

Introduction

A magician or juggler, a high priestess, an empress, an emperor, a hierophant or pope, a pair of lovers attacked by a winged Cupid; these are the images on the first six trumps of the deck of cards used to play *tarocchi*. The images grow darker: a chariot, the goddess Justice or Necessity, a hooded figure carrying a lantern in the manner of Diogenes, the wheel of Fortune, Hercules wrestling with a lion, a hanged man. *Tarocchi* in its various forms resembles the modern game of pinochle. A skeleton wielding a scythe: Death. There are 21 numbered trumps in all plus a fool, or joker. Trumps 14 and 17 are images of the winged dawn goddess Eos or Aurora. In Temperance she is pouring a liquid from one jug to another. In The Star she is spreading the morning dew; her wings, which appear on Greek vases, have mysteriously vanished. Above her head is the Mesopotamian symbol for the Pleiades, seven stars in a circle. There is something vaguely disturbing about this repetition of symbols. The images become cosmological: The Devil or Cosmocrator, a tower struck by lightning, The Star, The Moon, The Sun, Judgment, The World.

There are also four minor suits, denominated in swords, clubs, cups and coins, which resemble any modern European or American poker deck. The face cards include a knight and page in place of the usual jack, bringing the total in each suit to 14 and the entire deck to 78.

I have spent a number of years studying the Tarot and other closely related astrological gaming systems. What confronted me at every turn was such an apparent lack of knowledge on the part of the so-called experts that I was tempted to drop the study itself and concentrate on the nature of this profound ignorance. Since its introduction into the mainstream of European culture during the fourteenth century a tremendous amount of nonsense has been written about the Tarot. Authors in search of the true meaning of the cards have overlooked the

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| 1. The Magician, or Juggler | 13. Death |
| 2. The High Priestess (Juno) | 14. Temperance |
| 3. The Empress | 15. The Devil |
| 4. The Emperor | 16. The Tower Struck by
Lightning, or The Wrath
of God |
| 5. The Hierophant, or Pope
(Jupiter) | 17. The Star |
| 6. The Lovers | 18. The Moon |
| 7. The Chariot | 19. The Sun |
| 8. Justice | 20. Judgment |
| 9. The Hermit | 21. The World |
| 10. The Wheel of Fortune | Unnumbered. The Fool |
| 11. Strength | |
| 12. The Hanged Man | |

Table I: The Trumps of the Tarot Deck

most obvious references to classical mythology while concentrating on such minutiae as the type of satchel held by the fool. Only after I felt I had solved the basic problems of the origin and function of the original deck did I begin to recognize the reasons behind this state of affairs. We will explore this subject in detail toward the end of the book.

I have consulted a number of sources during the preparation of the present work. Some of these may not be totally acceptable to certain of my readers. The most objectionable of these, I suspect, would be the works of Helena Petrova Blavatsky. Madame Blavatsky was one of the founders of the Theosophical Society, an organization that still has branches in major cities of the United States, Europe and India. Her most important work, *The Secret Doctrine*, takes the form of a series of commentaries upon *The Book of Dzyan*, a manuscript, supposedly written upon palm leaves made impregnable to the elements, that remains unknown in the West. I have been careful to cite Madame Blavatsky as far as possible only on matters of Hindu religion and mythology and have steered clear of her views on theosophy and metaphysics. It is with trepidation that I mention her at all. One gathers one's data where one must.

Of even more obscurity, though of greater worth, is the *Anacalypsis* of Godfrey Higgins, magistrate and squire of Doncaster. Subtitled *An Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis; or an Inquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations and Religions*, this two volume folio edition runs to 1448 pages. Hidden in the recesses of this vast magnum opus are keys which unlock some of the darkest mysteries of the Tarot. Higgins is also considered off limits by many scholars. There is certainly a lot of nonsense in his writings, including what appear to be the seeds of

Immanuel Velikovsky's *Ages in Chaos*. I have apologized for mentioning Madame Blavatsky. I will not do so for Godfrey Higgins. From his vantage point at the beginning of the 19th century, when English schoolboys still studied the classics in their original Latin and Greek, he has, despite his faults, brought together such a mass of historical and contemporary information that it is difficult to see how any intelligent reader can doubt his major conclusion: that if one scratches the surface of any of the ancient religions one invariably finds a substratum of judicial astrology. The new science of archaeoastronomy is just beginning to relearn this lesson.

The third member of our triumvirate of forbidden sources is Robert Graves, who has come the closest of the three to the fold of scientific orthodoxy, having been elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford University. Graves takes a poetical approach to the understanding of mythology which has allowed him to decode certain of the symbolic motifs that run through ancient literature. Unfortunately, though *The Greek Myths* has been helpful, his major contribution to the field of mythological decipherment has been *The White Goddess*, which deals with northern rather than southern European myth. His brief excursion into the latter toward the end of his book produces a hazardous mixture of lucid insight and dim confusion. As will be seen later, his explication of the origin and significance of the Tetragrammaton is particularly wide of the mark. As with the preceding authors I have endeavored to cite him only when he has his feet firmly planted on the ground and is not cavorting with the muses amongst the crystalline celestial spheres.

I have also made use of the work of Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend. Their *Hamlet's Mill* is valuable not only for its extensive compilation of astrological themes in mythology but for the distinctive manner in which it propagates an error that has plagued scholars for centuries. The present work might have been subtitled *An Analysis of the Confusion Between Stars and Planets Among Modern Mythologists*. Though the origin of this confusion may be localized in space and time to the not always amicable proximity of Greek and Persian hegemonies during the millennium prior to the advent of the common era, its intellectual repercussions reached their zenith of absurdity in 1950 with the publication of *Worlds in Collision* by Immanuel Velikovsky. When we have finally sorted out the stars from the planets in the following pages we will take some time to explore the planetary fancies of the most interesting Dr. Velikovsky.

Games are at their most basic level symbol systems not unlike

simplified languages or idioms. In the course of the following inquiry we shall make implicit use of a method developed by those linguists who deal with the production and use of such interlanguages as Esperanto, Ido, Interlingua and Occidental. These interlinguists have developed a concept called the “central form,” defined as that word which is the “nearest documented or theoretical ancestor form common to all its variants” in some minimum number of control languages. Hence the Interlingua word for “earth” is *terra*, unchanged from Portuguese and Italian and one orthographic change from French *terre* and Spanish *tierra*.

Of interest are those cases where the central form is not the common ancestor of a series of derivatives but the expression of a common orthographic tendency or drift among most or all of the control languages. In an historical sense this drift itself may be thought of as the expression of a degree of interaction too weak to maintain a unified language, as occurred in the fragmentation of the Vulgar Latin into the Romance languages, but which nevertheless may be observed over a wide area. Good examples of this process may be found among those words that are classed as part of the International Scientific Vocabulary, which is presently being standardized by the International Standards Organization. We shall find this technique useful, not only in bridging the gaps between various stages of an at best fragmentary record, but in dealing with the problem of the syncretistic or amalgamating nature of Greek thought.

Beyond all else, my approach might be called evolutionary. Where similar structures are found among different species they are assumed to perform the same function. In this way I have been able to penetrate many of the darker corners of the Tarot. These would not have been accessible if I had maintained the strictly compartmentalized attitude of modern science. Where enlightenment was not at hand I have felt free to question relatives, ancestors, any system that could conceivably be related to the one under examination. This attitude may lead to the accusation of diffuseness, lack of focus. My only defense against this charge is utter necessity. Despite authoritative-sounding statements to the contrary, the most recent revision of the basic structure of the Tarot occurred at a time and place just barely inside that region of space-time known as the historical past. It would have been impossible to make a meaningful analysis based solely upon internal and other evidence that has accumulated since the modern reappearance of the deck.

Thus my first chapter concerns a group of square maps of reality whose external identities range from game and diviner’s boards to the Taoist *Book of Changes*. These cosmologies are linked together by the

lunar zodiac that occupies their outer perimeters. In subsequent chapters I range even farther afield in search of even the smallest bit of evidence that might shed some light upon the problem at hand.

Chapter Two takes information gained from the square maps and applies it to a group based upon the cross and circle. Here the 28-sign zodiac is replaced by a circle of 56 divisions. These include both *pachisi* and the Tarot itself.

In the third chapter I pause for the demonstration of a proof of my thesis based upon an identification of the actual stars symbolized by certain of the trumps. This is followed in the fourth chapter by a look at the astronomical monument at Stonehenge, whose Aubrey Circle may be seen as an early ancestor of the cross and circle.

The fifth and sixth chapters examine the mythological, astronomical and calendrical bases of the first 12 trumps as well as their relations to the lunar zodiac. Part of this discussion is deferred to the Appendix.

Chapter Seven concludes the examination of the trumps and provides the decipherment of a rather clever planetary cryptogram embedded in their final sequence.

The eighth chapter, which concludes the analytical part of the book, solves such until now seemingly impossible problems as the name of the deck's inventor, how and when it entered Italy and the meaning of the word "Tarot" itself.

This is followed, in the final chapter, by the promised analysis of the obstructions that have, in the past, blocked the way toward an understanding of the true nature of the Tarot. It is hoped that this analysis will, in the future, help to prevent the same problems from arising again.

At some point it will become apparent to the perceptive reader that certain ideas are appearing in places and at times where they would not ordinarily be expected. To a certain extent this may simply be the result of an attempt on the part of the constructor or constructors of the Tarot system to merge the cosmological concepts of multiple sources. On the other hand there are definite indications of underground rivers of information flowing just below the surface of ancient civilization. Whether these take their courses through the higher grades of secret societies and schools or the inner sancta of established priesthoods or even totally unsuspected passageways is not at all clear. What does become obvious is that we cannot reject an interpretation out of hand simply because it does not belong to the common knowledge of a particular time and place. It must also be remembered that systems of information

do not necessarily have to be true in order to be useful as codes and ciphers. We will find that the Ptolemaic order of the planets falls into this category. Finally, it is a truism that one cannot begin to decipher an inscription until one realizes that it is meant to be read; it is not always easy to distinguish between a picture and a pictograph.

What are my qualifications for undertaking the present work? I am neither a professional astronomer nor an archaeologist. If I have an area of expertise it is in photography and chemistry. I am, however, good at solving puzzles. Though I have drawn on numerous sources, the conclusions that I have reached are strictly my own and do not reflect those of anyone else living or dead. It is a property of any well constructed riddle that until it is finally solved no one has the foggiest idea what it means.

I have avoided the tendency of most books on the history of games to capitalize the names of all games other than chess, except where a direct quotation is involved. Where they represent foreign words which have not been absorbed into the English language they have been italicized. It has been suggested, with some justification, that the Tarot represents the remnants of an ancient hieroglyphic book, hence the capital; also the names of the trumps, in the manner of the chapters or headings of a book. The subject or contents of a trump have not been capitalized unless they specifically require it, as with the names of gods or goddesses; hence "Hercules" but "fool."

I would like to thank Andrea M. Spratt and Joseph S. Gayer for putting up with a constant series of debriefings upon the most arcane subjects imaginable.

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