

## Nine

# Points of View

There is nothing in the foregoing investigation or in the Appendix that is difficult or even obscure. True, some of my references first appeared in print over a century ago, but these have almost all been reprinted in modern times. Of the more recent works, most are available at any good university library and many may be obtained by interlibrary loan. As for the solution to the puzzle of the Tarot, there is very little in the way of analysis that should not be accessible to the average fan of the Sunday morning cryptogram or acrostic. All that really seems necessary is a keen interest in the problem at hand, a willingness to spend some time studying it in detail, and a commitment to follow the trail wherever it might lead. So how is it that the origin and meaning, of a deck of cards that has been known to the European public since before Christopher Columbus sailed off to the west looking for India, has only now been discovered; and how is it that the attempts that were previously made fell so far from the mark? If we can answer these questions we may very well be on our way toward understanding the process by which certain historical problems, whose solutions should be relatively easy to extract judging by the abundance of surviving authoritative and authentic ancient testimony, have come to be so grossly misunderstood as to render them apparently insoluble.

The factors whose summation and synthesis constitute the answers to both of the above questions fall into two broad categories. Of these, one group relates to the methods by which researchers in general study the past. The other has more to do with the idiosyncrasies of thought and belief of those persons who are specifically interested in the Tarot.

Tarot research has been conducted, in turn, by two easily definable though hardly mutually exclusive groups. Those investigators who have come to the Tarot by way of its use as a fortune-telling device have shown great interest in the roots of the images used on the cards,

whereas the group that sees the deck as an artifact of the world of gaming has consistently looked for the origins of the cards themselves, i.e. as physical objects. Between these two bodies lie the collectors, some tending toward the occultists, though most would take up the banner of the gamblers. The two factions of Tarot research may be identified with two basic theories concerning its origin.

It is the opinion of many occultists that the Tarot cards are some of the pages of the long lost *Book of Thoth*. Of course anyone can see that the cards are not pages of text but pictures that would be more suitable as illustrations. Yet by ascribing them to the Egyptians, these "Hermetic" pages become, in the eyes of the fortune-tellers, a series of hieroglyphic texts. No matter that even after the discovery of the Rosetta stone no Egyptologist has ever been able to decipher their meaning; no matter that the figures are not universally presented in profile, as is true of the genuine Egyptian writing; no matter that in the land of the Pharaohs, where paper was invented and mummies last for thousands of years, not one "page" of the *Book of Thoth* has ever been found; the very necessity that the cards should contain information requires, in the minds of these occultists, that they be hieroglyphics. This restriction of locality leads to a concomitant historical limitation. The hieroglyphs fall out of use long before the introduction of the Tarot into Europe. It must, therefore, have been "carried" there by some other people: the Jews, the Gypsies, the Arabs, the Crusaders, etc.

The theories multiply without end. One, similar to the Egyptian, sees the deck as a product of the need for a universal language felt by the participants in a confabulation held at Fez, Morocco, about the year 1200. Its purpose seems to be to bridge the gap in time between Egypt and the Renaissance. In this scenario, the Arabs, with access to the ancient knowledge, construct a system that contains all the knowledge in the world; again the need to see the cards as bearers of information. This is one example among many of an instance where an underlying truth has broken through what appears on the surface to be a totally ridiculous idea. We have already seen that the means by which it was stored had very little to do with writing in the usual sense of the word. Though the method of storage is primarily pictorial, it is so in the same sense as the illustrations in a geometry book. Though these may indeed look like "hieroglyphics" to the uninitiated, they are nothing more than diagrams.

Beyond the data actually contained in the Tarot is a certain quality by which it can be used to organize or knit together information contained in its environment. This is not surprising considering the stress

placed by Pythagoras and his followers on mnemonics, the art and science of memorization. Ignoring for the time being the possibility that Pythagorean doctrine included some principle by which such a device was actually thought to be capable of altering reality, we may imagine the neophyte using the cards or board to help him memorize the knowledge and beliefs of a school whose founder would not or dared not commit anything to writing. In this sense the Tarot images are diametrically opposed to anything as mundane as Egyptian picture-writing.

Of the second major group of Tarot researchers, whom I have called the gamesters, the majority tend toward the opinion that the cards were invented for the specific purpose of playing games. Since the appearance of genuine Tarot games may be dated with some degree of certainty to the 14th or 15th century, these gamesters, among whom number many of the collectors, have fallen into the same sort of trap as the occultists. Whereas the latter find themselves committed to a time and place consonant with Egyptian hieroglyphics, the former live and study under the tyranny of the Italian Renaissance. The gamesters have also in general noticed the resemblance between the Tarot and chess. This has led to various theories whose intention is to smooth over the dichotomy between the deck's obviously Indian elements and the need to keep the invention of the Tarot fairly modern. This has, in turn, led to the theory that various parts of the deck come from different times and places. Unfortunately, no two authors have yet been able to agree on which parts come from which time and place.

The dispute between the gamesters and the occultists mirrors a much deeper schism that spills over into the attitudes of researchers outside the restricted field of the Tarot. The attitude of the game theorists may be described as rationalistic, in opposition to the mysticism of the occultists. What better way to debunk the fortune-tellers than to find in the cards a device whose invention was only meant to serve someone's craving for amusement? The occultists, on the other hand, have preserved a tradition that within the cards are stored many of the mysteries of ancient science and religion. Intimations of the specific nature of some of these secrets have managed to survive in occult circles.

The most annoying of these is the suggestion that the deck contains the Tetragrammaton. There is no reason, *per se*, to hide away the four letters that stand for the holy name. These are and were well-known. What was secret was the correct pronunciation of these four letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which contains no written pure vowels, only

semivowels. There is good reason, therefore, to hide away the spelling of the full six-letter expansion of the Tetragrammaton, in an alphabet that contains vowel symbols, e.g. the Greek, from which the true pronunciation might easily be learned. This is, of course, what was done.

Another idea that has survived among the occultists is that of the identification of some of the cards with the letters of the alphabet. Generally, this has taken the form of an alignment of the 22 trumps (including The Fool) with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Though we have already seen that this specific theory is untenable, there have been clear indications of some kind of connection between the first 12 trumps and some of the signs of the lunar zodiac that became the letters of the alphabet (see Appendix). Beyond this rather tangential relation between the trumps and the alphabet is the very real possibility of a more direct connection between the four “minor” suits and the lunar mansions. If these 56 cards are indeed analogous to the 28 squares that border the chessboard and other early divining boards, as I have argued in the early chapters of my book, then 19 pairs of minor cards are each equivalent to one of the letters of the Phoenician alphabet. Whether the alignment of cards and signs follows the order of the stars, as it does on the Chinese *shih*, or whether succeeding mansions occupy every 26th position, as suggested by the use of the Tarot board as a clock-calendar, there is nothing to prevent the cards from being used as a means of sending enciphered messages.

This is quite a significant statement. No one has ever adequately explained why it was such a radical tabu to utter the name behind the Tetragrammaton. Robert Graves thinks that knowing the name of a god was equivalent to having control over him. This makes some kind of sense from a theological point of view but in terms of real-world political power it just doesn't fly. Short of mass hypnosis there is no reason for a group of warriors to give up just because the enemy has learned the name of their god. Though long and complex arguments could certainly be made about loss of morale and the like, I would like to introduce a more plausible explanation. Could it not be, is it not almost mandatory, in fact, that the importance of the discovery of a secret word that turns out to have connections to an organized system of symbols that contains a long and complex series of systematic substitutions and hidden meanings is that it was the key to deciphering a code whose primary purpose was to send and receive important religious and political information and, at a time when church and state were virtually indistinguishable, is it not equally probable that these

included, at least part of the time, sensitive military communications?

The third major concept that has survived in occult tradition is the Tarot as fortune-telling device. This should not be surprising to anyone who has read the preceding chapters and has appreciated the essentially astrological nature of divining boards. It might even be argued that all forms of divination derive ultimately from the belief that the stars control the destinies of men and nations alike, and when we remember that the gods were themselves stars we can see why so much of human knowledge and ingenuity was attributed to those inhabitants of the heavens. The major evolutionary theme that runs through the history of fortune-telling is a tendency toward the breakup of an archaic board or other unitary image of the sky into a group of smaller units. It must be remembered that astrology was originally reserved for the king and the city or country as a whole. Thus, in order for it to develop into a practical device for telling an individual's fortune it was necessary to allow for a much wider range of possible outcomes.

The first development in the progression from simple to complex is the invention of the square board, which represents the entire northern half of the sky, rather than simply the ecliptic, and thus allows for the use of fully half of the stars in the sky for purposes of divination. These are accessed randomly as in Western geomancy or the *I Ching*. The square board may also be used as a more detailed tabular presentation of the ecliptic, as in the *Tai Hsuan Ching*. An advantage of this arrangement is that it obviates the need for a double marker, as with the clock-calendar, where one has to keep track of one's position among both the 12 trumps and the 56 minor cards.

Proto-chess itself may have been a result of the transformation from ecliptical to hemispherical astrology. The major pieces, which had originally consisted of the four kings and their entourages—strictly stellar—had come to represent the first four planets of the week: the sun, moon, Mars and Mercury; and these, having been freed from fixed positions on the board, began to move about in total disregard for their actual locations among the stars of the zodiac. Hence, in proto-chess, the planets were free to fall under the astrological influence of constellations far from the ecliptic. This was originally a matter of random throws of the dice, but with the development of diceless chess the game became logically and irrevocably associated with the idea of free will, the very antithesis of the fatalistic outlook represented by astrology.

The apparatus of astrology continued to fragment. In China the

sequence of the *I Ching* hexagrams was changed and their arrangement in the form of a board ceased to be relevant. The oracle's lineal figures and commentaries were consulted strictly by means of the yarrow stalks or other random, though not necessarily statistically neutral, devices. In the West the illustrated Tarot board was broken up, either before or after reaching its final form due to Pythagoras, into a stack of square cards whose evolutionary offshoots would include *mah jongg* and possibly the movable pieces of proto-chess. By the time of the occult revival of the 19th century the prognostication done with the aid of the Tarot cards had degenerated into little more than the weaving of a story around the purported "occult" significance of the cards. I have been able to find no correlation at all between these interpretations and any of the equivalent astrological signs. Such is the usual result of "psychic" investigations, and I can only conclude that these "meanings" were made up out of whole cloth.

The failure of more orthodox science to comprehend the world-view upon which the Tarot is based is the result of a fundamental and systematic prejudice that goes far beyond anything of which the Tarot researchers, gamester and occultist alike, have been guilty. One need only open a book or periodical on the recently invented science known in the United States as archaeoastronomy and in the United Kingdom as astroarchaeology to begin to understand why the kind of interpretation that I have presented is so abhorrent to these modern day guardians of Truth; for it is the "astronomy" of past ages that they claim to be studying. Throughout the rapidly growing literature of this new "science" is the unstated but ever present assumption that the ancient observers of the sky were kindred spirits to the modern empirical astronomers. Despite lip-service to the "religious" implications of the historical observations, the modern researchers have made little attempt to understand the basic principles of astral religion. When the religious interpretation of astronomical events begins to look more and more like that sworn enemy of modern science known to the modern world as "astrology," the scientific voices grow silent.

Scientific luminaries, who would not dare criticize the beliefs of the followers of the man-god whose birth was signaled to the Chaldean magicians by the rising of a particular star, or those of the descendants, either genetically or theologically, of the leader who waited until the closest full moon to the vernal equinox to lead his followers out of Egypt, or any of the multitudinous other religious ideas, from around the world, that can be traced to the age-old conceit that the sky somehow controls the earth, nevertheless have gone out of their way to

launch a concerted attack on that group of people whose only sin is that they have accepted the astrological principles behind the world's great religions without hiding them under scientifically acceptable theological metaphor. Imagine the consternation of the members of the scientific community if they began to notice traces of their hated pseudoscientific foe among the papers in an apparently respectable archaeoastronomical journal, and further imagine how far the editors of such a journal would go to prevent such an event from happening. No matter that they are supposed to be studying the beliefs and practices of ancient civilizations in an objective and prejudice-free manner, the line must be held against the force of darkness! And so the way toward enlightenment has been blocked, as it has so many times in the past, by an inability or an unwillingness to lose a smaller battle in the interest of winning a wider war. If I may paraphrase that great doctrine of the Theosophists: "There is no Religion," nor Science, "higher than Truth."