and Beta, along with Iota Geminorum, form a perfect equilateral triangle. The two brightest stars, to which were later added those of the letter gamma, made up the Chinese "Tsing, a Well, or Pit."[28]

The next letter is he, "dipper" or "measure," clearly a direct reference to the shape of its star group. The Chinese mansion was Kuei, "ghosts," attributed by Moran to its similarity to the primitive for "a

ghost's head,"[29] and was made up, despite Needham, Kelley and others, of the four stars surrounding Praesaepe plus the nebula itself, five "stars" in all. It was Epsilon, the brightest of the nebular stars, that, after all, was called "Tseih She Ke, Exhalation of Piled-up Corpses."[30] The Persian and Coptic stations were identical. Moran shows Epsilon connected directly to Eta Cancri, forming a kind of distorted "E"; the actual orientation of the central line is impossible to determine at this late date, especially considering the tendency of the Phoenicians to reverse the directions of some of their letters.

We have already recognized the connection between the eighth lunar station and Saturn, alias The Emperor. It is a short step from the Sickle in Leo to the "hook" or "pin" of the letter waw. The slightest modification of the former produces a quite acceptable waw, whose travels we have already observed in Chapter Eight. Incidentally, it is now apparent that many of the letters of the later Greek alphabet were closer approximations to their stellar prototypes than one might expect from symbols simply borrowed at a late date, as some of the experts would have us believe, from the Northern Semites. I will allow the reader to draw his own conclusions from this fact.

Zayin, heth and teth are missing; another peculiar occurrence among many. The lists of ancient alphabets all show them neatly packed between waw and yod, where they are found in the standard Hebrew alphabet. Yet Julius Hyginus, curator of the Palatine Library under Augustus, claims that the Greek equivalents zeta, eta and theta were invented by the same two poets we have already come to know in connection with the revision of the Greek alphabet, Epicharmus and Simonides.[31] The problem is that by "the alphabet" is, at some times, meant the fixed sequence of letters, the "alpha-bet," and, at others, simply a conglomeration of letters. Though zayin, heth and teth certainly existed, as attested by the epigraphic evidence, during Phoenician times, they must not have been added to the actual alphabetical *sequence* until the coming of the Pythagoreans. That these three are not founding members of the stellar club but simply modifications of other letters may be seen, not only by their forms, but by their sounds and meanings.

In Hebrew, he and heth are both "h" sounds. In the revised Greek alphabet epsilon and eta became long and short "e" respectively. The original heth, far from modern "H," was simply a closed "E" (see Figure 17), which led to the appellation "fence" or "barrier."

The ancient form of teth was simply a taw, or cross, enclosed in a circle. No one will argue the connection between "t" and "th" sounds.

One need only look at the modern European orthography, where the slight variation in pronunciation is indicated by the addition of "H." Closure or encirclement may thus be the ancient equivalent of adding an "H."

Zayin appears to be a variation of one of the forms of sadhe. There are, in fact, cursive forms of the two letters that are virtually identical.[32] Whereas sadhe is commonly transliterated "ts," Mead,[33] again discussing Marcus, places Greek zeta (equivalent to zayin) among the three "double letters" xi (ks), psi (ps) and zeta (ds). Zayin is a "weapon" in general; sadhe is more closely defined as a "scythe," "javelin" or "arrow." Zayin is a balance; sadhe, justice.

Returning to ayin and pushing off in the other direction we come to pe, "mouth," another clear reference to the shape of a sign. The Chinese called it "Ki, a Sieve."[34] Allen quotes from the *She King:*

> "In the south is the Sieve
> Idly showing its mouth. . .
> But it is of no use to sift,"

but does not understand the reference to a mouth, "the commentator explaining that the two stars widest apart were the Mouth, and the two closer together the Heels."

Both pe and sadhe made up the 18th Arabic *manzil,* which now marks "the head and the vane of the Archer's arrow."[35] It is therefore not surprising that sadhe should be the "javelin" or "arrow." Moran also gives sadhe as "justice" in his "Comparative chart of Western alphabet and Oriental astrological signs," but does not list the cognate Hebrew word in his chapter "Comparison of Letters of the Alphabet." Fortunately, it appears in Ben-Yehuda's *English-Hebrew, Hebrew-English Dictionary.* It is *tsedek,* "justice."[36] The Chinese called it Tou, the "Ladle or Measure."[37] It is not very far from a measure to a balance, which the five stars of the Chinese Dipper become when Chi Sagittarii is added to them. The equation of sadhe (or tsade) with "justice" finally brings us back to the original reason for writing this Appendix. The reader may recall that Trump 8, Justice, falls between the Chinese Tien Sze (Fang) or Four-horse Chariot of Heaven, earlier identified with Trump 7, The Chariot, and the Indian Srona (Sravistha), "lame" equivalent of the Burmese Hermit (Trump 9). We can only conclude that Justice of the Tarot deck was so named because it marks that Twelfth of the solar zodiac that contains the lunar asterism that later became the letter sadhe, "justice."

Letter	*Arabic Manzil*	*Chinese Hsiu*	*Indian Nakshatra*	*Modern Sign*
Aleph	2 (5)*	2 (5)	2 (5)	Taurus
Beth		4 (5)	4 (1)	Orion
Gimel	4 (5)	5 (4)		Gemini
Daleth	5 (2)	5 (2)	5 (2)	
He	6 (3)	6 (4)†	6 (3)	Cancer
Waw	8 (4)		8 (6)	Leo
Yod	9 (2)		9 (2)	
	10 (1)		10 (2)	
Kaph	11 (5)			Virgo
Lamed	12 (1)	12 (2)	12 (1)	
Mem	13 (3)	13 (3)		
Nun	14 (2)	14 (4)	14 (4)	Libra
Samekh	15 (4)	15 (4)	15 (4)	Scorpio
Ayin	17 (2)	17 (9)	17 (9)	
Pe	18 (4)	18 (4)	18 (4)	Sagittarius
Sadhe	18 (6)	19 (4)	19 (4)	
Qoph	19			
Resh	20 (2)	20 (4)		Capricorn
Sin	21 (3)	21 (3)		Aquarius
	22 (2)	22 (2)		
Taw	23 (5)	23 (1)		

**Number of stars in asterism that appear in letter.*
†*Two of these stars do not appear in the equivalent manzil.*

Table XII: Relation Between the Alphabet and the Lunar Mansions

"The 19th *manzil* lay in the vacant space from the upper part of the figure toward the horns of the Sea-Goat, and was known as Al Baldah, the city, or District. . . . It was marked by one scarcely distinguishable star, probably Pi, and was bounded by six others in the form of a Bow, the Arabs' Kaus, which, however, was not our Bow of Sagittarius. It also was Al Kiladah, the Necklace; and Al Udhiyy, the Ostrich's Nest,"[38] both circular figures. Though Allen specifically names six stars besides Pi Sagittarii, these not only do not form a circle, some of them appear as part of the previous *manzil.* Neither are they found "in the vacant space from the upper part of the figure toward the horns of the Sea-Goat," nor do they fit Burgess' description, "north of Pi Sagittarii." I suggest a possible solution in Figure 17, but whatever their specific location, the "six others in the form of a Bow" would appear to be the source of the letter that Moran thinks resembles a target or arrow and whose meanings run from "ape" or "monkey" through "circuit" and "surround" to "strike off," "wound" and "mutilate."

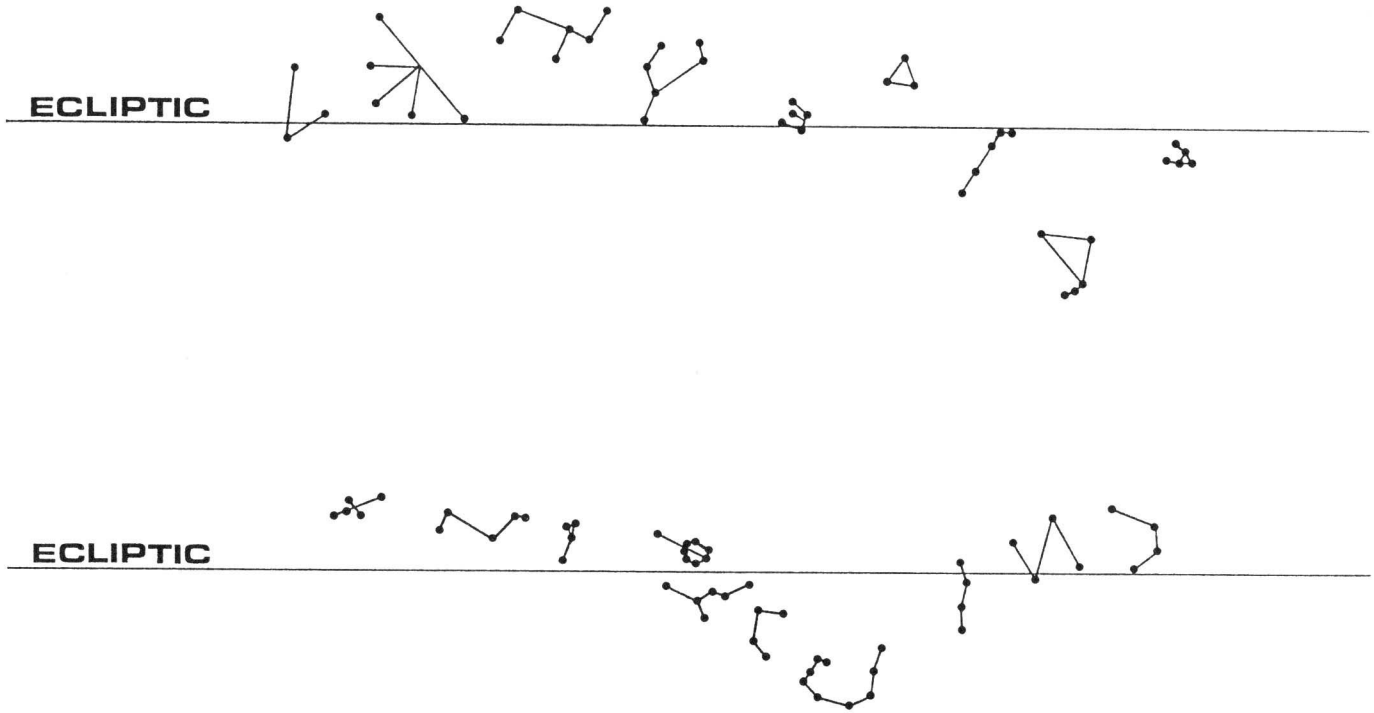


Figure 18: Star Map of the Phoenician Letters

Resh, "head," "chief," is made up of from four to six stars in Capricorn. The brightest of these, Alpha Capricorni, is a double star. "Other titles, Dabih and the degenerated Dschabbe and Dshabeh, applied to them, but more commonly to Beta, have been traced by some to Al Jabbah, the Forehead. . . ."[39] The two Betas Capricorni, Dabih Major and Dabih Minor, "mark the head of the Goat."

Sin is a "tooth," "sheep" or "goat," the former, again, from its shape. Its left half contains our old friend the Star of Mighty Destiny, The Wheel of Fortune. Despite the fact that this letter is well outside the confines of the modern Capricorn, and though Moran tries to place it there,[40] the three stars of its right half "were the Euphratean lunar asterism Munacha, the Goat-fish."[41]

Taw, a "mark" or "sign," is the final letter of the original 19-letter Phoenician alphabet and the only one of the four corner markers, I, O, T, A, that does not appear in the holy name IAO. Moran attributes the gap between taw and aleph to a tabu against the fourth quarters of the month and year,[42] and it is my contention that the same applied to the letter taw, identified with the winter solstice. Hence IAO would be the god of summer, spring and autumn, but not winter. The Roman failure to even name the months between December and March appears to be a related practice. According to Needham and Ronan, the vernal equinox fell at the Hyades, or "A," sometime very near 2400 B.C.[43] It is, therefore, not surprising that Alpha Hydrae "was observed passing the meridian at sunset on the day of the vernal equinox during the time of the emperor Yao, about 2350 B.C."[44] Godfrey Higgins seems to have been the first to identify the Chinese Yao with the Western IAO.[45] In China, four of the five stars of taw, plus Tau Aquarii, were "Fun Mo, the Tomb."[46]

Table 12 gives the Arabic, Chinese and Indian lunar asterisms that are equivalent to or overlap the 19 letters of the Phoenician alphabet, as well as the number of stars that actually appear in both systems. Of the 88 stars that comprise those 18 letters that may be placed with some confidence (all but qoph), 61, or 69.3 percent, appear, according to at least one source,[47] among the stars of the Arabic zodiac; 80, or 90.9 percent, appear in either the Arabic or Chinese lists; and 83, or 94.3 percent, may be found in at least one of the three sequences. This figure could be slightly improved by reference either to other sources or to other zodiacs. However, over 94 percent is already quite respectable. We are, after all, not trying to prove a direct connection between any specific zodiac and the alphabet, though the Arabic would certainly seem to be the most closely related. It is simply necessary to

demonstrate that the stars from which the alphabet developed were taken from among those most likely to be chosen for such a zodiac.

Figure 18 shows the actual distribution of the 19 letters along the ecliptic. The reader will notice that some asterisms are missing from this sequence. This is the natural result of an apparent change from 24 to 28 signs; from a solar- or Jupiter-based system to one founded upon the moon. This original number of signs may also be suggested by the length of the final version of the revised alphabet that gave Moran so much trouble, 24 letters.

How is it that such an obvious explanation of the origin of the alphabet could have gone unnoticed for so long? The answer to this question must be analogous to the one that responds to the query raised in the Introduction and answered in Chapter 9 above. In fact, it must be to some extent the same answer, for we have not strayed very far from the field upon which we originally entered the realm of the Tarot. It was the very same lunar zodiac we initially found arrayed about the edges of the chessboard that led us to the solution of the alphabet.