

Six

Red King, Yellow King, Green King, Black

The true holographic nature of the deck becomes clearer as we enter the realm of the final ten trumps. Of these, only The Hanged Man resides in the temporal world of the ecliptic. This world is permeated by a legion of symbols the consideration of which I have postponed until the present, not wishing to disturb the orderly development of the theme. They grow restless now, clamoring for attention from amidst the minor cards whose only function until now has been to support the stage on which the trumps perform their cosmological drama.

The Tarot board is divided into four sectors each bearing the imprint of a particular archetypal symbol—swords, either curved or straight; coins, often bearing the imprint of a lotus blossom; cups, resembling chalices or goblets more than any modern container; and rods, forerunners of the clubs of the standard poker deck, either wandlike devices of more or less magical quality or mere rude branches still bearing remnants of the leaves that once adorned them. Fortunately, there are only two major classes of ideas, which appear in the allied four-quartered kingdoms of divination and gaming, that can be related to these symbols. One is the idea of *varna* or class, an idea that has found its most ornate expression amongst the inhabitants of the sub-continent of India, where the population has been divided into Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants) and Sudras (farmers) since Vedic times. In this interpretation, which has attained currency among the self-appointed experts on the Tarot, the suits are the implements or tools of the various classes. This theory has in turn influenced the artistic development of modern decks.

The advocates of this theory would see the rods as rude staves, wielded by serfs and country bumpkins, the tools of farmers and manual laborers. Coins, which some insist on calling pentacles though

the stars inscribed upon them are of late invention, would represent the mercantile or merchant class, buying and selling the fruits of others' labors, a rung above the homely rod-folk. By the same logic the swords could only be the symbols of the warrior or military caste, protectors of the realm and the vested interests of the coin-folk. Above them all, ruling by divine right and the threat of eternal damnation or bad karma, sit the priest class, filling their chalices with the blood of divine kings or the wine of some old harvest god. All in all a neat little theory, satisfying to the common man and occultist alike, especially those with an interest in theosophy and orientalism in general. Unfortunately, as has occurred so many times before in the current work, the actual meaning of the suits lies at a greater depth, closer to the astrological bedrock of the ancient cosmos.

There is a level at which the suits of the Tarot deck can be directly connected to the colors of the pieces in *chaturanga* or four kings. These colors reappear in *pachisi* and form one of the connecting links between the Tarot and chess. They make little sense in terms of class structure and social organization but are extremely logical symbols of that other quaternary scheme that has already appeared in our earlier discussion of the four kings and the four figures of the zodiac. Even in the New World, far from the centers of radiation of Old World astrology, the four colors at the four corners of the world, whatever their actual hues, symbolize the four elements: earth, water, air and fire.

Before we can use the colors of the four armies in proto-chess to help us unravel the arrangement of the suits on the Tarot board, it is necessary to clear up a discrepancy between the game of *chaturanga* as it has been presented in books on the history of games and the way it is described in the *Mahabharata*. The reader may have already noticed that the arrangement of the four armies, as given in the chapter on proto-chess, is the opposite of that given for the Tarot board. As we shall see in a moment, this reversal extends beyond the clockwise or counterclockwise orientation of the armies to the colors of the pieces themselves. That both the arrangement of the lunar mansions on the diviner's board and that of the months in the *I Ching* are consistent with the orientation of our reconstructed Tarot board, as well as the actual positions of the stars in the sky, indicates that it is the illustrations of *chaturanga* that are in error and not the Tarot board. Among serious works, the most recent repetition of this error appears in Bell's *Board and Table Games*, where the colors of the pieces are given as they appear in Chapter One of the present work. The error results from al-Beruni's misreading of the relevant passage in the *Bhavishya Purana*.¹

The orientation of the pieces is given as²:

Front — Red *Back* — Yellow
Right — Green *Left* — Black

Despite Bell and his Persian source, the terms front, back, right and left are not open to interpretation. As Burgess³ informs us:

We must take notice of the origin and literal meaning of the Sanskrit words which designate the cardinal directions. The face of the observer is supposed always to be eastward: then "east" is *pranc*, "forward, toward the front"; "west" is *paccat*, "backward, toward the rear"; "south" is *dakshina*, "on the right"; "north" is *uttara*, "upward" (i.e., probably, toward the mountains, or up the course of the rivers in north-western India).

In other words the term "front" is not being used as it might be if one were referring to the arrangement of actors on a stage. It is not that part of the board closest to the viewer. Neither does "back" refer to the equivalent of the back of a stage. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that the red king resides in the northern quadrant of the *chaturanga* board or that he is equivalent to The Emperor on the Tarot board; after all, there is no reason to assume that the author of the *Bhavishya Purana* understood the cosmological implications of the game board. What it does mean is that the *relative* positions of the four kings of *chaturanga* should be identical to those of the four kings on the Tarot board. If one of the kings from one system can be identified with one of the kings from the other, the three remaining should fall into place.

The use of the terms "north," "south," "east" and "west" in reference to the ecliptic or zodiac does not conform to their meanings when used "on the ground." "North," in the parlance of those authors who have dealt with the astronomical nature of myth, refers to that portion of the ecliptic in the general direction of the summer solstice, where the sun, moon and planets make their closest approach to the North Pole. "South" refers to the direction of the winter solstice. The terms "east" and "west," in this system, are fairly abstract terms referring not to the directions of the rising and setting sun but to the spring and autumn equinoxes. There appears to be a close connection between this orientation⁴ and that described by Burgess in his analysis of the Sanskrit directional words. Thus, if one faces in the direction of the stars that mark the vernal equinox ("east"), the position of the winter solstice is toward the right ("south"), the autumnal equinox is toward the back ("west") and the summer solstice is left or "up" toward the North Pole.⁵ The following table summarizes the current state of our knowledge:

<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Season</i>	<i>Trump</i>	<i>Greek God</i>
Front	East	Indra	Spring	Magician	Maia
Up	North	Kuvera	Summer	Emperor	Cronus
Back	West	Varuna	Autumn	Chariot	Ouranos
Right	South	Yama	Winter	Wheel of Fortune	Tyche

There are undoubtedly a multitude of more or less arcane approaches to the alignment of the suits, colors and elements of the various astrologers' boards. Of these, the most direct is via The Emperor and the northern quadrant of the board.

Huang Ti, that is Shang Huang Ti and not Chin Huang Ti, whom De Santillana has identified with Saturn, was the first mythological emperor of China. He is sometimes known as the Yellow Emperor, which Walters tells us refers to the color of gold, Huang being thus, also, the Golden Emperor.⁶ De Santillana presents a slightly different interpretation. Yellow is the color of the element earth which belongs to Saturn.⁷ When we turn to the Indian version of the rulers of the four directions, we find Kuvera, who resides upon Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas,⁸ is not only lord of treasure but lord of the world as well.⁹ He was shown, early on, driving a chariot drawn by four hobgoblins. Hence we have the following series:

<i>Element</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Lord of</i>	<i>Suit</i>
Earth	Yellow	North	Kuvera	Treasure	Coins

Across the *chaturanga* board from Kuvera stands the army of Yama, god of the dead.¹⁰ Yama rules over a well defined region analogous to the Western Hell, to which the souls of the dead are conducted by means of the cremation fire whose other purpose is to drive away spirits and demons.¹¹ That Yama represents the element of fire, despite its usual connection with Agni, is confirmed by the color of the army that faces the yellow men of Kuvera. Throughout the world, wherever the primitive cosmos was divided into four quarters, red was most often the color of fire.

With regard to which suit is equivalent to fire, the answer is given to us gratis, though the association is less than transparent. As Dandadhara, Yama carried a rod or mace.¹² The connection between fire and rods may be symbolized by the way the Indians represent the ruler of the dead. His green body is shown dressed in clothes of red. Hence

the newly dead wood, to which the odd leaf still clings, has just burst into flame and is about to consume the body of the deceased. The following second series has emerged:

<i>Element</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Lord of</i>	<i>Suit</i>
Fire	Red	South	Yama	Death	Rods

We may stop for a moment to wonder why south, the direction of winter on the Tarot board, has been assigned the element fire. I believe the answer to this question, as far as it can be approached rationally, is inherent in the geography of India. If, figuratively, we stand at the top of one of the peaks of the Himalayas, perhaps near the abode of Kuvera, and look down the way the author of the Bhavishya Purana looked down upon his *chaturanga* board, we see off in the distance the hot lowlands of southern India. It is a geographical fact in the Northern Hemisphere that the farther one travels southward the warmer it gets, and this tendency is accentuated in the subcontinent by decreasing elevation.

There is another possible, though not necessarily contradictory, interpretation. If we return to de Santillana's "earth" as celestial equator, we notice that the king of the south, i.e. Yama, occupies the lowest point, on the ecliptic, below the surface of this "earth." Hence, if Kuvera occupies the great cosmic mountain, Yama lives within the mountain, in the realm of volcanic fire.

To the west stands the green army of Varuna, alter ego of Ouranos and god of the ocean or of waters in general.¹³ The fluid element would appear to be represented by the suit of cups, though direct evidence is lacking. There is, however, another approach to the suits which confirms the identification.

Alfred Douglas, in *The Tarot*,¹⁴ notices the strong resemblance between the four suits and the ring, scepter, cup and sword held by the androgynous four-armed god Ardhanari. These objects are similar to those held by the elephant-headed god Ganesha, Indian equivalent of the Roman Mercury and Greek Hermes, which are given by Higgins¹⁵ as a lotus, a club, a shell and a dirk (dagger). The referents of the club and dirk are obvious, and we have already noted the shell is sometimes replaced by the "Cornu Ammonis," as it is also by a representation of a ship, the *Argo-Argonautae*, when Ganesha appears in Latium under the guise of Janus. The third series is as follows:

<i>Element</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Lord of</i>	<i>Suit</i>
Water	Green	West	Varuna	Sea	Cups

Mackenzie¹⁶ calls Indra the “atmospheric god of battle,” which ties in nicely with both the element air and the suit of swords. As Kuvera dwells in the mountainous regions of earth, Indra inhabits a city that hangs in the air.¹⁷ As for the black pieces of proto-chess and *pachisi*, Higgins makes the point that blue is often substituted for black among ancient statuary, the implication being that blue represents the daytime sky while black stands for the night. The full table is as follows:

<i>Element</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Direction</i>	<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Lord of</i>	<i>Suit</i>
Fire	Red	South	Yama	Death	Rods
Air	Black	East	Indra	Battle	Swords
Water	Green	West	Varuna	Sea	Cups
Earth	Yellow	North	Kuvera	Treasure	Coins

It is now apparent that the elements of the ancient astrology boards were not some abstract philosophical concepts nor the pure elements of the alchemists but the real constituents of the physical world. “Earth” is the ground beneath our feet; “fire” is the molten fire of volcanic eruption or the flame of the funeral pyre; “water” is the very sea that surrounds the land and “air” is that region which stretches from the surface of the earth to the stars themselves.

The Hanged Man Revisited

It is of some significance that the suits appear in the four hands of the Indian equivalent of Hermes, for it is he whom we have identified with The Hanged Man. This god was the prototype of another, the day of whose hanging has been the subject of conflict since Western man began to calculate the dates of historical events. The solution to the problem that I will state in a moment lies in the assignment of days of the week to the Tarot board.

The board is naturally divided into four seven-day or eight half-week periods. This eight-part division is foreshadowed at Stonehenge where Wall¹⁸ notes that 8 of the 56 Aubrey Holes are more accurately laid out than the others. Any relation between the now universal seven-day week and the Tarot board would thus be expected to follow this natural division. Hence each week, each 28-day civil lunar month, each

season and each year would, if such designations yet existed, begin on a Sunday. By the same logic, each of these units would end on a Saturday, the original Hebrew Sabbath. Of primary importance for the decoding of the sequence of trumps from Death through Judgment is the location of The Hanged Man in this weekly sequence, for the first day following Trump 12, which we can now finally designate as the three and four of rods, is a Friday. Though this was, when Stonehenge was new, the first day of the month that had ended at the vernal equinox, by the beginning of the common era it had advanced, or rather the seasons had precessed, to the point that it marked the first day of spring on March 23 of the Julian year. If the reader will ponder for a moment the not widely known fact that the Christian high holiday of Easter was originally celebrated on the 25th day of the solar month of March, he or she may begin to comprehend the nature of the hidden meaning of The Hanged Man. The problem mentioned above is, of course, the date of the crucifixion as described in the Christian New Testament. As Dr. Hugh J. Schonfield points out in *The Passover Plot*,¹⁹ scholars have gone to extraordinary lengths in their various attempts to align the events of Holy Week with the astronomical and calendrical facts available to the modern world.

There is a fairly widespread and ancient tradition, mentioned both by Godfrey Higgins²⁰ and Sir James Frazer,²¹ that the crucifixion was originally observed on the 25th of March, which was taken to be the vernal equinox, though Frazer points out that the Christian holidays were, for some unknown reason, displaced by two days from their equivalent pagan holidays. Hence the resurrection of Jesus, as opposed to that of Attis, was celebrated on the 27th of March. Frazer, however, also cites evidence to the effect that what is now referred to as Good Friday was, by the Church in Gaul, observed on the 23rd of March. The Tarot board clearly places The Hanged Man, whether he represents Jesus, Attis or some other hanged god, not only on Friday but at what would have been the vernal equinox at the beginning of the Christian era.

Schonfield quite convincingly places the crucifixion among the historical events of the year A.D. 36.²² The first thing we note is that spring began that year on March 22,²³ which was a Thursday,²⁴ though it had been oscillating back and forth for decades between the 22nd and 23rd. Now according to the table presented in Frank Parise's *The Book of Calendars*, the feast of Passover, which is usually taken to be the reason for the Last Supper, fell on Wednesday,²⁵ the day before. The question is how an event that appears to have occurred on a Thursday came to

be known as "Good Friday." This sort of problem develops with all attempts to determine the date of the first Easter. There is always at least one factor that doesn't quite fit. Yet, as Schonfield stresses, "it is the imprisonment and execution of John the Baptist which governs the date of the ministry and crucifixion . . ." ²⁶ Thus we are left with the historical validity of the year A.D. 36, together with the proper position of Passover as well as the vernal equinox, against which positive evidence is contrasted the wrong day of the week as well as other, more circumstantial, evidence.

Dr. Schonfield mentions a theory that Jesus and his disciples observed Passover according to the "Qumran solar calendar." ²⁷ Whether this is true or not, it brings up the question of alternate calendars, including the one we are investigating in the present work. The fact is that when scholars calculate the day of the crucifixion they always assume the *rotating* week currently in use. Yet the calendar of the Tarot board that we have used to identify the Day of the Hanged Man with the vernal equinox is a week-year or even-week year of exactly 52 weeks. When spring finally begins to fall on Friday, it *always* falls on Friday! If the founders of Christianity were indeed using a calendar of the even-week Tarot variety, we would expect to find other similarities as well; which brings us back to a subject I promised to discuss quite a while ago.

We are now in a position to understand the alternate meaning of *nefer*, which the reader will recall as a symbol from the Egyptian *senat* board. As we noted earlier, *nefer* sometimes meant "door" or "gate." It is Godfrey Higgins ²⁸ who, in an attempt to connect Jesus of Nazareth with Ganesha, whose "poles" are found near the gates of Indian cities, points out that this very same Jesus refers to himself as the "door of the sheep." The sheep can only be Aries, especially in the light of the attendant references to fish, whose sign Pisces replaced the Ram as the sign of the equinox. Higgins makes the further identification of Krishna with the Greek "Christ," meaning messiah. Krishna replaced Indra as Christ replaced Yahweh.

We have come to the end of our analysis of the first 12 trumps. Figure 11 is a genealogy of the Greek gods whom we have identified with 11 of these. There is no overriding arcane significance to this chart. It is simply an interesting sidelight to the current study. It does, however, point up the connections among the various trumps. They are, if nothing else, close relatives.

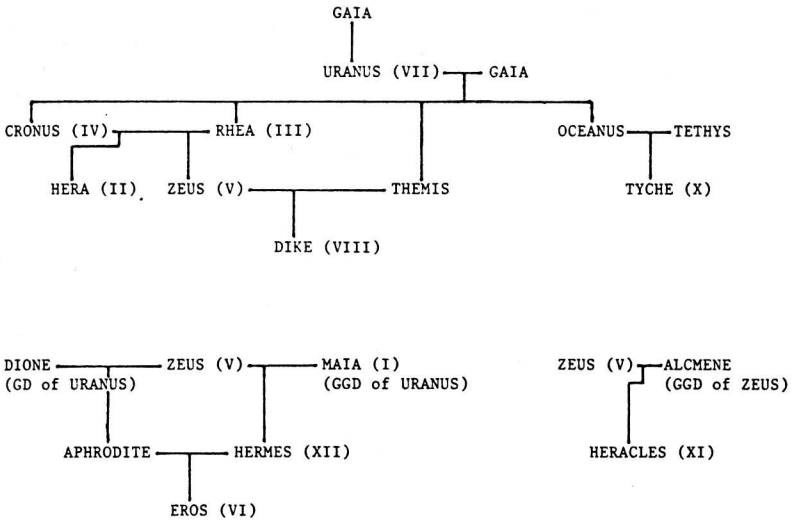


Figure 11: A Genealogy of 11 of the First 12 Trumps

Synopsis / The Hanged Man

I. Early

- A. Astronomical – Device for marking the meridian²⁹
- B. Mythological
 - 1. Scandinavian – Odin
 - 2. English – Woden
 - 3. Roman – Mercury
 - 4. Greek – Hermes
 - 5. Egyptian – Thoth
 - 6. Indian – Ganesha
- C. Linguistic
 - 1. Egyptian – Nefer

II. Late

- A. Astronomical – The vernal equinox
- B. Theological – Jesus of Nazareth
- C. Calendrical – Good Friday
- D. Mythological – Robin Hood