

tarot symbolism



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ROBERT V. O'NEILL

TAROT SYMBOLISM

Table of Contents

1. Introducing the Tarot Images	7
2. Critical Examination of 200 Years of Tarot Interpretations	27
3. The Italian Tarot	66
4. Neglect of the Tarot	107
5. Growth of the Tarot	123
6. The Tarot as a Symbolic Language	147
7. The Tarot as a Symbolic Language	167
8. The Tarot as a Symbolic Language	187
9. The Tarot as a Symbolic Language	207
10. Kabbalah and the Tarot	227
11. Alchemy and the Tarot	247
12. Numerology	267
13. Astrology and the Tarot	287
14. The Art of Magic	307
15. A Final Chapter of the Tarot	327

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FAIRWAY PRESS

DRAWER L • LIMA, OHIO 45802

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FIRST EDITION
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Fairway Press
Lima, Ohio

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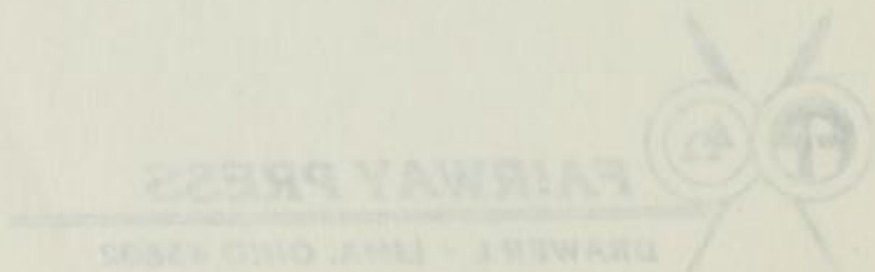


Table of Contents

1. Introducing the Tarot Trumps	7
2. Critical Examination of 200 Years of Tarot Interpretations	37
3. The Italian Renaissance	66
4. Neoplatonism	100
5. Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions	125
6. Egypt and the Hermetic Tradition	146
7. Christian Mysticism	162
8. Heretical Sects and their Influence on the Tarot	183
9. Renaissance Art and Sources for the Tarot Images	210
10. Kabbalah and the Tarot	233
11. Alchemy and the Tarot	264
12. Numerology and the Tarot	292
13. Astrology and the Tarot	322
14. The Art of Memory	340
15. A Final Interpretation of the Cards	364

Table of Contents

1	Introducing the Tarot Symbols	1
2	General Examination of 200 Years of Tarot Interpretations	37
3	The Italian Renaissance	88
4	Neoplatonism	100
5	Christianity and the Mystery Religions	125
6	Egypt and the Hermetic Tradition	148
7	Christian Mysticism	165
8	Neoplatonism and the Renaissance	181
9	Renaissance Art and Symbols for the Tarot Images	210
10	Keats and the Tarot	230
11	Albany and the Tarot	264
12	Technology and the Tarot	280
13	Technology and the Tarot	325
14	The Art of Memory	340
15	A Final Interpretation of the Cards	364

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Introduction

The enigmatic images of the Tarot have fascinated authors for two hundred years. Occult writers have done much to elucidate the meaning of the symbols but have accepted fantastic theories of origin. Authors interested in playing-card history have assembled the documentary evidence needed to reconstruct the true origins of the cards but have largely ignored the symbolism or reduced it to trivia.

The present work does not fall neatly into either camp. After perusing the first few chapters, the reader will have to agree with the historians that the Tarot originated *de novo* in northern Italy in the middle of the 15th century. But after completing the book, the same reader also will have to conclude that many occultist interpretations are justified based on our reconstruction of the Renaissance mindset. The major onus of the book is to present the symbolic systems of Renaissance Italy and to suggest how these systems might have entered into the design of the Tarot. The book does not offer a definitive interpretation but presents the available data from which such an interpretation might eventually be constructed.

The nature of the intellectual climate of the Renaissance causes real problems in presenting the data. During this period, many divergent lines of thought were synthesized into a comprehensive worldview. And yet a book must be written in a linear fashion, one page after another, one argument after another. As a result, considerable background and many lines of thought must be presented before the synthesis begins to emerge and key arguments can only be developed in later chapters. Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings, some important comments must be made at this point.

The Tarot was designed to play a game. The evidence on this point is so clear that no reasonable man can contend otherwise. Use of the cards for other purposes, such as divination, was superimposed on the Tarot. There is no evidence that anyone even thought of using it for anything but a game until after 1781, more than 300 years after its design.

But, at the same time, games are often used to educate and edify the participants. There are many examples of card decks which have these ancillary purposes. Thus, there is no contradiction in maintaining that the Tarot symbols have a meaning and significance that goes beyond a mere card game. Even though the symbolic significance of the images was probably lost very early in the history of the deck, we will find that it is not impossible to reconstruct much of the original symbolism.

The card images used throughout the presentation are taken from the Tarot de Marseilles. The well-informed reader is well aware that there are many versions of the Tarot. Various traditions differ

in the card images and in the number of cards in the deck. My choice of the Tarot de Marseilles is made for two reasons. First, the occultists have focused on this deck. Therefore, use of the French tradition simplifies the task of relating the occultists' interpretations to our study of Renaissance culture.

The second, and more important, reason for choosing the Tarot de Marseilles involves strong internal evidence that it closely follows the original symbolism. The Marseilles design traces back to the 15th century through the deck of Geoffrey Catelin, the World card found at the Castello Sforzesco, and the printed sheet in the Beinecke collection. The French deck can be shown to be consistent with the symbolism of the Renaissance. Other traditions, such as those associated with Ferrara and Bologna, and other early decks, such as the handpainted decks of Bembo and "Charles VI", appear to be derivatives from this original conception.

The strongest arguments for the originality of the Marseilles designs cannot logically be presented until much groundwork is laid. The discussion is scattered throughout the text, beginning in the later sections of the third chapter and extending through the beginning of the 12th chapter. The reader who holds other hypotheses about the original design of the cards is asked to reserve judgment until that point.

The author would be remiss if he did not acknowledge the support and assistance of many friends. These include Norman Handelsman and Stuart Kaplan who were supportive of this project from its inception. The author's wife, Gerry, and his friend, Bob Gardner, endured the author's enthusiasm with kindness and incredible patience. Special thanks is owed to Michael Dummett, the premier Tarot scholar of our day. Through his text on the Game of Tarot (Duckworth, 1980), his correspondence with the author, and his review of an earlier manuscript he encouraged the author again and again to bring his ideas into line with the historical evidence. If errors remain, as they certainly do, it is due to the author's stubborn refusal to follow Dr. Dummett's scholarly advice on every point.

Introducing the Tarot Trumps

A complete Tarot deck is composed of seventy-eight cards, divided into two major sections. The first section, sometimes called the Minor Arcana or minor mysteries, has fifty-six cards and is essentially the deck of playing cards with which we are familiar. The four suits of swords, wands, cups and disks are the old Italian equivalents of spades, clubs, hearts and diamonds. Each suit is composed of ace through ten and four court cards: page, knight, queen and king. Thus, the addition of one court card is the only difference between this portion of the Tarot and the modern deck of playing cards.

The second section of the Tarot deck is unique. It is composed of twenty-two symbolic cards called Trumps or Major Arcana (i.e., major mysteries). Typically, there is an unnumbered card, the Fool, and twenty-one cards numbered sequentially. These trump cards have been eliminated from the decks we have grown up with, although some would maintain that the Fool has been retained as the Joker.

Although the twenty-two Tarot trumps are unfamiliar, it is this set of symbols which has fascinated scholars, occultists and fortune-tellers for centuries. The enigmatic figures on the Trumps have formed the basis for most of the strange beliefs associated with the Tarot. For this reason, we will focus our attention on the trump cards throughout the studies in this book.

We will begin with a survey of the images on each of the trump cards. This introduction will serve us well by reviewing the wealth of psychological, philosophical and other world-views which have been applied to the Tarot. The great number of past studies, conducted over two centuries, has resulted in what might be called the "traditional" interpretation of the symbols. We will use this rich tradition as a jumping-off point for the more detailed and scholarly studies which follow.

It is hoped that the reader will use this opportunity to become thoroughly familiar with the individual symbols. This will permit us to refer to individual cards in other chapters without having to redescribe the images. It is recommended that the reader have a deck of Tarot cards in front of him as he proceeds. This will greatly facilitate the familiarization process.

The avowed purpose of this introductory study is to fascinate the reader with the symbolic richness of the images and to expose him briefly to the innuendos and interpretations which will occupy us later. To accomplish this purpose, the material is presented in simple narrative, uninterrupted by footnotes and comments. It is

intended that the reader will be intrigued and not frustrated by the brief treatment of each symbol. If frustration is the initial reaction, I beg the reader's indulgence. It was, after all, my own initial frustration that stimulated these studies in the first place.

The Fool

A man in gay motley prances across the landscape, all his possessions in a hobo's bag on his shoulder. His incredible naivete is indicated by his ignorance of imminent danger. He is about to walk over a cliff or into the jaws of an alligator. He is being harried, perhaps warned, by a small animal that leaps upon him from behind and rips his pants. He is represented in some decks as chasing a will-of-the-wisp in the form of a butterfly, imprudently ignoring the physical dangers which surround him. He is not even watching where he is going.

This is the symbol of the birth of awareness in man. Man first realizing his plight and too dumb to notice that his pants are falling off. This is the card of spiritual childhood, of birth into awareness, of the naivete of the beginner. His gaze is upwards because his journey is of the spirit. He is spirit in search of experience. This is man starting on the spiritual journey, gay and optimistic, not yet aware of the length of the journey or the dangers it entails.

Some fifteenth century decks introduce the Fool as the Beggar. He is inadequately dressed, leaning on a walking stick; a stranger welcome nowhere and chased by the neighborhood dogs. This is a symbol of despair, the despair which first motivates progress. The Fool is becoming aware that his misery is due to his materiality and he is ready to undertake the journey to higher consciousness. He has sunk to the lowest depths and sees that reliance on matter can only make things worse. He is ready to give up material values, become the vagabond, and search for higher spiritual values. The Fool is spiritual innocence, but an innocence that contains within it the seed of cosmic racial wisdom.

The Fool is also the unnumbered card. We describe him first because his most conspicuous meaning is that of naive beginnings. However, he is also the symbol of the individual examining the cards. He is the seeker who will travel through the entire series of cards, learning, experiencing, and growing in awareness. Therefore, the image of the Fool is rich with deeper connotations.

At the highest level, the Fool is the symbol of the goal of the journey. He is the Bodhisatva, the enlightened man, returned to the world to save others. He is not really ignorant, he is oblivious. He is still human but he is unconcerned about the dangers of the material world which he has transcended. Because he has no goal, he cannot lose his way. The animal represents his instincts which still harry him, for he is just as human now as he ever was. He is still bitten but he realizes that the bites are unimportant. It is not

that he carries all he *owns* in his sack; he carries all he *needs*. Anything more would be superficial. He is alone in the mountains, living on the edge of social life, unconcerned about the petty affairs of mankind. If you look closely, you may find that the foolscap is a disguise. The cape is attached to his staff. He holds the staff over his shoulder to make the viewer think he is a fool.

In this higher interpretation, he is not as much of a fool as people think. He is the medieval jester, the court entertainer, the sarcastic joker who was often an astute politician. He is no fool at all, he has simply rejected all that is stupid in human values. He remains in society only to remind and awaken others. The bag over his shoulder is really the jester's bladder. With it he strikes the sleeping man, awakening him with a bang, but causing no pain or discomfort. He is the holy madman who lives a charmed life. He is St. Francis preaching to the birds, the Shaman entranced with the wonders of the universe and trying to awaken others to his vision of awe and beauty. He is walking over the cliff as a symbol that he is living in the "Twilight Zone", half in material life and half in the spiritual beyond. His pants are falling off, but no matter, his existence is beyond cultural norms and petty conventions of dress. He lives in a world of his own. Wherever the Tarot deck has been used to play a game of cards, the fool is the wild card. He can be substituted for any other card you wish. He follows no rules and he wins no tricks, he is outside the purpose of the game. He has learned to balance his true significance as a spiritual entity living in the midst of a material universe.

The Magician

Almost immediately after setting out on his path, the Fool meets the Magician. Standing along the side of the road behind his table of tricks, he promises to display his legerdemain for a penny. In fact, he intends to lure the passer-by into gambling, and losing, in the "Old Shell Game". Some older decks show a group of men or boys who have been drawn under his spell.

At this lowest level, the Magician is an evil influence. He suggests to the Fool that one can succeed by trickery. One can take advantage of others. One can make money and achieve all of one's goals within the context of the material world. He represents the negative aspect of even the most legitimate businessman, advising the Fool to get a good job and set his goals within the context of the economic system.

A higher aspect of the symbol is revealed in decks which represent the Magus as an artisan or craftsman. In this aspect, he represents the inherent ability of man to create, to develop his talents and provide for himself through the satisfaction of producing a useful product. As with any craft, once the master level is reached, the artisan becomes the Alchemist. His skill reaches a level where it seems magical to the onlooker. The ancient world believed the

Alchemist could transform base metals into gold. Surely this feat was not impossible for the metallurgist who transformed rocks and ores into shiny metals in his furnace. In this aspect of artisan, the Magician teaches the Fool that he must develop his inherent talents. The natural abilities of man are amazing and "magical" if he will diligently study and perfect the arts.

At its highest level, this card represents the Magus, the man of power, the perfection and realization of man's innate abilities. He is Mercury and the Egyptian god Thoth who brings truth, knowledge and even language to his fellow man. He is depicted out-of-doors because he represents natural or "white magic": the development and application of the powers of nature. He exercises his intellect to understand and then to control nature. He raises his wand to draw down the powers of the cosmos which he directs with his lowered hand into nature and into the magical objects on his table.

The Magician offers the Fool his first route, his first entry into higher consciousness. He represents the dignity of man and his intellect which places him above the beasts. Man's intellectual powers stand between the spiritual World of Ideas and the material world. Man forms the intermediary who exists simultaneously in both worlds. He can draw himself up to God through his own efforts and draw down the divine influence into the material world for the benefit of others.

The Magus represents the journey to God through the development of the intellect: the Hermetic path. Through intense development of the mind, the Fool can come to understand the universe, see his true role and exercise his highest innate talents to reach higher consciousness. This is the route of the Hermetic masters, the way of the Orphic mysteries. This is the hardest, steepest route according to Hinduism: the route of Jnana Yoga, the way of the intellect. It is not suitable for everyone, but it is the fastest route.

The Papess

A calm, peaceful, centered woman sits on a throne. Behind her are two pillars with a veil stretched between. On her lap is a book or scroll, partially hidden in the folds of her gown. Her garments are of a religious nature: perhaps a nun, perhaps a papess with triple crown, perhaps an ancient priestess of Isis with horned orb on her head. Her face may be partially covered by a veil.

She presents to the Fool the polar opposite of the Magus. She is the sister, girlfriend, aunt. She is the symbol of feminine mystique. She shows an alternative to the path of the intellect, the path of power represented by the Magus. Instead of counseling aggressive self-development, she emphasizes receptivity, calm, acceptance.

The Papess indicates that the world is full of mystery. She is "Woman": different, enigmatic. She is attractive and frightening at the same time. This polarity is represented by the two pillars. The

veil between the pillars gives the Fool his first hint that by passing between the pillars of duality in some mysterious manner, his goal will be achieved.

The Papess also forms the polar opposite of card five, the Pope. In some early decks, the two cards are numbered sequentially. If the Pope represents the exoteric side of religion, the Papess represents the esoteric, the route of mystery and meditation. In the modern numbering system, she stands between the Magus, to balance his aggressive power, and the Pope, to balance his emphasis on the external, the ritual.

To interpreters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this card proved the ancient Egyptian origin of the Tarot. There is no female in the Church's hierarchy. Therefore, this must be a modernized version of Isis and the card must reference the mystery religion of Isis. The card is disguised, an attempt to hide the true origins of the symbol by dressing the image in modern attire.

One deck suggests that part of the card's symbolism is hidden beyond the borders of the image. The tops of the pillars, usually cut off by the upper margin, are actually cauldrons of fire and water to make the symbolism of duality even more striking. The folds of her gown are transformed into flowing water beyond the normal borders of the card. This occult interpretation emphasizes the belief of many that the symbols cannot be understood unless accompanied by an oral tradition that points out symbolic elements which are disguised or hidden in the figures.

As Isis, goddess of the Moon and symbol of the unconscious, this card offers the Fool the second important route to higher consciousness, the invitation to the mystery religions, to meditation and Raja Yoga, the path of passivity. The book in her lap and the world hidden behind the veil suggest great wisdom and possibilities if the Fool will take her path. She offers the path of initiation, the path between the pillars of Boaz and Joachim from Freemasonry tradition. She suggests that the Fool will find access to initiation through the occult, esoteric societies which claim to be the linear descendants and possessors of the true initiations of the ancient mysteries.

The Empress

Passing beyond the mysterious Temple of Isis, the Fool passes into the Garden of Venus and meets the Empress, the symbol of Mother Nature. Earthy and maternal, she represents the simple life, the acceptance of nature. She is surrounded by beauty: flowers, water, trees and a field of wheat, the symbol of Demeter of the Eleusian mysteries.

On older decks, she is the symbol of feminine power, seated upon a throne. The back of the throne closely resembles the veiled pillars of the Papess and in fact these two cards are related. Interpreters fluctuate in assigning one to the Moon and the other to Venus. Like the Papess, the Empress is a representation of the

mysterious power of woman. She symbolizes female power gained through acceptance of nature and through love. To the Fool, she is the maternal, sheltering, life-supporting aspects of the world.

While the Empress resembles the Papess, she is, in other respects, its polar opposite. She is the other side of woman. If the Papess lures and seduces, the Empress enfolds and protects. If the Papess is remote and unfamiliar, the Empress is familiar. If the Papess is dark and mysterious, the Empress is open and bright.

In the impression of mercy and love which this card conveys, the Empress contrasts with the cold, hard justice of the Emperor card to follow. She balances the unattainable mystery on one side; she balances the aggressive power of the Emperor on the other side. Surely, the Fool can see that successive cards are presenting polar opposites to his consciousness. Surely, the point will eventually get through to him that the duality he finds must be transcended at the end of his path. However, this requires a perception which will not come easily to the spiritual child. He will have to progress many stages before the lessons of these early cards will synthesize themselves into a mature understanding of the nature of reality.

For the moment, the Fool learns that nature is good. If it is mysterious (Papess), if it can be frightening (Magician), it can also be loving, warm, bright and life-supporting. Though he has discovered that he has within himself the life of the spirit, the intellect, he must learn that this high power can only be cultivated when it is in harmony with the material side of his existence. The path introduced by the Empress is thus the path of Karma Yoga, the route of life, of love, of duty, of disappointments and joys. Life lived to the full.

The fool began the journey because he realized that he had sunk to great depths by overemphasizing the material. There was a higher life. But his initial tendency may be to reject his material existence. The Empress counsels balance. Material life cannot simply be rejected. It must be lived and transcended; it must be lived and it must be accepted. Thus, the third route to the higher life is the simple existence: the farmer close to the soil, smelling the earth and recognizing his role as the developer and the master. There is the implication here that man is a material entity and must return to Mother Earth her due.

The Emperor

The Emperor sits upon his cubic throne, the master of all he surveys. The orb and scepter in his hands are the symbols of his power. He is the warrior who has overcome, the victor. He is the epitome of the aggressive, successful male; he is in control. He is natural man at the summit of the material universe. He signifies the mysteries of Mithras, the god who wrestled and overcame the Bull. He is Jupiter, the largest of the planets and the ruler of the Roman gods.

The Emperor signifies the highest attainment of material life. He

is ruler of the four quarters, Arthur of the Grail legends. He is the Fool's own father, but also the father of all the people, sustaining his kingdom by his personal vitality and fertility. Instead of fleeing life and emphasizing the intellectual, the Empress and Emperor advise the Fool to live life and conquer it. The Emperor is the all-powerful opener of opportunities. He shows that the world can be overcome and sets a powerful example for the young Fool. He is clear and present evidence that the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by storm.

Together with the Empress, he forms the royal pair of Alchemy. As a result of their union, their Chymical Marriage, they will produce a Royal Son who is the Fool reborn to a higher life. The Emperor sits with his legs crossed in a figure four. This signifies his position as the fourth card, but four is also a number of completion. It signifies that the Fool has completed the lowest or material cycle.

Together with the following card, the Pope, he signifies the duality of material and spiritual. He is the summit of the material life as the Pope appears to be of the spiritual. The Emperor is also closely related to the Magician card in that both suggest an aggressive attack on life, an overcoming of obstacles by one's own efforts. As such, the Emperor presents the fourth path to the Fool, the way of Hatha Yoga, the way of spirit that begins with conquering and transcending the limitations of the body.

The path he offers is the overcoming of nature by force, not by loving (Empress). The conquest is one of Will, not Intellect (Magician). He represents the power of the Will, the ascetic, physical route to higher consciousness.

In some respects, this is the first attractive advice the Fool has received. As he matures through the first third of his spiritual life (i.e., the first seven cards), he has arrived at the midpoint, his puberty. At this midpoint he is presented with the symbol of the Emperor, the epitome of the mature power he begins to feel filling his body. Surely at this stage in his progress, the development of his new power is the most attractive route to progress he has been offered. For the male Fool, this is certainly the path he will follow initially. (The female Fool is more likely to follow the path of the Empress).

The Pope

The Pope sits upon his throne in full ceremonial regalia: the tiara upon his head, the triple cross in his hand, his right hand raised in papal blessing. His disciples stand or kneel before him, receiving his blessing and hanging on his every word. This is the hierophant, the holder of spiritual wisdom, the exoteric symbol of the mysteries of Paul of Tarsus and Christianity.

The Pope holds the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. He is the official channel through which grace is transmitted to man. He is another route between the pillars of duality which stand behind him.

He is the route of exoteric religion, the way of standard devotion, liturgy and ritual. He presents the route of Bhakti Yoga, the way of the devotee.

The Pope is the symbol of the fifth path offered to the Fool: the socially acceptable and standard path of Christian mysticism. He advises love, service to others, possibly even monasticism. To the Fool, immersed in the world through the example of the Emperor, this might appear the highest path offered thus far.

However, we must ask whether this fifth path is the highest or the lowest. Do the cards suggest that the first path, the way of the intellect was really the highest? Was the Fool simply too naive to recognize this? Is the Pope given the highest place? Or is he really the last resort?

The Pope is the summit of the spiritual life, as the Emperor was the summit of the material. The Pope represents the exoteric side of religion to balance the esoteric mysteries of the Papess card. He balances the Magician's power to call down the divine influence through his own efforts by being the official channel of divine grace.

The Pope can also be seen as the symbol of the external view of the spiritual hero, the saint, the hierophant. He has won, he has achieved a victory. He is the symbol of pious hagiography, the saint as the sinless child of God, the pillar of strength. But this is a very distorted image of the guru or saint. This is how he appears to the disciple, blinded by love. This is not how he appears to himself, not how he appears to the enlightened man. The hierophant must always be viewed as a channel, not as an end in himself.

The Lovers

The Fool continues to mature. His adolescence over, he meets a lover and is faced with a challenge and a choice. In the Tarot image, blind Eros hovers overhead and fires his arrow into the heart of the lover. Some cards suggest that the Fool will choose the bare-footed, earthy lover over her chaste rival. In other decks, the choice appears to be made and the third figure looks on approvingly. Some cards imply a choice between lover and Mother, the first great decision of life: to leave the relative security of the home and venture forth into marriage and a life of one's own. There is a crossroads of a sort, but the route to further progress is clear: venture forth.

This card represents the point at which the Fool leaves behind the familiar territory of his childhood and starts a new life with a bride. This is always a major turning point, a step upward. This is actually the first step in following the route of the Emperor, exercising fertility, contributing to the stream of life. It is accepting the advice of the Empress to join the basic activities of nature. It is taking to oneself the mysterious other woman, the Papess. It is participating in a process that goes beyond oneself, contributing to the survival of the species. Now the Fool is called to active

participation in life. Now he will no longer be a listener at the feet of a wiser older person. Now he must try his own wings.

In its alchemical reference, this card represents the first union of the king and queen. The Empress and Emperor will unite and the royal son will be born. The first effort to overcome the duality of man and woman will be accomplished. The angel in some cards seems to be calling the man and woman together to face their destiny.

This card represents the first real response of the Fool. He has learned much and been offered five separate and related paths to higher consciousness. But as long as he remains a child, as long as he clings to the protective influence of the home, his progress will be limited. He cannot really undertake any of the paths until he strikes off on his own.

Even if he ignored all of the advice he has received thus far, the finding of the lover will force him out of himself. The lover is clearly an expression of the "other" and the Fool is drawn naturally and inevitably to unite with the other. His material existence, his body, forces him to take the next step, out of himself and into the other. It is a simple matter of instinct. In this way he will experience his first taste of the assimilation to unity in the ecstasy of physical love. He will learn that life is not entirely locked up within himself. He will learn that further progress depends upon his establishing and learning from relationships with others.

The Chariot

The Fool is now mature. He has left home, married a bride and taken a job. He appears as Mars in the triumphal chariot, master of himself and others. He has taken the advice of the Emperor and bravely moved forward to conquer earthly life. He is on top of the heap. The horses or sphinxes attached to the chariot are not guided by reins. He has achieved a degree of mastery over the lower self and the beasts follow his directions without needing physical cues. There is no sword visible, but he still wears a sword belt. The sword itself is simply moved back behind his back, out of the way. But this is only temporary. As long as the Fool is locked into the route of supremacy, the competition will always be there and the sword must always remain near at hand.

This victory over the trials and frustrations of maturing is another necessary step on the path. Everyone experiences the feelings of elation, of being on top of the world, which are symbolized in this card. This is an important experience which gives the person the self-confidence, the consolidation of the personality, which is required for future development.

The Fool has followed the advice of the Emperor. He has participated in life and conquered. Of course, the feelings of victory are fleeting. Unlike the Emperor, who sits ensconced on the throne, the victory parade of the Chariot will be brief. The crowds will disperse,

the ticker-tape will be swept from the street and the "hero" will be the fool once more. He will learn that the victory he has achieved, the victory that he set as the goal for the first third of his life, the victory that promised success in love and success in life, is after all hollow.

The Fool in the Chariot is the alchemical Royal Son, born of the union of the King and the Queen. He is the product of the influence of the Emperor and the Empress upon the Fool.

The Chariot marks the end of the first third of the Tarot Trumps. Stepping back and viewing these cards as a whole, they appear to represent the stages or conditions of human life. In an ever ascending hierarchy, we progress from the destitute beggar, to craftsman, to nun, to consort, to temporal rule, to spiritual rule, and then to love and to conquest over self. What is displayed is the array of possible states which can be achieved in his exterior, social and material existence. They clearly show a Neoplatonic concept of the world in which each level of the hierarchy is seen as a metaphysical stage arrayed between the purely material at one end and the purely spiritual at the other end. We can anticipate, therefore, that the second set of seven cards will present more and more spiritual stages of development.

Justice

The Fool has won his initial victories over life. He has consolidated his ego and established satisfactory relationships with the material and social world around him. Now he faces a major turning point. He is one-third of the way through life, perhaps twenty-five years of age. He has reached the top of the heap in the Chariot card, only to find that it was the wrong heap! He made it to the top and all he can see are higher peaks all around him. He is king of his little personal world, but vassal to greater kings. He now realizes that his journey is only beginning. He climbs down off the triumphal chariot, which is now seen to be tinsel and paper-mache, and sets off again.

Soon after he resumes his journey, he finds himself once more before the pillars of duality. Instead of the mystical figure of Isis, he finds Justice. She carries scales in her left hand and in the right holds a two-edged sword upright. She guards the entrance to the pillars with a message of balance. The material success he has found must be balanced by spiritual progress. He must now weigh his values and examine them closely. The values which brought him to the summit of material success may not be the values which will allow him to progress further.

The figure which appears to the Fool is not a human figure. The symbols no longer represent the stages or conditions of purely human life. Justice is an abstract, a virtue. The image is archetypal, a goddess or angel representing an ideal that transcends the

human condition. Such images will become more common as we proceed, leading the Fool into higher and more spiritual stages of existence.

Justice provides the Fool with a difficult choice. He must reexamine his values, and he will find them wanting. To proceed, he is told that the attitudes and aggression which have brought him to this point are off-balance. He must change. This challenge to change requires great courage. The principles he is now using to rule his life are successful. The ego is firmly established. If he changes the rules by which he operates, he must expect that this material success will begin to wane. To proceed higher, he must give up something of what he has achieved.

If the Fool rejects the message of Justice, he will fall back into the world of matter. The Chariot will become the symbol of his greatest progress. Material wealth, fame, success, competition, staying on top of the heap will become his permanent goals. For man trapped in the material stage of life, as much of Western Civilization seems to be, Justice forms the highest virtue, the ultimate resort. The goals which seem feasible are social justice and the establishment of a legal system which insures that his material gains cannot be taken away by others, who are also trapped in the material. In this concept, courts, jails, lawsuits and legal action are the route to order and peace. Such a material order is the highest that can be hoped for. Charity and Love seem principles that are beyond reach.

But if the Fool understands the message of Justice, he will realize that he is only one-third of the way to his real goal. Being fully human involves much more than material success. There is much, much more to life. There are far more difficult challenges to be met. Remember that Justice holds an upright sword. The route ahead will be no picnic, no joy-ride. The dangers will increase.

But what is the challenge offered by Justice that turns away most seekers? The challenge is balance, the scales which weigh and counterweigh the extremes. To achieve material success, the Fool followed the Emperor and developed his masculine traits: aggression, competition, courage. This approach helped to mold and consolidate his ego, his face to the world. To proceed further, he must balance this exaggerated masculinity with the softening influences of love, passivity and acceptance. This is a hard message to accept. The macho man must become effeminate! The victor must become the beginner. All he has won must be left behind and he must become a child again. The ego which has served him so well must be disintegrated and abandoned. His only security must be abolished, surely a frightening prospect. No wonder most turn back at this point. Maintaining the extreme position is always easier than finding the delicate balance, the Golden Mean between aggressive and passive, material and spiritual, masculine and feminine. Yet it is the poised position, the balance midway between the extremes, that

permits transcendence of the duality. This is a hard message to accept. But the Fool will continue to hear this message, over and over again, throughout the rest of his journey.

The Hermit

If the Fool is willing to hear the message of Justice, he will continue his Journey on foot, abandoning the Chariot, picking up his walking stick and donning his traveling robes. He will become more humble, more docile, more willing to accept things as they come. He will become the hermit, the introspective wanderer, perhaps seen as a "sadder but wiser" version of the Fool card. This is the Fool, wanderer through the material world, become the Hermit, wanderer in the spiritual world.

At a higher level, the Hermit, carrying the lantern of wisdom, represents the Wise Old Man whose message can now be accepted. In fairy tales, the old man shows up to offer the magical solution only when the hero or heroine is ready to hear the message. If this foolish old man had been met earlier, he would not have been heard or even noticed. Now that the Fool is in a more receptive mood, he may be able to profit from the wisdom of age and experience.

In many older cards, the Hermit is pictured as "Father Time", the god Kronos, on crutches and with an hourglass in the background. The hourglass counsels that time is proceeding apace and the Fool must get on with the journey. But the reference may also be that the Fool is reaching an age at which he realizes his mortality, his human frailty. Even the Emperor and the victor in the Chariot are mortal and finite. Life is a limited opportunity. The Fool perhaps recognizes the reality of his death for the first time and this traumatic realization reinforces the need for the balance and progress counseled by Justice. The result is a deeper reevaluation of his life, his values and the path ahead.

From another viewpoint, the Hermit is the meditative, wandering monk, the ascetic. However far our progress along the path to higher consciousness and integrity, we must periodically cycle back to this stage. We must stop, take off the trappings of our present ego involvements and become the Hermit, wandering in the wilderness in search of balance and truth. For some, this may take the form of the ascetic ideal: isolation and aggressive efforts to bring the instincts into submission. For others, this will take the form of a retreat, of quiet contemplation and reevaluation.

Basically, the Hermit counsels a period of introspection and acceptance. The Hermit wanders into the wilderness alone, without food or provisions of any kind. He has left behind the tiny sack he carried as the Fool. Instead he carries the lantern of wisdom to symbolize his search. He adopts an attitude of quiet and listening to replace the aggression of the Chariot. Isolation is needed to achieve

the new balance. Time must be set aside to reexamine his life and values. His values must be seen in a "new light". But the new light is the lantern in his own hand, the light to examine his values is within his own experiences and consciousness. The answer is in his own hands. The Kingdom of Heaven is within.

The Wheel

The Fool returns from his period of introspection and finds his material life has taken on the character of a rat-race. The Wheel symbolizes a major psychological phenomenon of adulthood: the oscillation of moods, highs and lows, successes and failures, elations and depression, motion and rest. Lots of activity and little progress. Once again it is suggested that the Fool is caught in duality and that duality makes his life meaningless.

The Tarot card symbolizes the duality of life by a great Wheel of Fortune. Human characters with asses' ears or strange mythological beasts are riding the perpetual rise and fall of the wheel. In some cards, the hand of Fate, the Spirit of the World, is turning the wheel. The symbolism of the card is clearly shown on the oldest cards on which the figures are saying, "I shall reign", "I do reign", "I did reign", "I don't reign". On top of the world for a moment, then falling off a cliff or having the wheel roll right over you the next minute. This is the rise and fall of human events, the yin and yang of daily life. This is the new perspective of the life of the world which is given to the Fool by his period of introspection and self-searching. Material values are seen as inane and the Fool realizes that his peace and integrity cannot possibly lie in this world of duality and oscillation.

As foreshadowed in the Justice and Hermit cards, the striking of a new balance has resulted in a change of values and a change of viewpoint. Material life no longer appears as it did in the Chariot card. For some, the realization of the inanity of the Wheel of Fortune leads to depression and despair. At best, the next stage of development is characterized by periods of extroversion and introversion: the Wheel and the Hermit. With this glimpse into the higher level of consciousness, the Fool realizes that the activities of daily life, the sanctions of society, the economic, political life are not movement forward but movement in endless circles with no prospects for peace or progress.

On another level, the Wheel opposes and therefore balances the message of the Hermit. Although periods of introspection are necessary, contemplation can become a trap if one does not move beyond it. Medieval monasticism progressed to the stage of the Hermit and stopped. Looking forward it saw only the hopeless rat-race of the Wheel and it refused to move forward. In so doing, it denied the example of Christ, for whom retreats to the wilderness were a repast, not an occupation.

In the Tarot deck the Wheel is "higher", is beyond the Hermit. Although the Fool realizes now that material existence is senseless, the resolution of the dilemma is not found in retreat to the monastery. Rather, the cards imply that to progress, the Fool must throw himself into life, become a participant, a contributor. Forgetting material success, which is only temporary, he must dive into life with a new openness and begin to learn. The Fool must become an impartial observer, instead of becoming immersed in the world.

If the Fool will take the advice to live his daily life on a more detached plane, in the world but not of it, he can learn much from the daily turn of events. He will learn to evaluate life on a higher level. He will see through the traps that dragged him down into materialism. He will come to understand the value of life as a teaching tool, but only if he becomes the teacher. The blind rush of events can only teach when the Fool learns to participate fully in it, while remaining the observer. If he stands back and looks at the Wheel, if he watches himself elevated and lowered, he will see the lessons of life in a new way. And this is the key to progress. This is the wheel as the symbol of the great Alchemical work, the continuous trying and failing (but never giving up) which characterizes work on the self.

The implication that material life is "lower" or "evil" and must be rejected enroute to the "higher" spiritual life, is a concept that entered Western consciousness through the Gnostic religions of the first few centuries after Christ. Many interpreters see in the cards a reiteration of the ancient Gnostic myth which sees the soul of man as a bright "spark" of divinity entrapped in dark matter. The mission of man is to realize his condition, to set out on a path of spiritual purification and perfection, and, ultimately, to "free" the divine spark from any trace of matter. Thus, Gnosticism introduced a radically dual (matter and spirit) conception of the world and this duality seems to be hinted at in many of the Tarot cards. By the tenth card, the Wheel, the verisimilitude of the Gnostic interpretation becomes clear as the Fool is continuously faced with the dualities of matter and spirit, light and dark, masculine and feminine and is led inescapably toward the spiritual aspects of life as synonymous with progress.

Fortitude

Among Tarot decks, there are three major representations of the Fortitude card. In early decks, it is shown as Hercules (perhaps Samson) clubbing a lion. In others it is a personification of Fortitude breaking a pillar. Both these symbols indicate to the Fool that the way off the Wheel of life is through an aggressive assertion of his power. This is the ascetic route, the victory of mind over matter, of the spiritual over the material, achieved by beating the material into submission. This is the purification process of the Gnostics, the purgative stage of Christian mysticism, the practice of virtue. All of

these lead to the ascendancy of the spirit and the submission of the body. This is the representation of Paul's "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak". The sleeping spirit is awakened by force.

Since these two representations of the card refer to the virtue of Fortitude, the card also implies that the practice of virtue is a necessary ingredient at this stage of development. If the Fool is to remain on the Wheel and not get trapped, he will require considerable courage and endurance, attributes symbolized by this card.

The third, and more common, representation of the card shows a gentle woman opening (or closing) the mouth of a lion. There is no violence in the card, but the message is still that the spirit must dominate the body in order for further progress to occur. In this case it is the alchemical "Green Lion" who is forced to open its mouth and release the true man from the bonds of matter. The card is the symbol of the Anima Mundi, the spirit, descending to touch matter and release the soul of man. The process is depicted as gentle, as a simple, natural process that occurs in surroundings of fields and flowers. The process of shedding the snake's skin is natural and gentle, it cannot be rushed. The release of the spirit is a process of learning and awakening, not a violent overcoming but a submission to the inevitable.

The card basically says that the wheel can only be escaped through its center. At the hub of the wheel of nature is a motionless, peaceful point that is the Kingdom of Heaven, the centered point, the calm that represents the supremacy of the spirit over matter. You cannot get *off* the wheel, but you can get to its center and the dizziness will be cured.

The Fortitude card is the pivot point of the entire Tarot series, the eleventh card, the center of the Journey. This is the midpoint of life, noon in the Journey of the sun-god. From this point on, everything reverses. The Fool will enter the afternoon of life and everything will be altered. This initiation of the second half of life is symbolized in the Tarot by the similarities between the Fortitude and Magician cards. In the eleventh card, the Magician turns into his opposite: the gentle woman. Instead of overpowering nature, he gently persuades. His neat headband has turned into a messy wreath of flowers. Things are not so tidy and under control as they seemed at the beginning. The message is to "hang loose" and let the process take its natural course.

The first, eleventh and twenty-first cards are symbolically linked in many decks. The ribbon of eternity, the lemniscus or figure eight lying on its side, is found floating over the heads or disguised in the floppy hats of the Magician and the gentle woman. The lemniscus appears again in the ribbons holding the wreath in card twenty-one. The masculine Magician has become the feminine woman and finally, at the end of the path, the opposites are united in the androgyne, the hermaphroditic Initiate. The external magic of the Magus becomes the magical "work upon the self" of the Fortitude card.

The message to the Fool is clear. The way off the wheel of life is through the center, the calm and peaceful core of the Self. The process is one of enlightenment, not violence. The process is natural and cannot be hurried or forced. The Fool must remain strapped to the wheel, letting it amplify his awareness of duality until, of itself, the central point comes to the fore as the union of opposites.

The Hanged Man

The logical consequence of the advice of the Fortitude card is resignation. The Fool hangs by one foot with a rope loosely tied about his ankle. His legs are crossed as in the Emperor and World cards. In some decks, money can be seen falling away from him. His values are changed. In fact, his inverted position suggests that his values have been completely reversed, turned upside down, or at least that the Fool is prepared for this eventuality. He has hung himself in voluntary sacrifice.

In the second half of life, the values of the Emperor and the Chariot are replaced by those of the Hanged Man. Monetary values begin to fade. New values, new goals are now established. What was appropriate for the journey during the first half, during the ascent, is now inappropriate.

The Alchemist can no longer be an innocent bystander, he now becomes a part of the process, he is drawn into the transmutation in the vessel. Some cards show crows which are the alchemical symbol of the Nigredo, the blackening, the first stage in the Great Work. The seeking, the breaking down, the disintegration process has begun. This is the process by which old values are dismissed and new ones come to take their place. The crow also symbolizes the solitude needed for the work and is often used in this way in Christian art.

In the background of some cards can be seen the barren mountains of the Hermit: the mountains of solitude, the sacred "high places" of ancient Israel. To these mountains the Fool must continue to retire in order to refresh his spirit and renew his resolve. This same theme is implied in cards which show him suspended over water, the universal symbol of the unconscious.

This is the twelfth card. Even in the oldest numberings of the cards, the Hanged Man retains this value. The number twelve is a symbol of completion. There are twelve hours on the clock, 12 apostles, twelve signs of the zodiac, and twelve gifts of the Holy Ghost. It may also be significant that there were twelve days of Christmas, which was the old pagan feast of the winter solstice. It was celebrated in behalf of the dying sun-god so that he would rise again in the spring. The number twelve is also the product of three and four. The crossed legs of the Hanged Man form the numeral four. His arms are formed into a triangle to form the three.

He hangs suspended between two tree trunks, once again

symbolizing duality like the pillars on earlier cards. He is now in a position to pass through the pillars, but in a manner unlike anything he suspected. He must swing through the pillars upside down! It does not appear to be possible to walk between the pillars like an ordinary man. Before one is ready to take this step, everything must be topsy-turvy. His passage will not be marked by personal effort, by aggression. The passage is made possible by his radical acceptance. He must accept who he is and reject old, erroneous, prideful views of himself. The passage is made possible by the destruction of the old ego structure.

To understand the symbol, you must place yourself in the position of the Fool. Imagine yourself swinging upside down, nonchalant and accepting. Allow every breeze to swing you back and forth. Flow with everything that happens around you. Whether or not the world conforms to your will matters not at all, everything is happening exactly as it should. This is utter acceptance of the Will of God, not your will but God's Will be done. The expression on the Hanged Man's face shows no sorrow, no grief, no surprise, only calm and peace. The voluntary nature of his sacrifice is clear in some decks in which he hangs right down to the ground. By using his hands, he could probably free himself. Instead, he is holding his hands behind his back so they will not interfere and he can swing freely.

The branches of the uprights have been trimmed to signify that the acceptance must be preceded by the simplification process that occurred in the last few cards. There must be a trimming away of the excessive and irrelevant, a getting down to essentials which must precede this radical acceptance. His head is lying at the same level as the roots of the trees because this card symbolizes changes that must occur at the source, at the base. The acceptance here is radical, i.e., at the roots.

Death

Death is represented as the "Grim Reaper". Astride a horse or afoot, he swings his scythe and harvests souls. No one is exempted from his influence: Pope, Emperor, woman, man, child, all must face this specter.

However, this card does not symbolize the death that spells the end of life. This is only card thirteen. We are just beginning the second half of the journey of the Fool. This is rather transformation, death to the old material ego, the first passage through the pillars of duality. Therefore, on a higher level, this card represents an entrance, not an exit.

The Tarot card also indicates the need to remember death. All major religions counsel their members to remember death, to live today as though one would die tomorrow. In this way, the reality of material existence, the reality of death as an inevitable end, is ever before the eyes. Death must be accepted as a real and vital part

of life, something that has reality now, not something put off to a vague future. Then, NOW takes on new meaning and grandiose future plans can be seen in better perspective.

To the alchemist, this is the next logical step of Nigredo or dissolution. The Grim Reaper is often used in this way in alchemical illustrations. King Saturn eats his own son. The philosopher's son dies because without that death, future progress is impossible. "Unless a seed fall to the earth and die . . ."

The acceptance, the resignation of the Hanged Man has culminated in mystical death: the disintegration of the ego. The Hanged Man represented the voluntary offer by the Fool, the Death card represents the acceptance of the offer. The ego dissolves and the Fool's journey takes him down, down deep into the unconscious. He has experienced the mystical death, the journey to the underworld, the dark night of the soul. Traumatic and dangerous, this is a necessary next step on the journey.

No matter which route the Fool may decide to take: Hermetic, occult, exoteric or esoteric, the time of initiation must come. The mystical death is a step on all routes. Every ascent must begin by following Dante, Aeneas and Orpheus downward into hell.

Temperance

The image of an angel appears to the Fool. She is pouring water back and forth from one vessel to another. She stands with one foot on dry land and the other submerged. She is the symbol of the junction between the old material life (land) and the new spiritual life of the unconscious (water). She will advise and guide the Fool through his next steps, just as Virgil guided Dante through his hell. She is the guide that bridges the gap between the two lives of the Fool.

The Fool has reached the end of the second third of his journey. This portion of the journey (cards eight to fourteen) has emphasized the psychological transformations which must occur to the Fool as he proceeds to higher consciousness. The earlier route to material success that culminated in the ego consolidation of the Chariot has progressed into a period of introspection (Hermit), reevaluation (Wheel) and psychological development. The aggression of the first third of the journey has been replaced by passivity and acceptance (Hanged Man). Finally, the ego, so carefully built up in youth and young adulthood, becomes dissolved (Death).

The period of psychological development symbolized in the second third of the deck has its beginning (card eight, Justice), middle (card eleven, Fortitude) and end (card fourteen, Temperance) marked by Virtues. This symbolizes the need for self-effort and discipline during this part of the journey. For a virtue is a habit developed through one's own efforts.

But these virtues are also symbols of balance and equilibrium.

Aristotle defined virtue as the Golden Mean, the balance point between two extremes. Thus, Temperance is a balance between gluttony and fasting. The three virtues, taken as a whole, represent the self-discipline and balance which are needed during the psychological transformations which must occur in this second third of the Fool's journey.

At the beginning of the psychological transformations, Justice cautioned balance as the route beyond the Chariot. She told the Fool that he must balance his extraverted masculine traits with a more submissive attitude. The same female now returns in card fourteen as an angel to tell the Fool that he must balance his descent into the underworld with an alertness that will prevent his being sucked into the jaws of the beasts. In all fairy tales, myths and sagas, the hero's journey to the underworld is filled with dangers. The deep, labyrinthine underworld is filled with dragons and demons. If the Fool is not alert, the dragon will devour him. He will descend into the unconscious and never emerge, he will become insane. The dangers of the underworld are very real.

Thus, the Fool ends the middle third of his journey with the same advice for balance that began it. The truly difficult part of the journey is maintaining balance between the extremes. The pillars of duality cannot be circumvented. The Fool must walk *between* them, not around them at one extreme or the other.

As the Fool begins his descent, he treads on dangerous ground. The Temperance image is not a mermaid, she does not counsel total submergence of the personality into the unconscious. She keeps one foot firmly planted on the solid earth. To survive the trials of the underworld, the Fool will have to follow the advice of this wise guide and maintain his balance.

The Devil

The Fool has penetrated into the depths of the underworld. As one might expect, he is confronted by the Devil who blocks his path. This Devil, dancing before him or perched on his cubic throne, must be confronted. In many representations, two human/demon figures are chained to the front of the Devil's throne. But the chains about their necks are remarkably loose. It appears they could lift off the chains at will and walk away. In fact they have chained themselves and made themselves willing prisoners. In one nineteenth century deck, the supposed victims are actually holding up the Devil's throne, actively supporting his rule over them.

It is important to recognize the similarities between this card and the Pope card. Both show an authority figure and two disciples. In many respects, the Devil is the polar opposite of the Pope. The disciples have become slaves. The Pope represents philosophy, theology and logic. If the Pope and his dogma were seen earlier as a route to freedom, dogmatism and logic are now seen to enslave. The rigidity of exoteric religion has become the chains about the disciples' necks. At first, logical thinking was a guide, but now it

has turned into Mephistopheles.

Having reversed his view of the world (Hanged Man) and accepted the mystical death, many former viewpoints have been turned upside down. The Pope has become the Devil. The guru, the rigid master, must now be rejected and abandoned. The rest of the journey must be made on one's own. Even the help of the virtue Temperance must be dismissed. The angel has turned into the Devil and the water on the Temperance card has become flames on the Devil's torch. In fact, any guide will become a devil when his firm hand of guidance becomes a burden instead of a help.

At this point in the journey, the human, exoteric rules, designed for those who have not reached this stage of development, must be abandoned. The Devil and the Pope, the Devil and Virtue, have become identical and must be left behind; the chains must be lifted off the neck and the Fool must walk away on his own. At some point, even reason, even Mephistopheles, must be overthrown. At some point, one cannot trust any human guide. "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him."

The Fool has descended into the depths of hell, the center of his own unconscious. The Devil is the symbol of the dark side of his personality which he invariably meets at this depth. The Devil is the "Shadow" of Jungian psychology. Alchemically, the Fool is at the final stage of nigredo: blackening, decaying, dissolving.

The Devil may also remind the Fool of the old magical incantations designed to summon up the demons. What this black magic is really recommending is the summoning up of the devil which resides inside us, our evil side. The effect of the incense, candles and chanting was probably more self-hypnotic than anything else. The Devil summoned in the ceremony was the evil within, the evil that must be brought forth, faced, and resolved.

This is a point of great danger for the Fool, like the heroes of the myths, he may overcome or he may be devoured by the demon. If the Fool tries to reason his way past the Devil, he will find himself chained there like the other disciples. If he lets the Devil overpower him, he may go insane. He must heed the advice of Temperance and remain alert.

The message of balance and consciousness suggests the only route past the Devil, back out of hell and into the light. Once again, it is acceptance which is called for here. The Devil represents the dark side of the Fool's nature, the Shadow, which he must accept. He must kiss the toad and let it turn into the beautiful princess. He must accept himself for what he is: both good and bad. He must come to accept and love the Devil as merely another aspect of himself.

The Tower

A lightning bolt strikes from the dark sky. Like a great arrow it

strikes the upper turrets of a Tower that stands on a dark and dismal peak. The force of the lightning blasts off the top of the tower and hurls a man and woman down into the darkness. To the Gnostics this would have represented the fall of the soul of man from the world of light, God's world, into the world of matter where it becomes enmeshed.

This is a dismal and frightening card, yet the lightning seems to be coming from the sun. The light of the sun and the lightning bolt itself are just slightly brighter than the pitch blackness of the rest of the card. Thus, even though the card is horrifying, it signifies the beginning of the ascent out of hell, the beginning of the ascent of Mount Purgatory. Remember that at the dismal bottom of Dante's hell was the Devil. In passing beyond the Devil, Dante and Virgil find themselves at the beginning of the ascent to heaven. In the Tower and succeeding cards, the symbols of light will gradually increase.

At the darkest moment, in the depths of hell, there is a lightning bolt which gives the first hint of the light which is to come. This is the first stage of breakthrough, the first Satori, the first enlightenment. This is Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. The lightning is an awakening, the flash of clear vision which destroys the old vision. This is the symbol of new light that appears to the Fool once he has accepted the Devil. Even though it destroys the Tower, the force behind this lightning comes from the sun. It is good and the end result is an increase of consciousness. Many cards show the sparks of light falling everywhere and lighting the otherwise dark landscape.

If the Devil card recommends that the Fool overthrow reason and visible guides, the Tower card tells him to throw away everything else. The Tower is the last line of defense. When a man is tried, he must be stripped bare, denied all defenses or the trial is not ultimate. As long as he hangs on to some residual of the old life as an anchor, he has not been completely transformed.

This card represents some traumatic event: death in the family, bankruptcy, disgrace, something that causes the final collapse of the Charioteer's smug world, the final dismissal of any political, social or cultural defenses, the disintegration or dissolving of the final ego-barriers in the Alchemist's vessel. This is the final cataclysmic break with anything that had meaning in the Fool's previous life.

It is interesting that the cards symbolizing the break with the old life have occupied such a large proportion of the Trumps. The designer had only twenty-two symbols to get his message across. Yet he took up quite a number of them on this one point: Hermit, Hanged Man, Death, Devil, Tower. He must have been convinced that this was a difficult part of the journey, that it would occupy the Fool for a considerable period. He reiterates the message of death and destruction of the old life. He envisions it as occurring in stages,

each more traumatic and complete than the previous. The designer felt these psychological transformations to be a very important part of the journey.

The Tower card is the final and most cataclysmic of the series of death symbols. It represents a final ripping away of any vestige of the old, ego-bound system. The guru, the Pope, was left behind in the Devil card. Even the most precious and desirable of the guru's doctrines must be left behind here. Every exoteric, learned and understandable doctrine must tumble. Yes: the Bible; Yes: mystical doctrine; Yes: the way of the ascetic. The Fool must dismiss even that last rampart of the old life, the ego itself. He must leave himself behind! This break is absolute!

The Star

In some older Tarot Decks, the symbolism of the Star card is simple and clear. The image is of a woman reaching up toward a star in the upper corner of the card. Another representation shows Magi following the Star of Bethlehem. The meaning is clear: Hope, trust in the message of the star and hope to achieve the goal represented by the star.

But these representations also point out another tendency which has occurred frequently through the long history of the deck: the tendency to water down or Christianize the symbols. The transformation into the Magi following the Star of Bethlehem is an effort to diminish the astrological, mystical, and psychological symbol into an innocent and orthodox message. The attempt is blatant and is conspicuous even in the oldest decks we have in our possession, the fifteenth century hand-painted Tarots.

The most common representation of the Star, tracing back to one of the earliest printed decks, shows a young, naked woman kneeling beside, or partially in, the water. She holds two vases and pours water from them. Though it is ambiguous (perhaps deliberately so), she appears to be pouring one pitcher onto the land and the other onto the water. In the sky over her are a number of stars, usually with a central eight-pointed star dominating. The grassy background usually has one or two bushes and a bird or a butterfly alighting on one. So, in addition to the hope symbolized by the stars overhead, there is an implication of naked openness, of giving, of outpouring, and of unconscious control symbolized by the water.

This card is strongly linked to the Papess, Isis. The bird on the tree in the background is the sacred ibis of Isis. The woman is depicted as the Great Mother, the eternally youthful mother, pouring out fertility and blessings, like a Nile goddess (again Isis). Thus, the figure on the Star card is the Papess, but now naked, open and giving instead of hidden, mysterious and unattainable. This implies that the traumatic transformations which the Fool has gone through have now made it possible for him to make contact with these sources

of energy. The seducing Anima is now open to him and available.

The card is also linked to the Temperance card. This is the angel of Temperance returned. The guide into hell has become the guide out of the darkness. She is the first glimmer of light he sees after the darkness of the Devil and the Tower. In Alchemy, she is the queen who comes to wash off the blackness from the Nigredo. The water she pours out is the cleansing water. This process is called Ablutio.

The Star shows the angel of the Temperance card, but more familiar. She is kneeling instead of standing, naked instead of clothed. The nakedness even suggests intimacy. The angel has come down to the level of the Fool. Or has the Fool raised himself up to the level of the angels?

Instead of containing the waters of the unconscious within her vessels, the angel now pours them out. This implies that the Fool need not be quite so conservative about containing the unconscious forces. The Star tells the Fool that he can go ahead and submerge himself into the waters of the unconscious. Now that he has been through the depths, the psychic forces will not overwhelm him: they will flow through him, like the water she pours from her bottomless pitchers.

This is a card of imbalance, in contrast with Temperance. The angel advises the Fool to explore the unconscious world. Previously, she advised that he be temperate, that he keep the unconscious exploration contained and under control. The Star now says to submerge and let the energy flow through. She tells the Fool to let the waters of the unconscious pour out freely. This can only be done safely when the ego barriers have disappeared. The dike is no longer in danger of being destroyed, because the dike is no longer there.

Since much of the psychic force has been dissipated in the experience of the Devil and the Tower, the outpouring of the unconscious will not be experienced as a torrent, but as a gentle breeze. The Fool can now let the inner voice guide him because his own head is no longer working overtime to shout down this tiny voice within.

Only one who has transcended his ego in the journey through the underworld is ready for this message. The advice to follow the inner voice and forget the exoteric rules, the logic, the laws, the conventions, is dangerous in the extreme. Following the promptings of the spirit, even if it suggests what on the surface appears to be wrong, is very dangerous advice to give to the masses. Only one who has progressed to this stage is capable of putting his ego aside and operating safely on this principle. Those who advocated following the inner spirit were burned as heretics in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. One wonders if one of them didn't choose the Tarot as a method of insuring that their message would outlive them.

But even if the message was to be preserved, it must be guarded from the masses. So show a naked girl. If the viewer's instincts

have not been transcended, his mind will only think of sex. He will be misled by his domineering lower instincts. He will be deliberately led away from the hidden meaning. Make it a Star so the occultist, still bound up in his own version of dogma, will think the card is merely an astrological symbol.

The Tarot is indeed the Devil's Picturebook — the antithesis of the advice of the popes, rulers and others responsible for the orderly control of the masses. If most of mankind is never to pass the level of the Chariot, if Justice is the highest ideal of society, then this card is dangerous and its meaning must be disguised or suppressed. The "Black" magic recommended in this card must be condemned, even by the "White" magician. Even the white must be turned into black and the differences transcended before the final synthesis can be accomplished.

The Moon

The creature of the mud emerges from the waters on the *other side* of consciousness. The light of the star has brightened into the moon. But this is not the true light, it is still a reflection of the sun. Plato is still within the Cave and knowledge is still a play of shadows. The light is seen reflected off material objects.

The Crayfish, the amphibian, the mermaid is a creature of the waters, the unconscious. It is the fool who has taken the advice of the Star and resubmerged into the unconscious world. He has submerged and become a creature of the unconscious. This is the card of deepest meditation, of submergence, of continued exploration of the unconscious. It may seem paradoxical, but to reach out for further light, the Fool must walk backwards, turning back again and again to the dark waters of the self.

The creature crawls from the waters and now the world seems transformed, a dream world. This card is assigned the Hebrew letter Qoph, which means the back of the head. It carries the connotation of dreams, intuitions, right brain function. The route through this strange landscape cannot be fathomed by logic. The bright light of the Moon illuminates a path ahead, but the path is dark, unfamiliar. There are no guides here, the Anima of the Star remained on the opposite shore. Here the Fool is on his own to follow his instincts and the gentle voice within.

The path ahead is no less dangerous than the descent into hell, but the light is better and the distractions and illusions of the ego have disappeared. But if the Fool wanders mindlessly off the narrow path, two beasts stand ready to drag his consciousness back into the material world. The formerly familiar and safe guides: Isis, Justice, Temperance, Star, have now become a dog/wolf. Things are reversed on this landscape on the other side of reality. The path lies between the beasts. What formerly appeared as a unitary, i.e. good, guide is now seen in the moonlight of the unconscious, i.e., truly

seen for the first time, as two evils, not one good. Nevertheless the good guide turned evil beasts still indicates the true path between them.

The Sun

When the Fool reemerges from the waters, returned from the other side of the Moon, he finds himself a child, dancing hand in hand with the Anima, outside a walled garden. Both are naked and open to each other, ready to unite and consolidate the final union. The Fool has become like a child. This is the end of the journey through purgatory and the first entrance into heaven and Paradise. This is illumination, gladness and warmth, the summit of the natural life. The Fool has completed the long and arduous ascent of Mount Purgatory.

As the Fool ascended, out of the darkest pit of the Devil card, the light became progressively brighter: lightning, star, moon. Finally the Fool stands in the bright light of the sun. The ascent from the darkness to the light is completed. This is as far as the Fool can go on his own power.

It should be carefully noted that the children are not *in* the garden, not within the wall, but outside. The flowers are on the other side of the wall. The flowers are sunflowers, which are very tall plants, growing ten to twelve feet high. So they have escaped from a sunken garden. The garden is the neat and tidy, cultivated world of society. The children are out of the orderliness and into the simple and natural. They have truly become little children.

This is the card of nature mysticism, the mysticism of the poets. It is the response to the Empress, the response of the simple man, the man living close to the soil and the seasons. The false extravagance, the sophistication of the social world is thrown aside and the naked children dance free from cares.

In one version of the Tarot, the Sun card shows a naked boy riding a horse. He is the final overthrow of the Chariot. The scepter of the Charioteer was held in the right hand, the side of logic and reason. The boy has thrown down the scepter and taken up a huge banner which he holds in his left hand, the side of intuition. The armor and the sword have been abandoned in nakedness. The domineering, competitive, aggressive personality of the Charioteer has finally been completely overcome. Only the child within the victor remains.

The night sea journey of the sun-hero is over, the dawn has come. The sun is rising in the sky. This is the alchemical rebirth, the start of a new life, a new cycle, new possibilities. This is the rebirth to newness spoken of in all mystical traditions, East and West. This is the psychological freshness of a spring morning, this is the peak experience. The Crayfish/fetus of the Moon card has been birthed as the child. Because he has been faithful and alert, the light has

gotten brighter and brighter for the Fool. Finally, he has walked out of

Plato's cave. He no longer sees reality as shadows on the cave wall. Now he sees the sun in direct, full glory. The barren landscape of the Moon has turned into sunlight, grass and flowers. The Fool has reached the summit of the natural life. This is as far as he can go on his own power.

While we are following the psychological changes in the Fool, we must not allow ourselves to become so fascinated by this interpretation that we forget some other ways of viewing the Trumps. The series of cards: Star, Moon, Sun, has such an obvious reference to astrological influences that it seems too obvious to mention. Throughout the period of history when the Tarot was designed, astrology was accepted as factual science. The heavenly bodies were divine agents who directed the actions of man. To the orthodox they were angels and devils. To the unorthodox they were gods. To the philosopher they were emanations of the One. The presence of these heavenly bodies in the Tarot clearly indicates an influence of these astrological beliefs in the formation of the symbolic and philosophical system of the Tarot.

In the great Gnostic myth, which influenced much of astrological thinking, the soul of man descended from God through the heavenly spheres, each dominated by a planetary deity. This journey was repeated in reverse after death by the ordinary soul, and during life by the mystic. The soul was envisioned as ascending through the heavenly spheres, approaching closer and closer to God. Some reference to this mythology seems clear in the ascent of the Fool through heavenly symbols of increasing brightness.

Judgment

The Fool cannot proceed beyond the Sun. This seems no tragedy since the beauty and freedom of the natural child has been achieved. The nature mysticism of the poets is very high consciousness indeed. But to go beyond requires a call, a summons, a trumpet blast. Nothing the Fool can do will ever cause *that* to happen.

But through no virtue or merit of his own, the angel Gabriel may appear in the heavens, blowing the trumpet with crossed banner. This is the final call of the spirit out of matter. Men, women and children are shown rising from their graves, reaching upward to respond to the call. This is the reappearance of the angel of Temperance. There she appeared to lead the soul down into hell. Now she appears to summon the soul out.

The purgative and illuminative ways of the mystic have now been passed through. This is the symbol of the mystical marriage. This is the call to union with the One. The trumpet blast announces the resurrection, the rebirth of man. The image on the card seems to refer to the Last Judgment, the final reckoning when the souls

of the just will rise and resume bodily existence. In fact, this card refers to the spiritual resurrection which occurs during the lifetime of the mystic.

The Judgment card is the last of the "orthodox" symbols: Pope, Hermit, the Moral Virtues of Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance, Death and the Devil. These are common Christian symbols and it is impossible to deny the influence of the Church on the designers of the Tarot.

Yet throughout this study, we have suggested other, rather less than orthodox, interpretations of these symbols. This seems a contradiction. Yet if we will allow the possibility of the interpretations offered in this study, if we will allow that an attempt was being made to synthesize these heterodox ideas into Christianity, then a resolution of the dilemma suggests itself. What better way to disguise the esoteric meaning of the symbols than to introduce a few, quite orthodox images. Though they would be interpreted differently than usual, the presence of these symbols might throw the witch-hunter off the track, might distract him and might prevent him from burning the heretic at the stake. The stake was certainly the common plight of the heterodox and would provide adequate motivation to disguise the symbolic system of the Tarot behind Christian images. Thus there is no paradox in knowing that the Judgment card portrays the Last Judgment to officialdom and the mystical call to union to the seeker.

World

If the Fool responds to the call of the trumpet, the Fool is transformed into the initiate, the Anima Mundi, the androgyne pictured on the World card. The initiation is completed, the death-rebirth cycle has been experienced, there is new life, completed change. The Alchemist has found the Philosopher's Stone. The lead of the Fool has become gold.

The figure on the card is the androgyne (from anthros, man, and gynes, woman) and the Hermaphrodite (from Hermes and Aphrodite). The figure is the symbol of duality transcended in the very body of the initiate. The scarf which sweeps around the front of the figure hides the phallic organs. The Fool has been subsumed into the Anima Mundi, into Sophia (Wisdom) of the Gnostics. The Fool now carries two wands, which symbolize the duality which is now his instrument, instead of his prison. The pillars and towers of earlier cards are now the tools of the renewed man/woman.

The Fool has reached the Beatific Vision, he has become the Philosopher's Stone, the key to everlasting life. The naked androgyne is surrounded by a laurel wreath, the sign of victory. The four animals around the wreath form the classic sign of transformation: the circle and quaternary, the mandala. The symbol of circle and four is found in Gnostic art, in psychoanalysis, in the art of most primitive

peoples, and in alchemy where it is called squaring the circle.

The ribbons holding the wreath at top and bottom relate this card to the Magician and Fortitude cards. The symbol of male supremacy, of control over nature was the first card in the series. Halfway through the deck, this symbol was transformed into the gentle woman. Feelings won out over intellect, love conquered aggression, control turned to acceptance. The initiate, the final card of the deck, represents the completion of the process. Here we find the final union of male and female traits, the transcendence of both extremes. The man became the woman and the woman turned into the androgyne.

The figure on the card has its legs crossed, linking it with the Emperor and Hanged Man. The Emperor was the summit of the material cycle. The Hanged Man was the inversion of the Emperor's ideal, the reversal of values. The Emperor's feet became firmly planted in the sky, in the spirit. Now, in the final card, the duality of material and spiritual is transcended. There is no up or down, no matter or spirit, no soul and no body.

In a very real sense, the World symbolizes the mystical marriage, the final achievement, a state of balance, the highest stage of consciousness. But this is an interpretation for those who have not been there. In fact, the circle and quaternary on this card link it to the Wheel of Fortune, which represented the constant ups and downs of this life.

Thus, the achievement of the perfect balance in the World card is a transient event. The World symbolizes the flash of light of infinite brightness. True, once this light flashes, nothing is ever the same again. But the flash is not continuous, otherwise it would stun one into inactivity. The flash is for the moment. This is the supreme moment of mystic union, Cosmic Consciousness, but the following moment the cycle is completed and the Fool is the Fool again:

"A man in gay motley prances across the landscape, all his possessions in a hobo's bag on his shoulder . . ."

Final Words

The Fool has completed his journey and so have we. If the reader feels more familiar with the Tarot symbols, our primary objective has been fulfilled. If the reader is fascinated and intrigued by the layers of interpretation that have been suggested, then the effort has been worthwhile. If the intuitive sense of the images has been awakened in the reader, then he has reacted as thousands have before him. The cards *do* have a numinous aura about their symbols, one that tends to awaken a response in us that is more primitive than logical.

The real purpose of this study has been to elicit a kind of intuitive response in the reader. For this reason the presentation has been deliberately kaleidoscopic. I have tried to insinuate and

suggest rather than substantiate. I have tried to introduce the great width and breadth of the interpretive structure which has developed around the Tarot. I have even made so bold as to superimpose on the material a psychological and mystical interpretation of my own.

But rather than solving any problems, this study has merely suggested the scope of the problem. I have suggested interpretations drawn from Alchemy, Astrology, mythology, and Christian mysticism, both orthodox and heterodox. How much of the tissue and fabric of this complex interpretation can realistically be attributed to the designers of the Tarot? How much of the interpretation is pure imagination, superimposed without justification on the minds of the designers? Is there a basis for any of this, or is it simply absurd? This will be the task of the remaining chapters of the book.

However, even the brief look we have taken at the Tarot Trumps allows us to make some general observations. First, there is no single interpretation of the symbols. This is intrinsic to the concept of a symbol, as opposed to a sign. A sign, like a picture of a cigarette with a red "X" through it, has a single meaning. Although that meaning may not be immediately apparent to us, once someone explains that the sign means "no smoking", there is an end to it. A symbol is something quite different. It has no precise singular meaning. For example, a cross formed of a single vertical and a single horizontal line, does not have any one meaning. This symbol is familiar to Christians but is also found in Egyptian, Aztec, Indonesian, Hindu and many other cultures and can be found long before the time of Christ. The symbol seems to arise spontaneously in the consciousness of man. There is no simple meaning. Rather the symbol seems to elicit a response, a response that arises from unconscious depths. It is this response, brought forth in the individual viewer, that constitutes the real value of the Tarot symbols. This will continue to be true even after we have searched extensively for what might reasonably have been in the minds of the designers. We will *not* succeed in explaining the symbols. Just as a piece of great art will elicit feelings and reactions in the viewer which were not specifically intended by the artist, so the Tarot will continue to intrigue even after our investigations.

But even if it is not possible to identify the symbols with any specific meaning, it is already clear to us that there are "layers" of interpretation possible. In the Tarot it is easy to identify the Psychodynamic, the Mythological and the Philosophical layers. The psychodynamic layer involves the cards as stages in the journey of the Fool. Even if one does not accept the elaborate story I have presented, still there seems to be a progression from the material "states of man" in the early cards to more ethereal and spiritual symbols later in the series. The numinous and mysterious sense that one gets by examining the cards as a whole suggests a mythological layer of interpretation. There seems to be a statement about the nature of man and reality, yet a statement made in mythological

terms of angels, devils and mystery. Such symbols are the classic language of myth. There also seems to be a philosophical statement about all of reality, a kind of cosmological statement.

It should be clear, even after our brief acquaintance with the symbols, that no single class of explanation will suffice. There are clearly references made to astrology, alchemy and perhaps a dozen other world-views. Any attempt to understand the symbolism which limits itself to only one of these systems is doomed to failure. The symbolic system represented by the Tarot cannot be squeezed into any single interpretive scheme, though many have tried. We will find a sufficient reason for the multiple sources of the symbols when we examine the place and time of origin of the deck. But that is a matter for a later chapter.

For now we must be content with simply introducing the problem. If the reader has accepted every interpretation in this chapter as gospel truth, then I suggest he adopt a more sceptical attitude. In later studies we will have to conclude that much is nonsense. Indeed, some interpretations depend heavily on features which do not even appear on the oldest cards we possess. If the reader has accepted nothing of what was offered in this study, then I applaud his scepticism but beg him to stay with us. I believe I can shake some of his disbelief. Some interpretations remain unshaken by careful investigation. If the reader has disbelieved some things and responded to others positively, then he is in the perfect position. At the conclusion of our studies, we will find that his position was the true one.

Chapter Two

A Critical Examination of Two Hundred Years of Tarot Interpretation

In our first study, we briefly examined the individual Tarot Trumps. In exploring the symbols, the reader may have been able to feel something of the fascination which has captured the hundreds of writers who have dealt with the Tarot. The associations, correspondences and snatches of interpretation which were sprinkled through the first study were a sample, and only a sample, of the extensive material which has accumulated.

The purpose of the present study is to reapproach the Tarot through its major interpreters. Our purpose is not to give a detailed history. Instead, we will use a cursory historical survey as a way of introducing some order into the complex web of theories. We will be concerned with drawing out the major theories of the origin of the deck, and the major methods of interpreting the symbols. We will attempt to keep track of all the associations drawn between the cards and other, often occult, sciences. In order to do this, our historical survey will be interrupted often. But that is all right, for it is the interruptions, not the history, which will carry us into the rest of the studies.

In many respects, the studies in the remainder of the book are expansions, elaborations and discussions of the theories outlined in this chapter. If the reader finds some of the theories silly, don't be upset. I agree with you. In the second half of this chapter, we will attempt to separate some of the chaff from the few kernels. Since some of the theories have very little substance, we will want to eliminate them as candidates for further investigation. But I will warn the reader that some of the most fantastic theories actually have some basis. Therefore, for the present, the reader should simply survey the concepts and reserve judgment. The format we will adopt in the first half of the study is a continuing historical survey, punctuated by sections that discuss each of the strange theories as we encounter them.

Part I. History and Theories

Early Commentators

We may safely begin our story in 1781 with the publication of the eighth and next to last volume of "Le Monde Primitif Analyse et Compare avec le Monde Moderne" by Court Antoine de Gebelin (1725-1784). Although there are incidental mentions of the Tarot in

older manuscripts, de Gebelin was the first to deal with the deck at length and was instrumental in bringing the cards to the attention of the public.

According to his story, he was visiting friends in a home in Paris. They were playing a game with an unusual deck of cards. The implication is that the cards were quite common in some parts of Europe in the form of a game. When he saw the cards, he was flabbergasted because he recognized in them an ancient Egyptian book of wisdom, somehow preserved in an ordinary deck of playing cards. The images were pictograms, like the hieroglyphics, given to the Egyptians by the god Thoth. He noticed that the number of cards in the Trumps, twenty-two, was the same as the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. In addition, there appeared to be numerological references in the images. We will return to these specific references later. At the moment, let us focus on the theory of Egyptian origin.

The theory that the Tarot Trumps were really Egyptian images dressed up in European garb had instant appeal in France where Martinist and Rosicrucian Societies were flourishing. In the 1750's, the Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross was founded and formed the core from which other occult societies developed. The Order of Elect Cohens was also flourishing as a secret Martinist group.¹

It was barely two years after the publication of *Le Monde Primitif* when a Parisian named Alliette reversed his name to Etteilla and let the wings of his imagination take full flight with the Egyptian theory. He produced a new deck which offered to "correct" all the errors which had cropped up over the centuries. Suddenly, the Tarot contained pyramids, obelisks and strange temples.

The Theory of Egyptian Origins

Though we have barely begun our story, we must already interrupt ourselves and explore this Egyptian concept a bit more. The idea that the Tarot originated in Egypt is probably the most persistent tradition about the cards. Even modern writers continue to pay obeisance to the concept that Thoth, mythical scribe to the Egyptian gods, invented the images. Whenever we find these strange theories among the Tarot interpreters, we will want to stop and examine them. The theories may not be correct, but some of them are certainly stubborn. The concept of Egyptian origins was taken up by Taylor in 1865, by Christian in 1870, and by Mathers in 1888.²

The stories do have a certain romance to them. Alliette believed that Hermes (Thoth) had conceived the cards and that they were written on leaves of gold in a temple three miles from Memphis. Paul Christian added real spice to the story by asserting that there was an underground room, beneath the Sphinx, that was used as an initiatory chamber. The candidate was taken into the room and the Tarot images arranged on the walls were explained to him. We will

find in the second half of this study that the addition of such romantic details is characteristic of much of occult literature and helps account for its verisimilitude.

Underlying this Egyptian theory is the concept that the images of the Tarot are pictograms, like the hieroglyphics. Occult tradition has always maintained that the hieroglyphics were mystical symbols that encoded the structure of reality. To disguise the doctrine, the symbols were transformed into an alphabet that could be read on another, lower level by the masses. Similarly, the Tarot was reproduced as playing cards. This approach would insure the continuance of the symbols without endangering the secret which underlay them.

It is quite surprising that de Gebelin recognized anything Egyptian about the cards. The symbolism is certainly buried deeply, at least before Alliette began "correcting" them. In fact, there is nothing Egyptian about them. Yet de Gebelin did not claim that anyone told him the secret, he discovered it for himself. It seems more likely that he saw deeper implications in the cards and that his occult interests alerted him to the deeper significance of the symbols. Since the Hermetic tradition ascribed *all* higher wisdom and magic to Egypt, it was probably natural that he would also attribute the wisdom he intuited in the cards to this same universal source.

Magical Interpretations

It seems almost unnecessary to point out that the Tarot has long been considered a device for magic and that this mode of interpretation can be found in de Gebelin and in almost every interpreter who has studied the cards since him. This is, of course, implied in the use of the images for fortune-telling. The belief is that a kind of power is captured in the cards. The user is often given rituals to perform over the cards. In other cases, it is recommended that the cards be carried about next to the skin so that the cards will pick up the vibrations emitted by the user. The reading of the cards is usually preceded by some formality which prepares the reader and insures that the "Astral forces" will be properly aligned.

The source of this interpretation may simply be the extensive use of images throughout the history of Western occultism. The talisman was a magical image, usually engraved on a precious or semi-precious stone. The magician called down certain powers into the stone which would then be effective in protecting the wearer. The use of insignia, magic signs and pentagrams has always been a part of the paraphernalia of the wizard. It must have seemed natural to attribute magical powers to the strange images of the Tarot Trumps.

Early Nineteenth Century

As we resume our historical inquiry at the beginning of the

nineteenth century, interest in occult subjects is still in full swing. In 1813, Antoine Fabre d'Olivet published "Les Vers Dores de Pythagore Expliques" which attempted a mystical interpretation of verses attributed to the Greek Philosopher/Mystic, Pythagoras. A few years later, he published "La Langue Hebraique Restituee", a revitalization of the Hebrew language, together with a grammar based on biblical Hebrew. This latter work, in particular, had a great impact on occultism when it was published in 1816 because it offered an entry into Hebrew mystical writings.

This led naturally into an increased interest in the Kabbalah, a general term for esoteric Judaic mysticism. In 1823, Lenain published "La Science Kabbalistique ou L'Art de Connaitre Les Bons Genies". Interest in Kabbalah complemented interest in numerology awakened by studies of Pythagoras, who held that the basis of the universe was a numerical system. In 1814, Antonio Dargoni suggested the importance of the mystical numbers three and seven, which play a critical role in interpretations of the Tarot. A general interest in occultism was also encouraged by *Des Sciences Occultes*, published by Eusebe Solverte in 1829.

Into this milieu entered the next major actor in our story, Alphonse Louis Constant, born in Paris in 1810 and died in 1875.³ He adopted the pseudonym of Eliphas Levi which is a Hebraication of his first two names. In 1856, he published "Le Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie". In it, he called the Tarot a book which is the sum of all sciences.⁴ He believed the Tarot was of Jewish origin. He noted that there were twenty-two cards, twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and twenty-two chapters in the Book of Revelation. The number twenty-two also corresponded to the number of paths on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. Thus, although de Gebelin was first to attribute Hebrew letters to the cards, it was Levi who popularized the idea.

Jean Baptist Pitois who wrote under the name of Paul Christian, was a student of Levi. We have already seen that he introduced the fantastic story about the chamber under the Great Sphinx. But he was also concerned with Kabbalistic astrology and other aspects of occultism and magic.

Parallel with the occult investigations of the Tarot, the early nineteenth century saw the beginnings of scholarly studies of playing cards. In 1816, Samuel Weller Singer published his "Researches into the History of Playing Cards". He was among the first to introduce the possibility of an Arabian origin for the cards. In 1848, W. A. Chatto published a work on the history of cards that dismissed the Egyptian theory of origin rather offhandedly, but did not add much pro or con to the theory.⁵

Interpretations based on Kabbalah and Numerology

It is convenient to deal with these topics together since numerological manipulations are a significant part of Kabbalah. Numerology

has its primary source in later Greek mysticism, but frequently the numerological interpretations associated with the Tarot are based on Jewish concepts. Numerology is not to be considered as a theory of origin of the Tarot. No one, to the best of my knowledge, has proposed that Pythagoras invented the cards. But it is an important method of interpretation. As such, it will occupy our attention in a later study when we attempt to discover why this mode of interpretation was so commonly applied.

Since Levi, virtually every writer on the Tarot has made reference to Kabbalah. It seems facetious to refer individually to every author who has made this connection. In fact, Kabbalah and traditional Jewish magic have come to play a major role in all occult sciences. Not only are Kabbalistic interpretations applied to the Tarot, but some maintain that the origin of the deck is to be sought here also. One of the most influential of modern interpreters, A. E. Waite, implies that there is a secret Jewish version of the Tarot which has never been published.⁶ Lady Frieda Harris, painter of the magnificent Crowley Thoth deck, believed that the original Egyptian images were lost and then reconstructed by medieval Jewish Kabbalists.⁷ This theory has never had a distinct champion, but it is again pervasive. Therefore, we must consider later whether it is reasonable to assume that the Tarot was influenced in its origins by Kabbalists.

Arabic Origins, Crusaders and Templars

Before we resume our historical dialogue, we must deal with a second theory of origin, again popularized by Levi, though earlier presented by Singer. According to this theory, the Tarot is Arabic or Islamic. Modern interpreters have been more specific in attributing it to the mystical Sufi orders.⁸ One writer, Indries Shah, is certain that the Tarot is Sufi,⁹ but then he is also certain that Shakespeare, Aristotle and all other worthwhile products of Western Europe came directly from the Sufi also! Singer believed that the Tarot entered Europe through Italy during the Saracen invasions of Sicily in 652 A.D.

Basically the theory maintains that the cards were part of the mystical heritage taken over by Islam as it spread through the Middle East. When Western Europe was exposed to Islam during the crusades, the warriors returned to their homes with the Tarot deck. The most common variant of the story is that the Knights Templar, a religious/martial order of monks, founded to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land, assimilated much of Islamic mysticism. When the order was disbanded by the Inquisition in the Fourteenth Century, former knights of the order preserved the secrets they had learned and later brought them to light in Freemasonry and the Tarot.

Late Nineteenth Century

Continuing the tradition of scholarly studies, in 1865 Taylor

published a history of playing cards that attributed the deck to an eastern source and mentioned the belief that the cards were transmitted to Europe by the wandering gypsies.¹⁰ The gypsy theory of origin was also mentioned by d'Ambly¹¹ in 1854. The theory was reinforced by the classic study of Vaillant on the gypsies in 1857.¹² These writers may have been influenced by Levi or even de Gebelin, both of whom hinted at this source.

The next major actor in the play was Gerard Encausse who wrote under the pseudonym of Papus. The gypsy theory is clearly implied in the title of his major work, "Le Tarot des Bohemiens", published in 1889. Actually, the theory presented by Papus is quite complex. The Tarot originated in Egypt, was preserved through the ancient Mystery Religions, then passed with the Gnostics into Islam. From Islam it passed into alchemy, the Knights Templar and Ramon Lull, an esoteric character we will meet in later studies. It was then picked up by the Rosicrucians, Masons, Martinists and other occult societies. Although Papus is not nearly so orderly in his presentation, he essentially drew in all of these historical linkages. It will take us a considerable amount of research just to work out the truth and fantasy from his brief account of history. Papus also worked into his analysis of the deck elaborate Kabbalistic interpretations and relied heavily on numerology, based on the mystical numbers three and seven.

A close associate of Papus, cited in his book, was Oswald Wirth who produced a deck which has been very influential in this century. The deck contains introduced Egyptian symbols and many esoteric references which were included to remind the viewer of the many theories and associations which had built up by that time. Wirth later published "Le Tarot des Imagiers du Moyen Age" in 1927 which described his deck and greatly influenced later designers.

Indian Origins: The Gypsies

Theories involving the gypsies as transmitters of the Tarot to Europe suggest an origin for the cards either in India or in the Islamic countries through which the gypsies traveled. According to this concept, the Tarot originated from the Indian game of chess and was carried by the gypsies when they were evicted from India, their place of origin.

The basis of this theory seems to be related to the mystery associated with the gypsies. They merely appeared in Europe in the late middle ages and no one seems to be sure where they came from. They were wanderers with a distinctive eastern culture. Particularly appealing to the occultists was the fact that they frequently earned a living by telling fortunes with cards. Because of the mystery associated with their origins and the sources of their wisdom, it is not at all surprising that the occultists immediately credited them as originators of the Tarot or at least as the transmitters of

the deck to the Western world.

Alchemy

Papus' brief mention of the alchemists will provide the excuse to introduce this theory into the mill. Although some authors, such as Jolivet de Castellot¹³, consider the alchemists as originators, it is more common to find alchemy called upon as another interpretive tool. This theme was particularly drawn out by Crowley¹⁴ and can be found in many modern interpreters alongside references to depth psychology.

The association with alchemy is, of course, tightly intertwined with many of the other occult associations. The word alchemy derives from Al Khem, the Arabic name for Egypt where alchemy underwent its early development. Levi had already drawn out the implied connection between the Tarot and the Philosopher's stone. The neophyte alchemist is advised that he will find the stone among the most common and despised of human objects. It is the most common and trivial of things but is in fact the precious elixir under the very noses of those who despise it. Levi took this to refer to the Tarot, a mere card game that held the secrets of the Universe. It was also widely held that the Knights Templar had learned the secrets of alchemy in the Middle East and were the primary transmitters to European culture.

Astrology

Since the Tarot was regarded as a book of cosmic revelations and since it had long been used for fortune-telling, it is not surprising that a connection should be drawn between the Tarot and Astrology. Such an association is, after all, explicitly made in the deck with the Star, Moon and Sun cards. Papus lays considerable emphasis on astrological associations and almost all of the later interpreters spend some time lining up the cards with the planets and zodiacal signs. In fact, astrological interpretations are likely to crop up whenever the ancient roots of western civilization are considered. Astrology was the science and mathematics of the ancient Middle East.¹⁵

The Golden Dawn ..

It is well that we have been able to dissect some of the theories out of the history based on earlier writers. Otherwise the next step in our story would totally overwhelm us. With the exception of a few minor writers such as Ely Star (*Les Mysteres de l'Horoscope*, 1887) and Albert Pike (*Morals and Dogma of the Scottish Rite*) who added less to the story than they borrowed from earlier writers, we are ready to enter into the most influential period of Tarot interpretation. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an English Rosicrucian society, was founded in 1888.¹⁶ This group espoused and

propagated virtually every theory and innuendo advanced before their time and added considerably to the complexity. But it is clear that every interpretation of the Tarot which has been produced since that time has been influenced by writers from this society.

The story begins in 1888 with the publication of a booklet by MacGregor Mathers, the grand adept of the society during its brief history. He drew together in this work references to Kabbalah, alchemy, astrology, numerology and visionary experiences. He felt the Tarot had its origins in ancient Kabbalah, dating back to oral traditions of Moses, who was influenced by the Egyptian philosophy he learned in the Pharaoh's household.

In 1890, W. B. Yeats, the famous poet, joined the Golden Dawn. He was particularly interested in the use of the Tarot for meditation and believed that he had experienced God as the Anima Mundi through meditation.¹⁷ The Anima Mundi (Spirit of the World) is a Gnostic and Neoplatonic concept. It is symbolized in the final Tarot card and represents a type of spiritual intermediary between God and man.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the Golden Dawn was the development of the Gnostic origins of the deck, combined with the use of the Tarot for meditation. The idea that the cards represent intermediary steps between man and God and that meditation on the cards would elevate the consciousness through these intermediary steps was evident in all of the society's rituals.

Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions

We can deal with Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions as a unit since the Mysteries are largely a ritualization of the philosophy and mythology of Gnosticism. Gnosticism can be considered as the root from which many, if not all, of the occult traditions sprang. The Gnostic concepts underlying the Tarot symbols were already apparent to de Gebelin and Papus, but were more explicitly discussed by the Golden Dawn adepts.

Gnosticism is a religion based on the intuition that there is duality in human life, me/you, male/female, happy/sad, success/failure, and especially, body/spirit. The differences between body and soul are so profound that this duality is taken as the epitome of the paradox. Man is the unique being who combines the world of the Spirit with the world of Matter. The vast distance between these two worlds is spanned by a number of intermediary beings, usually represented as angels, demons, or superhuman personalities. Man, by his very nature, also spans this gap and therefore contains within his spirit/matter nature the seed of resolution for the paradox.

Gnostic cosmology is an elaborate myth to describe the steps which lie between matter and God. It describes the steps by which the soul of man descended from God and became entrapped in matter and it describes these same steps in reverse as the ladder which

must be climbed, symbolic step by symbolic step, to regain union with the One, with God. The Tarot cards are just another expression of these symbolic steps to God-union.¹⁸ The Tarot lays out the individual steps which must be taken between the lowest condition of man (The Fool) and the Anima Mundi (The World), the highest emanation of God which can be reached by man. The Tarot is a system of enlightenment, of Gnosis, and its aim is to guide the aspirant on his path.

Meditation by Guided Imagery

If the Tarot contains a map of the Universe, then it is not only to be studied, it is to be traveled. Therefore, the cards were used by the Golden Dawn adepts as training tools in guided imagination. In meditation, one would encounter the symbolic images represented by each card.¹⁹ This method takes advantage of the esoteric cosmology built into the cards. If the symbols are a ladder to God-union, the paths of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, then they could be used in a systematic and progressive manner. It is possible to raise one's consciousness up through the ascending steps, experiencing and learning to control each level as it was encountered.

The meditation process used by the Golden Dawn was unlike the imageless clearing of the mind which most people associate with meditation. The process is more similar to the Buddhist's Tattva meditation. The neophyte Buddhist manufactures a concrete symbol of the elements (for example, earth, water, air, etc.). He focuses all of his attention on this device until he can close his eyes and visualize it clearly. In this way he gains mastery over his powers of concentration and imagination.

By knowing the associations between the cards and the stages of ascent represented on the Kabbalistic Tree, the meditator can choose the card appropriate for his own stage of development. He would then attempt "astral projection", which we may associate with very concentrated one-pointed focus, but which the adept associated with the psychic phenomenon of "out-of-the-body" experiences. If he had trained well, he would not roam aimlessly through these esoteric realms, but he would be directed to the plane represented by the card he had chosen as his meditation object. This symbol would appear before him, assuring him that his upward flight was being directed properly to the stage of development from which he could gain the greatest benefit.

On the other side of the coin, this occult and visionary meditation was the foundation for the claims of magical powers by the Golden Dawn adepts. Through experiencing the various cosmic forces represented in the cards, the adept learned to control them. Though the concentration required to achieve this facility was no mean feat, the rewards appeared to be the ability to raise one's consciousness to new levels. At each cosmic level, he could

"intercept" the influences before they reached this mundane world. He could then influence the energy and have an effect on the course of future events.²⁰ This certainly appears to be what the Magus is doing in decks designed by the Golden Dawn adepts. He is raising his consciousness above (symbolized by the raised wand) in order to direct and influence the forces, focusing them on the world around him according to his will.

With the promise of such a reward before him, the beginner must have been willing to work very hard indeed! The Golden Dawn not only believed that the Tarot foretold the future, they believed it contained the means for controlling it. This concept explains why the adepts spent so much time dickering about the assignment of Hebrew letters and paths on the Tree. If you got the order wrong, you could literally "blow your mind" by encountering forces beyond your current stage of development and be overpowered by them. The consequences of such an error would be disastrous.

After the Golden Dawn

If any one thing characterized the members of the Golden Dawn, it was individuality. Their strong personalities caused the society to disband within two decades of its formation. Following its demise, each of the major adepts contributed his own unique theories to the Tarot story.

Aleister Crowley joined the Golden Dawn in 1898. He was born in 1875 and spent most of his adult life in the study of magic. He explored sexual magic and opiates which probably were the cause of his death. In 1944, he published the *Book of Thoth*¹⁴ which summarized many of his theories and mystical references. Mixed in with the strange, ambling, occult text is the realization that the Tarot cards were a product of fifteenth-century Italy. This realization was the result of the accumulating evidence about playing cards in general.

Paul Foster Case was born in 1884 and died in 1954. He formed the Builders of the Adytum after the Golden Dawn disbanded. Even though he recognized that the cards originated in the Renaissance, he did not let that stop him from postulating a prior existence in exclusive occult circles that dated back two centuries earlier.²¹ The organization he founded, BOTA, is still active, producing Tarot decks and promulgating interpretations of the cards which are rather more insightful than most.

The next actor on the stage is perhaps the most scholarly of the lot, Arthur Edward Waite. Born in 1857, he joined the Golden Dawn in 1891 and was an active force in the society. A significant scholar, he published a number of books attempting to place occultism on a firm historical base. Of particular interest is his book on the Tarot published in 1910.²² In this book he debunks some of the sillier theories, but still remains enigmatic. Thus, while he introduced some good sense into the picture, he also significantly muddied the

waters introducing yet another theory. He implied, in indirect language, that the Tarot was the secret language of the Albigensian heretics. In his work on the Kabbalah⁶ he pointed out that the Renaissance scholar, Pico della Mirandola, was at once an occultist and a Kabbalist; a likely candidate for the originator of the Tarot. He also provided a significant key to the proper interpretation of the origins of Tarot in his preface to the English translation of Papus' book.²³ He suggested that the cards originated in the Renaissance but dealt with concepts that were much older. We will find ourselves returning to this insight in later chapters. The forces which caused the Renaissance to produce the cards trace their roots much further back into history. The cards are young, the philosophy behind them is old.

Renaissance Origins

The basic fact which was recognized by the beginning of the twentieth century is that the Tarot is no older than the fifteenth century. It must be remembered that Burckhardt's classic study of the Italian Renaissance²⁴ had been published in 1860. This book is still essentially unchallenged as the master work of historical research on this period. Therefore, the adepts were aware of the complex mixture of Neoplatonism, magic, Humanism, respect for ancient wisdom and revival of the Pagan gods which combined to influence European culture during this period. It was no longer necessary or viable to focus on a single line of tradition for interpretation. It was already clear that sets of images available to the Renaissance, such as the Tarocchi of Mantegna, religious art and images of mythical gods, could adequately account for the Tarot cards and no further searching was needed.

Fez, Morocco Theory

It is all the more surprising therefore, that Paul Foster Case should have offered a new theory of origin which traced the cards further back. According to his story, Fez had a major university which became the intellectual center after the Alexandrian library was destroyed by the Moslems. In the year 1200, a group of the greatest adepts in the world met in Fez. They decided to encode the wisdom of the universe into a series of pictograms and chose Kabbalistic number and letter symbolism as the mode of expression. Part of the stimulus for this development was the need for the adepts of many different tongues to communicate with each other. The result was the Tarot, the universal symbolic system of mankind.

Heretics Theory

The Albigensian theory introduced by Waite actually had its basis in the strange scholarly efforts of Harold Bayley.²⁵ Bayley studied

the watermarks used by papermakers. Some of these resemble the symbols of the Tarot. He maintained that these were the symbols of heretical sects, descendants of the Gnostics, which entered Europe with the papermakers and their families. Their guilds were the "churches" of the sects and their watermarks the esoteric symbols of their beliefs. Waite implied that it was these heretical cults, specifically the Albigensians, who originated the Tarot. This theory was pursued to some extent by Sir Steven Runciman who, in 1955, published some of the plausible implications of the theory. On the face of it, the theory is not absurd and must be given due consideration, even if Waite was being facetious when he introduced the idea.

The China Theory

It has also been proposed that playing cards originated in China. Northern Italian cities, such as Venice, had long had trade relations with China and it is conceivable that returning sailors introduced the concept of card-playing. Something resembling playing cards had been used in China for gambling for many centuries.

There is also the implication that the themes of duality and the union of opposites, which are obvious in the symbolism of the Tarot, could have originated in Chinese Taoism and the concepts of yin and yang.

Modern Interpreters

Following the reign of the Golden Dawn adepts, we enter the modern period of Tarot interpretation. Hundreds of texts have been produced and it is impossible to present the story in a linear, chronological order. Many of the works are less-than-inspiring cookbooks for fortune-telling that add little to the story.

There are, however, a smaller number of scholars who have made real contributions to our understanding. In general, we can characterize modern Tarot scholarship as accepting the Renaissance origin of the cards themselves. Effort has focused on organizing the indirect evidence for the philosophical, religious, mystical and cultural influences which formed the milieu within which the Tarot originated. These efforts have introduced new theories into the already complex picture.

Tarot as a Memory Art

Closely associated with the Golden Dawn's concept of the Tarot as a ladder of reality, is the theory that the images represent aids to memory.²⁶ Such memory systems were actively developed during the Middle Ages and were based on Hermetic and Neoplatonic concepts of the universe. To memorize a list, one associated each item with some aspect of a "memory image library" stored permanently in the imagination. By walking through this library, one could

recall each of the associations and reproduce the list. The Tarot constituted a sea of vivid images which could be used in this way. In addition, the Tarot images served the adept as an encyclopedia of occult references. Contained in the images were references to astrology, alchemy, Kabbalah, numerology, etc. There were the associations which the adept wished to memorize and have at his fingertips.

Superimposed on the memory system was a kind of mental magic: meditate on the attributes of the Sun and you will take on these attributes. This form of "magic" is little more than the power of positive thinking, combined with a belief system that led the practitioner to expect excellent results. This type of positive effect was encouraged in the development of memory systems and obviously relates to the magical properties associated with Tarot meditation.

Renaissance Triumphs

In one of the more complete and scholarly of modern analyses, Gertrude Moakley²⁷ concluded that the Tarot was a representation of the fifteenth century triumph. The triumph was a procession, or better, a festive parade that marked the beginning of Lent and other official civic occasions. The Fourth of July parade and Mardi Gras are modern versions of this method of social celebration.

The triumphs were of immense popularity in Renaissance Italy marking such events as a victory or visit of a dignitary. The heart of the parade was a series of magnificent floats, each symbolizing some virtue or moral principle. The float would be surrounded by marchers representing the faults or factors of life which had been defeated by the virtue exalted on the float.

Moakley's thesis is simply that these ceremonies were turned into a popular game of cards. The moralizing themes of the triumphs were retained in the game, as well as the concept that the virtues would triumph, i.e., win the trick, over any of the lesser cards in the deck.

Jungian Psychology

Several modern interpreters have suggested a relationship between the Tarot images and the archetypes of Carl Jung. Archetypes are unconscious "themes" which express themselves in dream images, mythology, alchemy and art. Archetypal images are an expression of the "collective unconscious", the psychic forces common to all men. The archetypes express themselves in "vivid" or forceful dreams so that their message is hard to dismiss. Sometimes the images warn the conscious mind that something is out of balance. Sometimes they suggest in enigmatic language of the dream that some adjustment of the ego is needed. If the message is ignored, the psychic forces behind the images tend to increase, eventually

endangering the mental balance of the person.

Although Jung never analyzed the Tarot images in the light of his theory, some interpreters²⁸ have pointed to the resemblance between the cards and the individual images of the archetypes. The sequence of Tarot symbols suggests the "path of individuation" followed by the person as he reconciles himself to the archetypal images and becomes a "whole" personality. The sequence of cards beginning with the Hanged Man suggests the myth of the sun-god who must die in order to be reborn.²⁹ Jung often suggested that the myth of the sun-god was simply another expression of the Death-Rebirth archetypal theme. The Empress seems to express the archetype of the Great Mother. The Emperor is the archetypal father. The Hermit is the Wise Old Man. All of this is just another way of saying that the Tarot represents the steps of the spiritual ascent of man, of the psychological development of the personality.

The Grail Legend

Among others, Decker³⁰ has pointed out the resemblance of some fifteenth-century, hand-painted cards and images from the legend of the Quest for the Holy Grail. Even more intriguing, Weston³¹ has suggested that the Grail legend is a romanticized version of the concepts and rituals of the old Mystery Religions. Weston has also suggested that the suit marks of the minor arcana could represent the treasures associated with the Grail.

On the face of it, this theory has some plausibility. The Grail legend was popular in Renaissance Italy and was likely well known to the Tarot designers. The journey of the Fool, as outlined in Chapter One, could well represent the search for the Grail. Most commentators on the Grail legend have suggested that it represents the spiritual struggles and psychological development of man.

Closing Comments

We have now made our way through the labyrinth of theories which have been offered over the last 200 years. I dare say we have missed some of the minor theories,³² but I believe we have considered enough of the major themes to proceed safely.

The various theories are summarized in Table 2-1. Notice the distinction between theories of origin and theories of interpretation. Interpreters have examined the cards and found indications of astrology, alchemy, etc. When they found these esoteric references, they then asked themselves: "Where could these cards have come from?" As a result of asking this question, theories of origin were formulated, not on the basis of historical fact, but on a logic which said that the cards must have come from far away and long ago to account for the marvelous wisdom they contain.

Viewed in this light, an adequate theory of origin is one that

explains how all of the modes of interpretation we have extracted from the cards could have gotten into them in the first place. In other words, Gebelin was saying that the cards *must* have come from Egypt, the fount of all esoteric knowledge. Otherwise, how could one account for the esoteric symbols in the cards?

Under any circumstances, the summary in Table 2-1 must now serve as the roadmap upon which we proceed. Our task in the second half of this chapter, is to examine the theories and narrow the list to those worthy of further consideration.

Table 2-1. Summary of Theories of Origin and Interpretation which have been offered by Tarot interpreters over the centuries.

I. Countries of Origin:

China	Fez, Morocco
Egypt	India
Islamic Middle East	Renaissance Italy

II. Transmitters of Cards to Europe:

Returning Crusaders	Saracen Invaders
Knights Templar	Gypsies

III. Philosophical Origins:

Gnosticism	Albigensians
Mystery Religions	Kabballah

IV. Theories of Interpretation:

Magic	Kabballah
Astrology	Numerology
Alchemy	Meditation
Gnostic Mythology	Jungian Psychology

Part II. Critique of Theories

Before we begin our critique, we must face up to the difficult methodological problem of how to decide when to reject a theory. In many cases we are dealing with "belief" and not rationality. It is impossible to logically disprove a "belief". What we must do is develop an approach with objective validity that is free from faith in any specific tradition.

A Fable

To introduce the problem, I would like to present my own fantastic theory of the Tarot. The story I will tell is *completely false* but let us see what it would take to *disprove* it.

In 9321 BC, a flying saucer landed in the Egyptian desert. The ship was from a far galaxy which had long observed earth. They had seen developments which indicated intelligence and the ship was on a "fact-finding" mission. If this new race was capable of intelligence perhaps some initial seeds could be implanted that might subtly influence future developments and enhance the spiritual progress of the race. From the viewpoint of the benevolent visitors, it would be better to plant a good seed that would grow into a strong ally instead of a vicious enemy.

Chosen for this difficult mission were 22 of the highest adepts of their planet. They were to travel throughout the earth, observing and implanting subtle spiritual influences. After burying their craft deep beneath the sands, the adepts split up. Some traveled east to India, China and across the Pacific to Micronesia. Others traveled west across the Atlantic to Central and South America. The remainder spread out over Europe.

Since these adepts were tall, beautiful, and possessed super-human psychic powers, they must have seemed like gods to the mere men. Clearly, the ancient gods of all cultures are simply the lingering memories of these adepts. (Obviously, one could survey the mythologies of the world and pretend to reduce all the important gods to just twenty-two, corresponding to our adepts).

When their mission was complete, the adepts reassembled in Egypt. They had done their best to influence the primitives by giving them the Golden Rule and other universal principles of love. But in spreading the word, each had emphasized a slightly different aspect of universal wisdom and truth. None of them had revealed the whole story, but together the twenty-two lessons made up a complete lexicon.

Unfortunately, even the plans of semi-divine adepts go astray. During their long absence, the sands of the desert had shifted and exposed their saucer. The vehicle had been discovered by the local people who immediately recognized its divine origin. To preserve this unique gift of the gods, they had buried it and covered it with a great pyramid that reached toward the sky.

Since the pyramid was one of the greatest achievements of the young race, the adepts didn't feel right about disintegrating it to retrieve their vessel. So they were trapped. They would have to transmit their report by psychic transmission. This meant that they would have to transform the information into some mental image. After long discussion, they devised the images of the Tarot as the perfect vehicle. Implied in each image would be the specific message that each adept had communicated to the people. The adepts at home would have no difficulty interpreting these images and seeing how the various combinations would play themselves out in the future. Thus the images, in a sense, enabled one to predict the future. At the same time, the images summarized what the adepts had learned about mankind.

When the Tarot images had been communicated, the mission of the adepts was complete. They decided to travel together to the Himalayan mountains, the place on earth most like their own planet. Their primary mission was over but they would still live on for hundreds of centuries. They could still serve this new race by periodically influencing the spirit in subtle ways.

But one of the adepts, Thoth (also called Mercury and Hermes), did not believe that going off into the mountains was the proper course. He believed that humanity should be given much more of their wisdom. Therefore, when the other gods went to Shangrala, Thoth remained in Egypt and presented the highest adepts of that race with their language, their hieroglyphics and with the keys to the future development of mankind, the Tarot.

Methodological Considerations

Now let us examine this silly fantasy. I have tried to insert into the story all of the factors which I have identified as elements of the enduring occult traditions.

1. The story is mythological in scope, that is, cosmic, grandiose, archetypal. This elicits a psychological response in the reader which makes the story appealing.

2. The story takes place long ago and far away. Nothing can be disproven by existing facts.

3. Many occult references are woven into the story in a way likely to appeal to the credulous reader. By inserting pyramids, flying saucers, gods, astral transmission, Shangrala, etc., the story will appeal to the reader familiar with other occult themes.

4. Little details are added that seem to make the story factual, like the date they landed.

5. The story is internally consistent and does not obviously conflict with mythology, occult wisdom or history. (At least I don't think I slipped up!)

6. Finally, I will avoid the temptation to claim that I received the story from one of the original adepts in Outer Mongolia one day. Such an appeal to some secret source of wisdom, inaccessible to the reader, also seems to make occult stories convincing.

Now the whole purpose of this trip to the light fantastic in the midst of what I intend to be a serious study is to place things into perspective. Since someone was bound to be insulted if I called their particular "belief system" foolish, I had to invent my own. The story is patently absurd. But how could one disprove it? As is usually the case, the story is simply asserted as true on the highest authority. The strategy is to shift the burden of proof totally onto the sceptic.

If we are to undertake a serious study, we cannot permit ourselves the luxury of dismissing any of the theories on the basis of a *reductio ad absurdum* such as, "That is obviously nonsense." Instead we must seek some criteria for "nonsense". I would propose

therefore, the following criteria of judgment:

1. Whenever possible we will use *direct evidence*, such as historical records, known dates, etc. If a theory doesn't fit the facts, we can safely dismiss it, no matter how high the authority.

2. We must carefully examine whether the theory is internally consistent or whether there are logical contradictions which indicate that the theory is fabricated.

3. The lack of any kind of positive evidence, no matter how indirect and circumstantial, is reason enough to doubt a theory.

4. The presence of negative evidence, no matter how indirect is reason to doubt.

5. In the case of conflicting theories, equally supported by evidence, we should choose the simplest theory.

Although this approach will never disprove my spaceman theory, it should permit us to cast doubt since there is not a shred of supporting evidence. It would certainly permit us to choose some less fantastic explanation which fits the known facts just as well, if not better. We cannot say that the theory is false, but we can say it is unnecessary, that is, there is no evidence which forces us to accept it over a less fantastic alternative.

In the absence of direct evidence, we can never arrive at "the" origin of the Tarot. But we can certainly opt for the simplest explanation that fits all the facts. Then we will be justified in offering that a theory is a sufficient explanation of the data. Unless other facts are discovered which compel us to dismiss this theory as insufficient, we are justified in maintaining our position.

What we have just outlined are the criteria of any good scientific theory. A theory in science is not the last word, not Truth. But a good theory has two characteristics: it explains the known facts and, of the possible explanations, it is the simplest in that it includes the fewest unnecessary assumptions. By proceeding in this way, we will never be guaranteed of arriving at the true explanation of the Tarot's origins. That is probably an impossible goal anyway. We will have to be satisfied with theories that explain everything in the simplest possible way. That doesn't seem much of a sacrifice!

Documentary Evidence for Tarot Origins

The first step in our inquiry must be to examine the documentary evidence we have available to us.³³ First we can consider manuscripts on games and gambling that do *not* mention playing cards, even though one could reasonably expect them to be mentioned in this context. Summarized by country and year, they are:

England: 1110, 1240, 1278

Germany: 1275, 1286

France: 1364, 1369

In addition, there is no mention of playing cards in Petrarch, Boccaccio or Chaucer even though they deal with the common

activities of the people such as gambling and games. There is no mention of cards in any of the romances written between the eleventh and the fourteenth century, even though they detail many of the habits and customs of the people.

A second series of manuscripts mention playing cards, but not the Tarot trumps. In some cases, there is reason to believe that a deck of fifty-two cards is being referred to. In other cases, there is a mere mention and it is not clear whether the cards are Tarots or not. According to Dummett, the earliest authenticated mention occurred in 1377. Within the next twenty years we find references to playing cards in Italy, Germany, Belgium, and France. Thus, once cards were invented or introduced to Europe, they spread rapidly.

There is no documentary evidence for the existence of the Tarot until the fourth decade of the fifteenth century. But at this point a number of references appear. In 1442, Tarot cards were ordered for the court at Ferrara. A painting called the Tarocchi Players was done in the early 1440's. We have several partial decks painted by an artist named Bembo (c1420-1480). His earliest decks were probably commissioned by Filippo Maria Visconti who died in 1447. We also find the trumps listed in a sermon preached sometime between 1450 and 1480.

On the basis of this direct evidence, we can draw a few conclusions. Playing cards appeared in Europe during the fourteenth century. Since the earliest evidence for the Tarot cards is in the fifteenth century, almost a century after the first mention of playing cards (1377), the Trumps must have been a later addition. The earliest mentions of the Tarot are all from northern Italy.

Countries of Origin

All of the documentary evidence points to the fifteenth century and northern Italy as the time and place of origin of the Tarot. Armed with this information and the methodological principles we have developed, we must now examine whether there are compelling reasons to accept any more complicated theory involving prior existence in another place and time.

China. The Italian city-states were actively engaged in trade with most of the centers of civilization in the world. They were well acquainted with China since Marco Polo's writings in the mid-thirteenth century. The Chinese had used a sort of playing card since the Tang Dynasty (618-908 A.D.). So the hypothesis that the cards came from China is at least feasible. However, the evidence is hardly compelling. The Chinese cards are thin strips less than 1/2 inches wide. The symbolism bears no resemblance to the Tarot. There is little reason to believe that associating the cards with China would be at all helpful in explaining the complex associations that developed between Tarot and astrology, numerology, etc. One might argue that

the theme of duality, clearly seen in the cards, might have originated in the Taoist concept of Yin and Yang as primal forces. But we will find that this same theme of duality was also accessible much closer to home.

India. Chatto argued⁵ that cards originated from chess which came from India. Cards were merely a cheaper and more transportable version of the game. We know that Godfrey of Bouillon brought chess back from the first crusade³⁴ so the game had already penetrated into Islamic lands. Singer³⁵ believed that this game of chess, penetrating into Europe with the Saracen invaders of Sicily, was the probable origin of cards. India is also regarded as the traditional place of origin of the gypsies and cards might have been carried with them in their wanderings.

On the negative side, the origin through chess might be useful in explaining playing cards with their kings, queens and pawns, but does little to explain the Major Arcana. Indian playing cards, as such, only date from the sixteenth century.³⁶ They are round and contain as many as twelve suits of twelve cards. Their images bear no relationship to the Tarot. There appears to be little to compel us to move the origins of the Tarot backward in time and further in space to India.

Islamic Middle East. Since the gypsies passed through the Middle East on their travels from India, they might have picked up the Tarot on the way. This might account for the Gnostic concepts imbedded in the Tarot since sects were still flourishing in Syria and Mesopotamia. We know of the existence of Islamic playing cards in the form of the Mamluk cards which date from the fifteenth century. The early European word for card games, Naib, may also be Arabic in origin.

Counterbalancing these factors is the strong tendency of Islam to discourage the use of images of animals or humans. The art of Islam is architecture and calligraphy. This is clear in the Mamluk cards which are devoid of images. At best the Mamluk cards can be postulated as the origin of the four suits of playing cards. The implication that many of the Gnostic, astrological, alchemical and other interpretations of the Tarot can be logically traced to Islamic countries is certainly feasible. All of these trends of thought were in existence. But they were in existence over a broad geographic base, all around the Mediterranean. So if Sufi doctrine resembles that of the Tarot, it is no demonstration of origin, but evidence of common roots. There is the same mysticism, the same overcoming of materialism and duality, but these are characteristic of many traditions. We don't *need* a prior history in Islam to explain the Tarot.

Egypt. This brings us to the Egyptian theory, the oldest and most pervasive of the "long ago and far away" hypotheses. We will find,

once again, that there is no compelling evidence to force us to postulate an Egyptian origin for the cards. The very persistence of this theory calls for a more thorough treatment, even though the proponents have largely presented this Egyptian theory in a form resembling my Spaceman fable. Indeed, the earliest interpreters, such as de Gebelin, Alliette and Christian, were expressing a basic tenet of occultism, rather than making objective inquiries into history. Their only real logic was that the source of all Western Magic was Egypt and, therefore, the Tarot must come from there also.

The early interpreters based their theories on the concept that the Tarot was a type of hieroglyphic or pictogram: a mystical alphabet. The magic was only taken out of the hieroglyphics with the discovery of the Rosetta stone in 1799 and its decipherment about 1822. Before that time, occult tradition maintained that the only way to understand the alphabet was on a mystical and intuitive level. Unfortunately for the occultists, the hieroglyphics turned out to be a rather ordinary alphabet.

Other aspects of the Egyptian theory have also been embarrassed by archeological research. When the mounds of sand were removed from the Great Sphinx, the door between its paws leading to the underground initiatory chamber described by Christian simply wasn't there.

The "Egypt" to which these commentators attributed the Tarot's origin was largely a fabrication of occult traditions. As more and more temples were excavated and the images studied and catalogued, it was clear that Egyptian iconology was radically different from the Tarot. The gods are humans with animal heads. The icons are full of nature figures: chicks, snakes, vultures, hawks, ibises. These nature figures appear as elements of the hieroglyphics but are completely absent from the Tarot. None of the most important images or themes of Egyptian knowledge are found in the Tarot: Horus as the hawk, the scarab pushing the sun across the sky, the preoccupation with preparing the soul for the journey to the after-life. The obelisks and temples of the Etteilla deck look more Greek than Egyptian. The occultists were attributing to the deck what they envisioned Egypt to be like, rather than what it was really like, and this mistake led them into internal inconsistencies in their stories.

Although it was not known to the Tarot designers or the occult interpreters, there are some surprising resemblances between the Tarot and a few Egyptian images. The temple of the Nile goddess at Philae shows a bas-relief of a woman pouring the healing waters of the Nile out onto the land from two urns.³⁷ The image bears an obvious resemblance to the Star card. The same temple has Osiris between Nephthys and Isis with a winged scarab overhead.³⁸ Even the hand positions of the figures resemble the Lovers card. The Hierophant (Pope) card resembles the images of Osiris on his throne found in the Papyrus of Ani,³⁹ and this same source contains the image of the weighing of the soul in the balance, which recalls

Justice. Of course, none of these sources were available at a time when they might actually have influenced the Tarot. The papyrus, for example, had been sealed in tombs since millennia B.C.. Therefore, one cannot draw too much from such resemblances which are more likely due to the primal and archetypal nature of the images than to any direct copying. We will find in Chapter nine that models for the Tarot images can be found closer to home, in Renaissance Italy.

One of the enigmas of the Tarot which seems to be explained by an Egyptian origin is the Papess card. There are no females in the Christian Church hierarchy. But if this image represents Isis, as the occultists claim, the dilemma is solved. The Renaissance modifiers of the deck merely gave Isis a more modern garb. However, there are several explanations of the Papess which do not require so elaborate an explanation. Therefore, based on the criteria established earlier, we may wish to choose one of these simpler theories.

The Papess may represent Pope Joan, a fictitious female pope who died in childbirth on the steps of St. Peter's in Rome. A more likely explanation is based on the fifteenth century, hand-painted deck known as the Visconti-Sforza deck. The image on these cards is a nun. Moakley⁴⁰ has identified the habit as belonging to the Umiliata order and suggested that the woman represents Sister Manfreda, a distant relative of the Visconti family who had been elected Pope by a small heretical sect. However, the validity of this argument rests on the assumption that the hand-painted decks which have survived from the fifteenth century are actually the original designs for the cards. We will return to question this assumption later.

As another possible explanation, Godfrey Leland, a nineteenth century American folklorist, claimed to have found a pagan sect in the outskirts of Florence in 1886. This sect still worshipped Aradia, the daughter of the classical moon goddess, Diana. He believed that the sect had existed in secret in this vicinity since great antiquity. Perhaps the Renaissance designer was familiar with their beliefs and the Papess is a representation of their deity.

The simplest explanation of the Papess card is that she is indeed Isis. But the image was not handed down secretly through the ages. It was available to the Renaissance designers because of the reintroduction of classical gods into art during this period. In the apartments of Pope Alexander VI in the Vatican, there is a mural of Isis on a two-pillared throne, with a veil stretched between the pillars. On her lap is an open book and she is dressed in a flowing gown.⁴¹ This particular painting could not have been the prototype of the Tarot design of Papess because it was painted some time after 1492. However, the mural appears to represent Isis in a "recognizable" form, that is, this representation of Isis was known and accepted. Thus the Tarot designer could have been familiar with the representation from an earlier example. The Tarot designer would

not have needed secret oral traditions to be familiar with the image of Isis shown on the cards.

Because of this complex mesh of negative evidence, internal inconsistencies and unnecessary assumptions, our criteria for a good theory permits us to reject the Egyptian theory of origin. However, it should be carefully noted at this point that Egypt was considered the source of wisdom in the Renaissance, just as it was for the later occultists. We will have much to say in a later study about the contribution of Egyptian magic to the mindset of the Renaissance and its potential contribution to the Tarot designs.

Fez, Morocco

It will not require much detail to dismiss the theory of Paul Foster Case that the Tarot originated in Fez Morocco in 1200. There is not the slightest evidence to substantiate the story, except the theory that the playing cards of Europe came from the Islamic Mamluk cards of northern Africa. However, we have already seen that these cards may have been the precursors of the four suits of cards, but cannot explain the Trump cards.

Case's story shares many of the elements pointed out earlier as characteristic of occult traditions that are impossible to disprove. But with no evidence to substantiate it there is no compelling reason to surrender the simpler explanation of an origin in Renaissance Italy.

General Comments on Theories of Origin

Now that we have examined a number of the "long ago and far away" theories, perhaps we should pause here and try to understand why anyone would propose some of these fantastic theories in the first place. It is my opinion that the theories reflect the basic attitude that all Western wisdom was lost during the "Dark Ages" and that what little survived was crushed by unjust tyrants and overbearing clergy. True Wisdom can only be found "long ago and far away". We have seen this same phenomenon in the twentieth century as western youth turned to Hinduism and Buddhism to find answers.

We must remember that the occultists are forever rebels, maintaining their concepts in the face of science, religion and culture. The occultist is a seeker of wisdom who feels that he must reject the ordinary, the codified and the established. He will only be satisfied by the strange, by a wisdom that contradicts the world he has rejected, and which has rejected him. It would be most unpalatable to find that the roots of occultism were all very ordinary and accessible. Therefore, the roots of his knowledge must not be found to be merely European, the Europe of wars and the Inquisition.

The occultist attitude also reflects the common misunderstanding that absolutely nothing happened between 500 and 1400 A.D., the "Dark Ages". No one thought an original thought and the

European world was caught in the vise-grip of Asiatic invaders and a smothering Church. Instead of recognizing that much of the pagan wisdom revitalized in the Renaissance was retrieved from the libraries of monasteries, the occultist assumed that a more distant source was required. Because "familiarity breeds contempt", it was assumed that wisdom was preserved somewhere outside the reach of corrupt Europe. So Islam was lauded, Islam which destroyed the library of Alexandria, Islam which instructed its followers that they should dismiss any form of knowledge other than the Koran, Islam which burned its mystics at the stake, Islam must certainly be better than Christian Europe as the preserver of ancient wisdom. The "further away" and "longer ago" the origin could be placed, the simpler it was to believe in a purer world of intellectual development unencumbered by power politics and man oppressing man.

Therefore, in my opinion, the more fantastic theories we have examined are easily explained by a desire to find some pure, untainted, distant source. This source would be more likely to produce the Tarot because it would be free of the terrible evils of European culture. Of course, on closer examination, this distant culture was always about equally impure. But the very fact of distance made it easier not to see the impurity. The occult writers sought distant sources because they were too close to the trees to see the forest. They did not have the perspective to stand back and recognize that all of the lines of thought and interpretation they were finding in the Tarot were an integral part of the European soul.

Transmitters of the Cards: Gypsies, Templars, and Saracens

The perspective we have gained from considering theories of origin will make it easier to consider the theories about who brought the Tarot to Europe. In fact, the Tarot is a European product and there is little reason to believe that anyone brought it. Nevertheless, to be thorough, we must consider the theories which have been offered.

The most informed theory about the origin of the Gypsy people is that they were originally from India and were expelled by Islamic invaders. The early references to gypsies as the transmitters of the Tarot were influenced by the prevalent theory that the gypsies were Egyptian. This would fit nicely with the postulated Egyptian origin of the symbols. In later centuries, the gypsies took up the Tarot and earned money telling fortunes. Once again, the association with the cards was suggestive.

Unfortunately, the gypsies arrived in Europe rather late to explain the origin of playing cards. By 1417 they were in Germany, by 1422 in Rome, and by 1427 they arrived in Paris. Since the earliest mention of playing cards is 1377 it is unlikely that gypsies introduced the cards. Also, the earliest mention of fortune-telling with cards is 1540 and these cards were not Tarots. This date is rather late if

the gypsies are to be attributed with introducing fortune-telling with cards. It appears that the gypsies picked up both the cards and divination well after their arrival in Europe. The date of 1422 in Rome would make it possible for the gypsies to be the source of the Tarot Trumps. But then it is very strange that none of the fifteenth or sixteenth century manuscripts ever mention the gypsies in connection with the Tarot.

Careful examination of dates also makes it unlikely that the cards were introduced by returning crusaders or invading Saracens. The warriors returned from the last crusade in 1291, much too early to account for the origins of the Tarot. The Islamic forces invaded Sicily in 652 A.D., they were in Spain by 710 and France by 731. They held many territories until the tenth or eleventh century. All of these dates are too early to explain playing cards or Tarot.

The theory involving the Knights Templar requires a bit more explanation. The order of military monks was founded in 1118 to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land. Over the next two centuries, the order gained considerable prestige and wealth with extensive landholdings in France. In 1307, the Templars in France were arrested by King Phillip IV on a charge of heresy. Although the Templars may have acquired some strange beliefs and practices during their sojourns in the Holy Land, where Sufism and Gnostic sects still flourished, there is little evidence that they were heretics. It is likely that the King disliked a powerful armed force in his country and not under his authority. His intentions were clear when he confiscated the Templars' properties before the Pope could decide what to do about them.

What we know of the beliefs of the Templars, we know from the testimony offered to the Inquisition by their enemies. This is about as reliable a source as the Salem Trials for information on witches flying on broomsticks. Even if we accept the testimony of the trials, there is little to connect their strange heresies with the concepts of the Tarot. The order of monks disappeared from history after their Grand Master was executed in 1314. Since this is 100 years before the probable origin of the Tarot, the ex-knight who supposedly designed the deck must have been an amazing old fellow indeed!

Philosophical Origins

That the Jewish Kabbalists themselves invented the deck seems most unlikely. Kabbalah had long since developed an elaborate symbolism of letter and number mysticism. The symbols of the Tree of Life with its Sephiroth was quite adequate for their purposes. The Tarot images are, in a sense, superfluous to Kabbalah. It is significant in this regard that none of the *Jewish* Kabbalists from the eighteenth century to the present day show the slightest interest in Tarot. Rather, it is the Christian interpreters who have mixed Kabbalah into the potpourri of other influences.

A similar argument applies to the influence of the Albigensian heretics. The heresy can be traced back to the ancient Manichean cult through the Paulician Christians of Armenia. From there it was picked up by the Bogomils of Bulgaria, about 940 A.D. Then it moved into southern France and northern Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the form of Catharism. One sect of the heresy, known as Albigensians, had their headquarters in Albi, near Toulouse, France. The sect disappeared after Pope Innocent declared a holy war against it, the Albigensian Crusade. In 1229, the kingdom of Toulouse was divided up among the victors and a special Papal Inquisition was established to deal with the remaining heretics. Within a few decades, any public mention of the heresy disappears, fully two centuries too early for the Albigensians to be the actual designers of the Tarot.

The suggested connection with the Albigensian sect is largely based on the fact that it was a relic of Gnosticism. However, it was only one of a number of similar, radically dual heresies. The Albigensians were not *the* designers of the cards. However, we will find in a later study that some form of dualist heresy probably formed another of the many influences that affected the designers.

Renaissance Italy

We are left with the Tarot as a product of the Italian Renaissance. There is little justification for postulating secret traditions or foreign origins. The Renaissance was a time of intellectual exploration. This exploration included reexamination of ancient philosophies such as Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and Magic. Traders from the port of Venice were in contact with Buddhist, Taoist, Shaman, Moslem, Jewish and Gnostic centers. So there is no need to look further to explain any of these connections.

Details of the images on the oldest cards also seem to confirm an origin in Renaissance Italy. The doublet or hose on the men was prevalent about 1335. The third crown was added to the papal tiara only in 1315. The headdress of the Emperor is characteristic of the times. The pauldrons on the breastplate of the Charioteer came into vogue as decoration in the fifteenth century. They were never used earlier, or in actual combat, since they tended to turn the enemies' sword into the body instead of deflecting it.⁴²

The Tarot is clearly a child of the Renaissance. Other influences, interpretations and innuendos must be sought in the cultural and mystical milieu of those times. Influences postulated as affecting the Tarot must be shown to be prevalent in the Renaissance. Otherwise, we are not justified in maintaining that they are valid methods of interpretation. The burden of many of our later studies will be to explore this Renaissance milieu. We will find that we have to sacrifice but few of the interpretations and philosophical influences suggested in Table 2-1. We will find many of these influences in the

forefront of the intellectual climate of the times.

At this point we have failed to consider two of the detailed theories listed in Table 2-1: the theories which connect the Tarot to the Triumphal processions and to the Grail Legend. I have decided to delay our critique of these theories until after we have examined the Italian Renaissance in more detail in the next chapter. It will be easier to deal with these concepts after we have a clearer understanding of the culture of the times. I should also explain at this point that each of the methods of interpretation listed in the table will be considered in a separate chapter at a later point in the book.

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28. Hoeller, *The Royal Road* (Theosophical Publishing House, 1975). Nichols, *Jung and Tarot* (Weiser, 1980).
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32. If the reader is insecure about omitting some of the minor theories, I recommend Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of the Tarot* (U.S. Games, 1978) pp 12 ff. The reader will find in this source a brief but thorough survey of other theories.

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Chapter Three

The Italian Renaissance

The dilemma which faces us as we investigate the origins of the Tarot is a difficult one. We do not possess the original Tarot cards, signed by the original designers. I know of no criteria by which we could judge the deck as original, even if we possessed it. We do not know who the original designers were, nor do we know where to search for them. Since we do not have direct evidence, we must fall back on extensive analysis of the circumstantial.

In the previous study we established that the simplest theory which explained the facts postulates that the Tarot was designed during the Italian Renaissance. Therefore, the logical first step in our investigation is to analyze this historical period. The approach we will take is that of the scientific historian. We must look for the attitudes, predispositions and biases of the age. We must attempt to form in our own minds an accurate picture of the mental framework of the Renaissance scholar. Then we must ask ourselves whether it is reasonable to conclude that such a mental framework is necessary and sufficient to explain the Tarot symbols.

An important difficulty in our inquiry will be forcing our minds away from the *Weltenshauung* (world-view) of the twentieth century. We must make an honest effort to enter completely into the intellectual milieu of northern Italy during the fifteenth century. We must be ready to accept that ideas which appear to us as "quaint" were believed with great tenacity. On the other hand, cosmological ideas which we accept from childhood in the Space Age would, at that time, have been ample cause for burning at the stake. Occult interpretations now relegated to the candle-lit seance room, were discussed openly in the most sophisticated intellectual circles. We must be prepared to accept a very different set of values if we are to enter into the mind of Renaissance man.

We will begin by surveying four major points. Although the survey will be brief, it is important for the reader to assimilate this material as it will form the basis from which most of the subsequent studies will build. The first point is that a number of political and economic factors resulted in great freedom for the city-states of northern Italy. Second, economic security and freedom permitted an intellectual leisure which focused on a re-evaluation of the classical literature of Greece and Rome. Third, study of the classics engendered a new appreciation for the dignity and nobility of man. Fourth, there was a new awareness of nature, as a powerful force which man could, and should, learn to control.

The Italian City-States

The end of the Middle Ages was marked by a number of changes which disturbed the long-standing status quo. The feudal system, based on an agricultural economy, was breaking up. Economic power was shifting from the landed lords to the merchants and guilds of the cities. Extensive famine in the second decade of the fourteenth century and Bubonic plague which swept Europe in 1348-1350 severely depleted the manpower available to support agriculture.¹ Moslem control of the Mediterranean and invasion of Spain posed an imminent threat to Christian Europe. The stage was set for change.

The late Middle Ages had already seen a significant shift in the balance of power between Church and State.² In earlier times, the divine right of kings and emperors was considered a specific grace from God. Since the Church was viewed as the channel through which grace was communicated to man, it was only when the ruler was coronated by the pope's delegate that he became the legitimate ruler. Thus, the ruler was dependent on the Pope who had the power to approve or reject his claim to leadership. Coronation rituals make it clear that the emperor ruled only because of the grace of God communicated through the Church. Kings often figured the beginning of their reign from the date of coronation, not from the date on which they assumed power.

A feud which developed between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Emperor was to change this attitude. In defense against the Papacy, the emperor had recourse to ancient Roman law which antedated the authority of the Pope and which supported the concept of a secular rule, independent of the approval of the Church. The existence of an independent secular authority was firmly established and the power of the Papacy over secular affairs was never to fully recover. In the Tarot cards, the female and male representatives of secular and spiritual power are juxtaposed as independent and co-equal symbols. The Pope is not the single dominant figure, even though he is given the highest position of the series.

The influence of the Papacy was also weakened by the Babylonian Captivity which saw the transfer of the papal curia from Rome to Avignon from 1309 to 1377. Thus, during the Early Renaissance, the Pope was not even present in Italy, exerting a dominant influence over new ideas as he had in earlier centuries. His influence was still felt and Christianity remained unquestioned. But a new atmosphere was created, permitting both the development of secular power and the genesis of new ideas. It was precisely this new freedom which made possible the open dissemination of the heterodox ideas in the Tarot. In earlier times, such ideas would have been instantly suppressed.

But while the Renaissance thinker felt a certain freedom from the dogmatism of the Middle Ages, the Roman Church remained per-

vasive in Italy. Secular power of the Papacy was weakened, not the spiritual influence. The mystical ideal of union with God was still consistently upheld even while the power of the Church in secular matters was questioned. This mystical ideal was very much in the forefront of Renaissance thought,³ even if it took on strange new garb. The scholar criticized the Church, but he accepted the concept of a spiritual life and the need for devotions to increase his consciousness of God's presence. We see this interest dramatically reflected in the symbolism of the Tarot.

The rise to power of the Italian City-State was also made possible by events occurring elsewhere in Europe. France and England were engaged in the Hundred Years War. The Holy Roman Empire was disintegrating and the attention of Germany and northern Europe was fully occupied with power struggles and the search for a new stability. Spain was engaged in an extended struggle against the Moslem invaders. Thus, northern Italy found itself remarkably free from outside pressures.

The freedom experienced by the City-States fostered, and was supported by, a considerable concentration of wealth. The state provided a stable base for industry, such as cloth dying, and for extensive trade which optimized Italy's favorable position in the Mediterranean. The gradual loosening of the Church's position on usury permitted the development of banking. In turn, banking encouraged the rising concept of capitalism. The stability provided by the state supported the accumulation of wealth. The wealth in turn, provided a strong economic base for the state.

Thus we see in the City-States a new political entity resulting from the break up of Medieval feudalism. Freed from the influence of the Church and the pressure of outside interference, the cities developed considerable political and economic power. This power led to stability, a stability that allowed attention to be turned toward intellectual pursuits.

Re-evaluation of Antiquity

The stability of the City-States permitted the rulers to turn their attention to patronage of the arts. Although the rulers themselves were preoccupied with petty wars, they still encouraged painting and sculpture. One of the most important activities involved the collection of manuscripts.⁴ This trend was supported by the invention of printing which greatly increased the feasibility of libraries.

The mania for collecting and studying ancient works was accompanied by a new need for scholars to translate and copy the manuscripts. Translating Greek texts became a source of employment and encouraged the study of ancient languages. The enthusiasm for language produced a general interest in Oriental studies, including Hebrew and Arabic.⁵ The employment of Jewish translators and teachers from Moslem Spain brought the Renaissance scholar into contact with Kabbalah which had seen

considerable development in Spain. It was the respect held for these Kabbalist scholars which makes feasible to hypothesize that Kabbalistic concepts were incorporated into the Tarot.

The accumulation and preservation of manuscripts was formerly the province of the monastery. Some secular material was preserved but only because it exemplified the proper use of the Latin language. It served as useful educational material illustrating grammar, style and rhetoric. However, there was little direct interest in the contents of these pagan works.

The intellectual freedom of the City-States permitted a reevaluation of these manuscripts. Not only the style, but the contents began to be studied in earnest. Petrarch, a formidable literary figure at the beginning of the Renaissance, encouraged the translation and serious study of the Greek epics. Petrarch's student, Boccaccio, argued strongly for the study of ancient wisdom. He reasoned that at one time there was ample reason to suppress pagan ideals since they posed a threat to the spread of Christianity. However, now that Christianity had triumphed, it would be safe to return to the study of whatever wisdom could be found in the pagan writers.

The return to the wisdom of Greece and Rome was not surprising. The Italian landscape was littered with the ruins of Rome. The popular mind had little doubt that the highest attainment of the Italian spirit was in the "glory that was Rome". There was a deep-seated feeling that a return to the ancients would awaken the best that civilization had produced. This attitude is still common in the modern mind which sees the Middle Ages as a period of darkness and regression, not a period of progress but of subjugation of the human spirit.

One of the factors which is difficult for the twentieth century mind to grasp is the respect in which the ancient writers were held. The Middle Ages was considered a period of decay. The ancient world had developed an advanced civilization and must have had access to a higher wisdom, which had somehow been lost with the passage of the centuries. Therefore, the very fact that a text was ancient was sufficient reason to hold it in high esteem. When a manuscript was discovered, it was likely to be accepted as having been delivered from the highest authority.

Such an attitude developed naturally because the wisdom of the ancient world was evident in many fields of endeavor. The ancient Hebrew of Genesis was held to be the true account of the origins of the world. The anatomy of Galen, the celestial mechanics of Ptolemy and the geometry of Pythagoras had remained unquestioned for more than a dozen centuries. And let us not forget the dogma of the Church which held that divine revelation had ended with the New Testament. The Bible contained everything that man ever needed to know. No new sources of wisdom were expected and none were needed.

It should be pointed out that fascination with the mythological

theology of the ancients never really left European culture. Paganism had been submerged but continued as a vital part of folklore and legend.⁶ Representations of the Greek and Roman gods can be found throughout the Middle Ages. In fact, nothing, not even Christian imagery, attained the richness of pagan symbolism. The Renaissance simply found a new openness and freedom in seeking wisdom in the symbols of the pagan gods.

While the Renaissance scholar had greater freedom to search for new sources of wisdom, the need remained to reconcile this wisdom with Christianity. The basis for this reconciliation was to be found among the ancients themselves. Euhemerus, in the third century B.C., had developed the theory that the gods were originally ordinary men who had been elevated to the status of gods because of their great deeds.⁷ If the gods were historical figures, then they could be studied on historical grounds like other great figures of the past. They could be used allegorically because they set an example of great deeds and sound virtue.

The study of virtues exemplified by the gods was not in conflict with Christianity. The gods merely served as new paragons of virtue, with a role similar to that of the saint. Thus, the study of the gods could be seen, not as distracting, but as enhancing the appreciation of the Christian ideal. Thus it was natural that the ancient gods should appear in the Tarot and we should expect to find them used in an allegorical context.

It should always be remembered that the "ancient wisdom" which the Renaissance scholar discovered was largely dominated by Late Latin writers. Thus the writings were heavily imbued with the philosophies of that age, primarily Neoplatonism. It was not the pure, soaring philosophies of Plato and Aristotle that fell into the hands of the Renaissance, but the works of commentators such as Cicero, Seneca and Iamblicus. In many respects, the ancient philosophies were seen through the colored lenses of Neoplatonism. As we will develop later, the Renaissance scholar believed that he had found the deepest probings of the human mind. In fact, the great thoughts of the ancients had been filtered through generations of thinkers who had developed the concepts along lines that introduced magic and mysticism.⁸

Among other strange things, the Latin writers introduced the Renaissance to Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions. The Mystery Religions were secret, initiatory cults which claimed to raise the initiate above the status of ordinary men. In modern terms we would say that their ceremonies introduced the initiate to Cosmic Consciousness.⁹ A rather late introduction to the ancient Mediterranean world, they spread rapidly and became a dominant religion of the populous. Many of the writers influential in the Renaissance, such as Iamblicus¹⁰ and Apuleius,¹¹ are permeated with the Mystery Religions. They leave the reader with a strong sense of the impact that initiation ceremonies must have had on the individual. Because

of the influence of these ideas on the Renaissance in general, it appears quite feasible to postulate that the Tarot designers incorporated them into their Map of Reality.

We will have the opportunity to discuss the Mystery Religions in some detail in a later study. For the moment, it will suffice to emphasize a single characteristic of the Latin authors who delved into these areas: the use of symbols. Pseudo-Dionysius, a mystical writer of tremendous influence, stated that the wise always prefer incongruous symbols for holy things, so that the Divine will not be so easily profaned.¹²

The initiates of the Mystery Religions were bound by vows never to reveal the details of the initiation ceremonies. It is perhaps the strongest evidence for the psychological impact of these ceremonies that not a single description has survived. What the scholars found were veiled hints, couched in a complex symbolism. This approach to secret wisdom, revealed by symbols, was readily adopted by the Renaissance. The use of obscure symbols is certainly amply demonstrated in the *Divine Comedy* of Dante.¹³ One author, Cellio Caliagnini, believed that by using enigmatic symbols one could combine speech with silence just as the ancient writers of the Mysteries had done.¹⁴ Pico della Mirandola wrote¹⁵ proudly to a friend concerning a text he had just written that it would be intelligible only to a few because he had carefully hidden in symbols the true secrets of the ancients. It appears to be precisely this same attitude which prompted the Tarot designers to choose obscure symbols to convey their message. The very use of this symbolic system implies that they had some profound message to communicate. In the context of the Renaissance, it was only such profound wisdom which was hidden by enigmatic images.

Obscure symbols seemed, to the Renaissance mind, to hold the key to the deepest mysteries discovered by the ancient world. Thus, in addition to adopting this mode of expression in their own works, they felt that all ancient writers must surely have written in this way. Thus, they sought for "second meanings" everywhere. In many respects, the strange and occult meanings assigned to the Tarot symbols become more believable when one examines the allegorical meanings which the Renaissance writers claimed to find in myths, coin images and the pictures on ancient tombs. They became fascinated by hidden meanings and developed elaborate allegorical interpretations of Homer, Ovid and Virgil.¹⁶ Thus to maintain that there are no hidden meanings behind the Tarot symbols is to ignore considerable evidence that the Renaissance man was interested in, and took considerable pride in his ability to communicate mysteries in this manner. Much of Renaissance art is unintelligible until one recognizes the need to seek for hidden meanings behind the symbolism.

Thus, the ancient wisdom which the Renaissance discovered as it studied the manuscripts was not from the golden age of Plato and

Aristotle. These primary writers were known only through the works of later commentators. The manuscripts they studied were permeated with the language, secrets and enigmatic symbolism of the Mystery Religions, Neoplatonism, and Magic. In addition to being influenced by the contents of these works, they were also strongly influenced by the deliberately obscure style of the authors. Thus, in addition to awakening a renewed interest in pagan theology, mysteries and mysticism, the Renaissance scholar was also inundated by the need to express these topics in an enigmatic style which reveals much to the initiate and little to the masses. And it is precisely this subject matter and this style of presentation which we find in the Tarot, just as we find it in myriad other examples of the art and literature of the age.

Humanism: The Dignity of the Individual Man

In addition to mystery and magic, the Renaissance also extracted from their study of ancient writers another important theme: the dignity of the individual man. The gods had been elevated to their divine status through their own efforts. The initiate of the mystery religion was raised above the consciousness of ordinary men through his own individual experience and dedication. The epic heroes, Hercules, Ulysses and Aeneas, relied upon their own courage, resourcefulness and determination to accomplish their deeds.

The importance and novelty of this concept can only be appreciated against the contrasting mindset of the Medieval man. Throughout the Middle Ages, man viewed himself as a member of some higher unity. He belonged to a feudal estate, to a family or clan, to a nation and to a church. He viewed himself as only one actor in a cast of thousands. His significance and value were to be found only through his participation in something beyond himself.

This Medieval mindset was intensified by the teachings of the Church. The individual had been subsumed by the sacrifice of Christ into a Mystical Body. His greatest dignity was in his participation in Christ, in his participation in the Divine Life. But this participation was not earned by his own merits, but by those of the God-Man. The doctrine of Redemption held that the individual man is saved by the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus. His own virtuous acts were needed for him to participate in the life of grace. However, his own human acts profited him nothing. It was only through another that his actions had value in the eyes of God.

Another clear example of the Medieval mindset is the institution of the monastery. Accepted as the highest life to which a Christian could aspire, the monastic ideal involved perfection of the virtues of Obedience, Humility and Poverty.¹⁷ His will was surrendered in obedience to his superiors. He was to look upon himself as worthless. He was to be so poor that he could call nothing his own. In this way, the monk was to submerge his individuality into

the community. He was to lose his prideful identity and find all of his value in the community and in Christ. This was the most perfect route that a man could take in working out his salvation.

Certainly the concept of the dignity of man was not invented by the Renaissance. In the twelfth century we find Otto of Freising, in his *Chronica*¹⁸, emphasizing the potential of the human individual. To him, man initiated progress, both historical and spiritual, and he alone was responsible for his acts. Nevertheless, the prevailing attitude of the Middle Ages was that man as an individual could merit little for himself. Man was responsible for initiating action, but the gulf between man and the infinite, transcendent God was so vast that no action of man could win merit.

The intellectual freedom of the Renaissance gave man the courage to reject the rigidity of Medieval dogmatism and to take up a more optimistic view of man and his potential. The classic expression of this new attitude is found in "The Dignity of Man" by Pico della Mirandola¹⁹. God created man as an intermediary creature, composed of body and soul and therefore poised in the middle between the spiritual and the material. By placing him in this middle and indeterminate position, God gave man unique freedom to determine his own status. He could choose to make himself like an animal, groveling in the mud of materialism. But he could also choose to develop his intellectual and spiritual powers and link himself to God and the spiritual. He could in fact aspire to the highest state, God-union, through mysticism. Thus man has a unique dignity in being able to determine his own position in reality. Clearly it is this picture of man which is depicted in the Tarot.

This ennobling vision of man held sway throughout the Renaissance. Man was not limited by his birthright or by the need to submerge his individuality. If this led to negative results of egocentricity, cruelty and aggression,²⁰ these negative results were outweighed by the enthusiasm and optimism it engendered. Man could climb to any height through his own dedication and latent talents. There were no extrinsic limitations to his growth and development. This attitude provided the incentive to try new, ambitious undertakings and a general feeling that nothing was impossible.

To reinforce this concept of the potential of the individual, Renaissance man had before him some striking examples. In the literary field, no example was more important than Dante. The epic proportions of the *Divine Comedy* were nothing less than an attempt to synthesize all that was known about the psychological and spiritual nature of man. The scope of his vision and the excellence of his detail combined to demonstrate what man was capable of.

The city-states in which the scholar lived were ruled by powerful, despotic rulers. The dynasties of rulers were formed, not through orderly succession, but through usurpation by powerful individual men. The Visconti and Sforza families, responsible for the oldest surviving Tarot deck, rose to power through the personal talents of

individuals. Thus, Renaissance man was provided with numerous examples of men who rose to positions of great power through their own abilities and efforts. There would seem to be no limits to the heights an individual could reach through his own intrinsic merits.

The Renaissance ideal became the development and perfection of *l'uomo universale*, the universal man.²¹ This universal man developed an encyclopedic knowledge, well versed in the arts of war as well as poetry. He was an expert horseman and rhetorician. He was graceful, disciplined, virtuous. There were no rough edges, no areas of knowledge into which he had not delved deeply. He had studied mysticism and magic²² as seriously as he had developed law and philosophy. Indeed, he attempted to develop every potential which his human nature offered. He strove to become in his own eyes and in the eyes of his society, the perfect man, the Magus of the Tarot deck.

Man and Nature

The universal man was a natural man. He was no longer the fallen creature who must be transformed by Baptism before he had any significance or value. Renaissance man was part and parcel of the natural world about him. Nature was not evil, not the Mammon which must be rejected if he is to serve God. Nature was man's home, the sphere of action into which he had been born and within which he must develop and perfect himself.

The natural world in which man found himself was beautiful. The art of the Renaissance emphasizes the poetry and symmetry of landscapes.²³ For Petrarch, the enjoyment of the pleasures of nature was the perfect catalyst for intellectual activity. Man began to think of nature, not as a collection of forces and instincts which must be overcome, but as an integral part of his nature. The ideal was not to escape nature but to become immersed in it. The germ of this idea had already developed centuries earlier when Francis of Assisi sang his canticle to Brother Sun and Brother Wind.²⁴

Representations of man in art became less ethereal and more natural. This trend was encouraged by the interest in Greek and Roman gods as subjects, e.g., Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. But the trend was also evident in religious art. *Moses and David* by Michelangelo are not the emaciated, world-renouncing saints of the Middle Ages. Instead, man has become the Magnificent Animal, the ultimate product and master of nature.

Not only was nature no longer evil, it was not even neutral. Nothing moved man to contemplation of God more effectively than contemplation of the beauties of His creation. Nature was now seen as a definite good. It was the manifestation of God surrounding man. God's wisdom and power were to be seen everywhere. Nature, God's creative power, was personified as the *Anima Mundi*, the vice-regent who transformed the plan into reality and presided over the

creation.²⁵ It is this Anima Mundi, the Spirit of the World, that is represented in the twenty-first and final Tarot card.

The "Book of Nature" was a gift of God, placed before man for him to derive wisdom and inspiration. Nature was a second revelation, a revelation parallel and supplementary to the Scriptures.²⁶ Man was encouraged to contemplate the natural world around him. Nature was man's home and provided the easiest and most natural route back to God.

It seems strange to the modern mind, but the Renaissance scholar was led directly to magic by his contemplation of nature. To the Renaissance mind, this development was simple and logical. Magic was simply man's application of his knowledge of the forces of nature. The exercise of magic was a moral act, acknowledging God's will in creating man as master over nature.²⁷ Once man recognized the forces in nature, placed there by God for his use, he was naturally induced to apply these forces for his own spritual development and for the good of others. This was magic at its highest level.

Remember also that most of the occult arts which we associate with ignorance and superstition began as scientific and physical theories in the late Hellenistic and Roman period (first to fourth century A.D.). They were illicit extensions of the most powerful system of philosophy ever devised: the Greek Philosophers of the Golden Age. Though we now see these theories as silly, they were the epitome of human thought at the time of their invention. Renaissance man found and accepted their supremacy along with the rest of the heritage he found in ancient writings.

If we find it strange that Renaissance man did not approach the study of nature with microscopes, telescopes and computers, he would have found it equally strange that we did not see that the purpose of studying nature was simply the moral and spiritual elevation of man. Our science would seem as irrelevant to him as his magic does to us.

To the Renaissance scholar, the study of nature was the search for the underlying forces and principles that guided nature. Since nature was the mirror and creation of God, these underlying principles were the keys to reaching closer to God. It was not so much a matter of understanding nature. God was transcendent and could not be understood. The study of nature was not a key to understanding but a key to action. One studied nature to discover how to elevate one's own consciousness. It was obviously God's will that man should arrive at a closer union with Him. Since nature was the scripture given to man, it must contain the secrets whereby man could develop and utilize his own natural abilities to reach God. Since the goal of God-union was the highest reachable by man, the journey required a real struggle. The secrets of God-union were well hidden in nature and could only be discovered by diligent study by the dedicated seeker. Thus, the secrets must be kept from the masses, only the true initiate who had demonstrated his desires and abilities was

worthy to receive the knowledge.

To the Medieval mind, man merely submitted to Christ through Baptism and the sacraments. As a free gift, God would reach down and pick up fallen man. Sanctity was the result of God's actions, not man's. Man could not coerce God, he could literally do nothing to earn or influence God's actions.

To the Renaissance mind, God's free gift was encompassed in the gift of humanity itself. God had given man the intellect and talents to develop himself. Man reached God through the exercise of these innate abilities. Man was now the active principle in the transformation. God was passive in the sense that once He had given man the potential, He simply left him free to develop it.

How was man to accomplish this transformation? God had given man everything he needed. He had hidden in nature the plan of action. Then He had immersed man in nature and given him the intellect through which he could discover the plan. He had also given him the free will needed to choose to follow the plan of action leading to his own enlightenment.

Magic was, then, the study and subsequent exercise of the powers of nature. It was expressedly God's will that man find magic in nature. Nature was infused with purpose. If an herb had a particular shape or color, it was to help man learn of its specific application in medicine.²⁸ The logic is simple and straight-forward. Man finds nature beautiful so that he will be attracted to study it. The beauty of nature is there for a purpose. Once man begins to study nature, he finds certain correlations or correspondences. Take, for example, the root of the mandrake plant. The root's odd shape often takes on forms resembling a tiny man. The modern mind immediately asks: "How is it that the root takes this shape?" His question relates to the forces which operated on the root. But to the Renaissance mind, the first question was, "Why does it have this shape?" The question is one of purpose, not mechanism. Since nature was created for man to understand and use, the obvious purpose of the shape was to alert man to the fact that this root contained some property, whether medicinal or magical, which was relevant to the human being it resembled.

The correlations in nature, then, were correlations of resemblance. If a root resembled a man, then it had some purpose or function relative to man. The purpose of the resemblance was to alert the searcher to the correlation. This simple logic leads to the concept of Sympathetic Magic: like affects like. Needles stuck in a doll resembling an enemy, directly affect the enemy. If your toe is sore, you find a plant that looks like a toe, grind it up and apply it to the sore toe.

Once man was able to decipher the code placed in nature by God, it was obvious that this wisdom should be applied. Since God had placed the message there to be read, He obviously intended the information to be applied. This was especially true of "white

magic" in which the intended application was the spiritual development of one's fellow man. Quite obviously, God intended man to learn magic and practicing it was simply obeying God's will.

Summary of the Renaissance Mindset

Thus, we conclude our brief survey of the Renaissance. We have found in the Italian City-States an atmosphere of political and intellectual freedom. Along with the freedom came an economic stability that permitted leisurely study. What the scholar chose to study was the wisdom of the ancient writers, a wisdom associated in his mind with the Golden Age of late antiquity. What he learned led him to a new appreciation for the dignity of man. Man had both limitless potential and the obligation to develop this potential. He had an obligation to develop into the perfect man.

The route to perfection involved a study of the beauties of nature which surrounded him and of which he was an integral part. His discoveries of resemblances and correlations in nature combined with the magic, mystery and mysticism he found permeating the late Latin writers. Therefore, he saw the practice of magic as an integral element in the development of the perfect man. Magic was viewed as the search in nature for the clues left there by God. These clues led the seeker to the secrets of the forces of nature which God intended man to use for his own perfection.

It is important for our purposes that the reader take with him an appreciation of the differences between this cultural mindset and that of the twentieth century. We hold in common with the Renaissance the ideals of freedom and the potential of humanity to utilize its latent talents for progress. On the other hand, our society thinks little about God-union and the Divine plan for man. Renaissance man universally accepted these as topics of the highest importance. Today, one is unlikely to overhear conversations on magic, mysticism or pagan symbolism at a cocktail party. But we must keep in mind that these were among the "in" topics of conversation among Renaissance intellectuals. We must assimilate these differences if we are ever to understand the mindset of the designers of the Tarot.

Theories About The Origin Of The Tarot In The Renaissance

At the conclusion of the previous study, we noted that we had left some unfinished business. There were several theories about the origin of the Tarot which had not been discussed. It was necessary to leave these theories until we had an opportunity to look more closely at the Renaissance. Now that we have concluded our survey of the Renaissance mindset, it will be easier to deal with these theories in more detail. There are three theories that we must consider. First, there is the hypothesis that the Tarot is a representation of the popular triumphal procession. Second, the Tarot may be

drawn from the romances about the Quest for the Holy Grail. Third, there is the attitude (not exactly a theory) among modern scholars of playing-card history that there is absolutely no symbolism behind the Tarot at all.

Tarot as Derived from the Triumphal Procession

One of the most scholarly and insightful attempts to decipher the origins of the Tarot has been offered by Gertrude Moakley.²⁹ In her view, the images are representations of elements of the popular triumphal parades or processions of the fifteenth century. These processions were extremely popular and were used to celebrate any event of communal importance. In particular, they were used to mark the beginning of the period of Lent. The celebration was a final fling before the austerity and fasting of the penitential season.

This theory is presented as a serious scholarly explanation of the Tarot's origins. It is not a "long ago and far away" fable but a reasoned hypothesis which attempts to fit all the direct evidence. A considerable body of indirect evidence is elicited in support of the idea. However, I think the reader will find, as we examine the theory in some detail, that there is sufficient evidence to state that the Triumph was one of the sources for the Tarot. At the same time, I also hope to establish that it was not the sole source, in the sense of dismissing all of the other influences and lines of development which converged on the Renaissance.

According to Moakley, the Tarot Trumps are, in general, a representation of the elements of the triumphal procession. But even more specifically, they are strongly influenced by the allegorical Triumph elaborated in Petrarch's poem, "I Trionfi". In this poem, Petrarch moralized on love and life by describing a triumphal procession. First came Cupid, shooting at lovers. Love had triumphed over Petrarch. Then came the triumph of Chastity over Fortune. Then in succession came Death, Fame, Time and finally Eternity as the Trinity drawn by the four living creatures. The same type of allegorical triumph was used by Dante to describe the first meeting between himself and the heavenly Beatrice who rode past him in a triumphal chariot.³⁰

Petrarch's poem was very popular and influenced art and design in the Renaissance in a demonstrable way. The triumphal car can be seen in a number of alchemical symbols of the time. Hind³¹ illustrates woodcuts of several of Petrarch's themes. The triumph of Chastity is shown as a woman on a throne, drawn by unicorns with a number of ladies in attendance. The triumph of Love is shown as blindfolded Eros on a pedestal, bow and arrow in hand. He is attended by a king and by Strength represented as a man in lion skin carrying a pillar. These images are obviously suggestive of images on the Tarot cards. According to Moakley's theory, the Tarot cards followed the popular celebrations and the popular poem much as

we now see a popular TV show followed by jigsaw puzzles and board games in the toystores.

The structure of a triumphal parade was set by tradition. There were a series of triumphal cars, we would call them "floats", each announcing the triumph of some allegorical figure or virtue. Each car was preceded by a line of marchers dressed in identical livery. Also preceding the car would be the allegorical "captives", that is, the vices which had been made captive by the triumph. On the car would be "attendants" or allegorical figures related to the theme of the triumph.

The Tarot triumphs represent a carnival parade, part of the celebrations that immediately preceded Lent. The "Juggler" or Magician card represents the Carnival King whose reign is ending and who will be hung in effigy in the Hanged Man card. The Fool is the figure of Lent, who dances in and out amongst the floats and reminds everyone that tomorrow the fast begins. One of the attractive features of this theory is that it explains the word Trump, which is simply a pejoration of Triumph.

The sequence of images in Petrarch's poem is shown in the first column of Table 3-1. Cupid triumphs over men and gods and each successive figure triumphs over the preceding until the final image, God or Eternity, terminates the series. In the Tarot series, the sequence is shortened to four figures. This number is largely determined on the hypothesis that the four suits represent the four sets of liveried marchers who preceded each triumphal car.

At face value, the correspondences between the Tarot and Petrarch's poem seem reasonable and a wealth of circumstantial evidence can be brought forth to substantiate some details. But not *all* details. Why aren't there four triumphal cars? There is only one — the Chariot. In early cards, Death is often riding a horse, but that is not a parade float. The theory provides an excellent explanation of the word "Trump" but a similar explanation is also possible. The "Trump" cards are those that triumph over the other suits when they are played in a card game. It should also be pointed out that none of the fifteenth century manuscripts seemed to be aware of the connection with the Triumphal processions. Those manuscripts written by clergy imply a different and more sinister origin.

The real problems with the theory become more obvious as we look at the details of the correspondences. The correspondences are not exact, as one would expect if the Tarot were nothing but a representation of the procession. The explanation offered is not entirely satisfactory. The explanation is that the Tarot is not only a simplification of Petrarch's scheme but also a spoof, a ribald take-off on the solemnity of the original story and in the spirit of the Carnival parade. This explanation is not acceptable simply because it allows too much freedom. Any lack of correspondence can be passed off as a part of the joke. Therefore, if the cards match it is taken as positive evidence for the theory, while any discrepancy is

dismissed off-hand. This is too simplistic.

One reason that the "spoof" explanation must be questioned is that the triumphal processions were more than a gay festival, they were part of the psychological preparation for the Lenten season. The spirit was gay and almost anything was permitted, but the themes were sacred and regarded as such by the people. One can spoof a patriotic parade, but the spoof better not include dragging the flag in the mud. Some foolishness was expected, but the deeper values of the allegory could not really be spoofed, short of sacrilege.

When we examine the hypothesis in detail (Table 3-1) we notice a definite lack of balance. Each of the triumphal cars has two attendants but Fortune has none at all, nor any captives. This makes for a sparse triumphal car. While there is no particularly good reason why all the cars should have the same number of captives, it seems strange that the first has five while the second has none. Poor design for a parade and not particularly humorous. On the other hand, this is hardly sufficient reason for rejecting the theory.

The first triumphal car, Cupid (Lovers car) corresponds exactly with Petrarch, with captives accompanying the car representing all levels of mankind. A king or crowned figure is commonly included in representations of the triumph so the inclusion of the Empress and Emperor as captives represents no incongruity. Inclusion of the Pope seems somewhat strange at first, but the figure of Jupiter is common and numerous Renaissance representations of Jupiter show him dressed as a bishop or Pope.³² The virtues are commonly shown accompanying the triumphal cars, but not Cupid's car. The explanation of a spoof might have some validity here as the audience might see the staff on the Fortitude card as the Visconti-Sforza deck and the Cups on the Temperance card as overt sexual symbols that would relate directly to the theme of Cupid.

A further problem is raised because Cupid isn't riding a triumphal car. In the Visconti-Sforza cards, on which the theory is based, the car (i.e., the Chariot card) is ridden by the woman who appears on the Lovers card. But she is supposed to be the captive, not the triumph. Cupid appears, not on the triumphal car, but on the captives card! I guess I don't see this lack of correspondence as humorous, simply incorrect.

The second triumph of Petrarch's series, Chastity, is considered as missing from the Tarot series, even though the woman riding the Chariot card might easily represent this virtue. The Chastity car has been replaced by Fortune, who was a captive in Petrarch. Perhaps one can find a ribald reference here that Chastity doesn't always triumph after all. But if that is the joke, then I would have placed the Temperance and Fortitude spoof with this car and surely would have let the Papess ride along!

The triumph of Death is represented in both sequences by the same image of a skeleton. Both devils and hermits can be seen accompanying the triumphal car in various illustrations. There is a

minor inconsistency in that the Wheel on the Fortune car is riding over a bearded man who seems to be the individual on the Hermit card. That would represent Fortune triumphing over Time and, therefore, the figure of Time should precede, not follow, the Fortune car as it does in Petrarch's sequence. The other incongruity is that Time was originally a triumph in Petrarch's sequence and has now been reduced to an attendant. There is no particularly good reason for this, nor do I see any ribald implication.

The captives of the Death car also represent a problem. There doesn't seem to be any literary or graphical reference to the hanged man accompanying the Death car. Certainly the concept of the Hanged Man as a "shame-picture"³³ seems to indicate that the symbolism was accessible to the Renaissance designer of the cards. But then it would have had to come from some other source than the triumphal procession. The same is true of the Tower card. The image was common as the "hell's mouth" of the Renaissance stage³⁴ but there doesn't seem to be any reference to it as a triumphal figure. The problem basically is that the cards which represent human or angelic figures fit nicely into the hypothesis of a procession. On the Visconti-Sforza cards, this includes almost all of the figures. But the Hanged Man and Tower cards have psychological roots which do not fit in well with the concept of a social event.

The very presence of the Death triumph is problematic. Death is certainly present in Petrarch's sequence, but did not form a part of the Carnival triumphal procession until 1511. At that time it was a novelty and its appropriateness was questioned. If the Tarot cards are a spoof on the triumphal processions, which make fun of the pompous aspects of the ceremony, then the Death card is incongruous.

The Devil and Tower cards do not exist in the Visconti-Sforza decks. I hypothesize that they never were a part of these decks, since these particular images were unsuitable for viewing by the noble ladies. That this spoof on the solemn story should emphasize the darkest and most dismal parts of the story seems less than believable. These darkest aspects were omitted from the popular celebrations and even from the noble decks. The message of these cards cannot correspond to a spoof, they are stark reality.

According to the theory, the triumph of Fame has disappeared from the Tarot. The virtues which should accompany her are dispersed to the Cupid and Eternity cars. This seems to me a convenient omission. In point of fact, Fame may be represented in the Tarot by the Judgment card. Some Tarot decks and most minchiate decks (a Florentine relative of the Tarot) show an angel blowing two trumpets with the words "Fama volat" written across the bottom of the card. Clearly this is the many-mouthed trumpeter of Petrarch's poem. But if this is Fame, then there are five and not four triumphs represented and there are not enough suits of livery to go around. Also, the virtues which should be associated with Fame are

Table 3-1. The Tarot Trumps as representations of the Triumphs of Petrarch's poem. In the Tarot, each triumphal car is preceded by "captives" and accompanied by "attendants".

Petrarch's Sequence	Tarot Image	Corresponding	
		The Captives	The Attendants
The procession is preceded by the Carnival King (Magician)			
Cupid	Cupid	Empress Emperor Papess Pope Lovers	Temperance Fortitude
Chastity	---	---	---
---	Fortune	---	---
Death	Death	Hanged Man Tower	Time (Hermit) Devil
Fame	---	---	---
Time	---	---	---
Eternity	World	Star Moon Sun	Justice Judgment
The procession is ended by Lent (Fool)			

in the wrong places. Fame should follow death (card thirteen) but be followed by time (card eleven) which doesn't fit. The whole parade is falling apart if we identify Fame with the Judgment card. Then the star, moon and sun would be captives of this triumph instead of the World. So leaving out the Fame car is certainly the lesser of the two evils, but does disrupt the internal consistency of the theory.

The Eternity triumph is often illustrated as God surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists. This is suggested by some images on the World card (but not the Visconti-Sforza version). The illustrations frequently show the sun and moon in the sky behind the car, so they fit as captives (and we will throw in the star for good luck, even though it is *not* ordinarily pictured as a captive). We also have to be somewhat gratuitous to allow Judgment and Justice as attendants since these are not traditional. I would certainly like to

know why there is a horseman riding over the head of Justice in the Visconti-Sforza deck and what that has to do with a triumphal march. But then no one has ever offered any reasonable explanation for that strange image.

Now that the triumphal procession has passed, we can attempt an evaluation of the theory. The evidence certainly supports the idea that the cards represent an allegory, an allegory related to but not identical to Petrarch's poem. This contention is also supported by the Renaissance fascination with allegory which we outlined earlier in this study. Like a triumphal procession, the allegorical figures are placed in a sequence with at least some implication that the later images are superior to preceding ones. However, there are some significant differences in the sequencing from either Petrarch or the traditional parade. There are also some dark images which do not seem to fit the mood of celebration or spoof. It seems to me that the evidence is strong enough to justify stating that Petrarch and the Triumphs could be a source for the Tarot images.

On the other hand, the evidence is not strong enough to support the contention that the Tarot are *only* a representation of the Triumph and that Petrarch represents the one and only (or even the primary) inspiration for the cards. The real point is that correspondences do not prove cause-effect relationships. Emperors, Popes and the Devil appear in Dante, but that does not establish that the Divine Comedy is a representation of a Triumphal procession. Dante did not produce his masterpiece because he saw a parade, and neither did the Tarot designers.

The most likely explanation is that Triumphal processions were a part of the cultural milieu in which the cards were designed and they contributed their influence to the allegory. But, in fact, both the Tarot and the Triumphs drew from a common pool of historical, cultural and pictorial sources. The Triumph was one expression of this milieu and the Tarot is another. It is simply too simplistic to postulate a single source to the exclusion of all else, especially in an encyclopedic age when the emphasis was on synthesizing disparate elements. The Triumphs are merely another of the many examples of allegorical representations of the wisdom of man and the nature of the universe. As we will examine later, similar efforts were made in poetry, art, Magic theaters and memory arts. Images of gods, virtues and celestial bodies were the common property of educated men. Many artists were attempting to assemble symbols into a coherent expression of wisdom.

In so far as the theory draws our attention to the common roots of this allegorical effort, and in so far as it suggests that the popular poem of Petrarch and the carnival processions must have influenced the Tarot designers, to this extent the evidence supports the theory. But in so far as it constrains one from incorporating other sources, perhaps equally supported by circumstantial evidence, then the internal inconsistencies of the theory must be pointed out. I am

ally to the theory in debunking the "long ago and far away" theories. But I am an opponent when the debunking rejects all of the philosophical, cultural and mystical elements that also influenced the mindset of the Renaissance man. When all about them were synthesizing paganism with Christianity, Kabbalah with Christian mysticism, religion with magic, and seeking the synthesis of all ancient wisdom, in such times it is not reasonable to assume that the Tarot designers drew pictures of a parade. Especially when the pictures are not quite the same as the parade.

The Grail Legend

The second theory we will consider is based on a suggestion of Decker³⁵ that the legend of the Grail Quest influenced the design of the Tarot. He based his comment on the representation of the Ace of Cups in fifteenth century hand-painted decks. The cards show a lance upright in a cup or chalice. This image comes from the visions of the Grail in the very oldest stratum of the legend such as Gawain Bleheris from the twelfth century. The image also shows a dove descending from heaven with a wafer to be placed in the chalice. This comes from the legend that every Good Friday the Holy Spirit descends with a consecrated host to be placed in the Grail.³⁶

It is quite feasible that the designers of the Tarot were familiar with the story of the Grail. The "romances" or lengthy epic poems based on the legends of Arthur and the Grail were extremely popular throughout Europe and were well known in northern Italy in the fifteenth century. In fact, public recitations of the stories before the court or in the city square were a popular entertainment, not unrelated to the concept of the Triumphal procession. This connection may seem unwarranted, yet both were popular and both are fundamentally allegorical. The Grail hero sets out on a spiritual quest and must overcome tremendous obstacles to achieve the goal. In addition to the overall allegory, numerous details and subplots are superimposed to reinforce the moral lesson. In some versions, each adventure of the hero is followed by a meeting with a monk or hermit who explains the allegorical significance of the adventure.³⁷ In some cases, the affinity for enigmatic symbolism expresses itself as the holy man refuses to explain a vision because one should not reveal the secrets to the profane.³⁸ Thus, both Triumph and Legend were popular allegorical entertainments and both contain imagery and symbols that are also found in the Tarot.

The origins of the Grail legend are lost in obscurity. The earliest written version is Celtic, probably Welsh and probably twelfth century. Many interpreters have maintained that the symbolism is basically Celtic, though disguised and transmitted through Christian symbolism.³⁹ Others feel that there is no reason to go beyond the allegorical presentation of the mysteries of the Eucharist.⁴⁰ Still others point out that the cup and the lance are never associated

in Christian art and that the origins of the legend stem from the ancient Mystery Religions, perhaps preserved through the many folklore elements of the story.⁴¹ These theories are interesting since they suggest many of the same symbolic systems which have been suggested for the Tarot.

The details of the story have evolved through time. Table 3-2 summarizes some (certainly not all) of the versions available in translation to the interested reader. Although most modern readers are familiar with the legend through Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*⁴², Malory largely copied from earlier writers. All of the versions in the table antedate the fifteenth century and represent the substratum for whatever version of the legend was familiar to the Tarot designers.

The basic story-line begins at the round table of King Arthur. Instigated by boredom, a vision or a visitor to the court, the knights decide to undertake the greatest of all quests, the search for the Grail. The nature of the Grail itself is mysterious and may be identified with a dish, a stone or a chalice. In one case⁴³, it appears in five different guises, four of which are never described to the reader. The Grail hero (who may be Gawain, Perceval or Galahad) undergoes numerous trials, with much "smoting and bashing" before he arrives in the kingdom of the Grail. The Wasteland is in ruin because its ruler, the Fisher-King, has an incurable wound. Only the Grail hero can cure him. At his first encounter with the Grail, the hero fails to ask the "Question", that is, fails to ask the king how he received his wound and how he can be cured. The quest fails as a result, and it is only after a considerable period of purification and trial that the hero is permitted to return and ask the Question. The Fisher-King dies a peaceful death and the hero is made king. The land is restored to fruitfulness.

Thus, beyond the general allegorical system of a spiritual quest, the Grail legend bears little resemblance to the Tarot Trumps. However, an investigation of details shows many similarities in symbolism. We pointed out the frequent references to duality in the Tarot and the implication that overcoming this duality was an important aspect of the spiritual journey. This same duality appears in the Grail legends. King Vortigern is building a tall tower but each night it falls.⁴⁴ Merlin discovers an underground pool and two dragons, one red and one white, who fight each night and destroy the tower. Only when this duality is overcome can the project succeed. As another example, Perceval's mother teaches him about Light and Darkness and how different they are.⁴⁵ In another version, Perceval sees a knight and a damsel who are explained by a hermit as signifying the divinity of the Father.⁴⁶ The dualism in the legends also resembles the alchemical allegory in which the land is in waste because the king is wounded. Only through the death of the king and some form of union of opposites will the fertility of the land be restored.

The themes of mysticism and God-union are also evident. The grail hero fails the first time because he is so wrapped up in the

Table 3-2. Various Versions of the Arthurian Legend and the Quest for the Grail

Date	Author	Title	Hero	The Grail
1130	Geoffrey of Monmouth	Historia Regum Britanniae		
?	Bleheris	Gawain	Gawain	?
1155	Wace	Roman de Brut		
1190	Cretien de Troyes	Conte de Gral	Perceval	Dish
1199	Robert de Boron	Joseph d'Arimathie	Perceval	Chalice
1205	von Eschenbach	Parzival	Perceval	Stone
?	?	High History of the Grail	Perceval	Chalice
1225	Walter Map	Quest of the Holy Grail	Galahad	Plate

ecstatic religious experience that he forgets all else. The relationship of those in the Grail castle with God is a direct, mystical connection as indicated by the fact that an organized clergy and hierarchy are only required for an occasional ceremony. Galahad described the experience of the Grail as an experience of God-union, complete with trembling and ecstasy.⁴⁷

The astrological theme evident in the Star, Moon and Sun cards is also found in the Grail legend. There are many references to someone being born under auspicious planetary influences. The dying Fisher-King had to wait for Mars or Jupiter to return to a specific position in the sky. This was because the Grail would only appear at astrologically suitable times.⁴⁸ Thus the Legend, just as the Tarot, was influenced by the astrological theories prevalent at the time they were devised.

There are a number of additional details which deserve mention. Galahad takes the Grail from the castle and places it in the city of Sarras for safekeeping. Sarras is in Egypt and there is an implication of the return of the mystery to its source. In one story,⁴⁹ the hero must cross threebridges to reach the Grail castle, overcoming greater and greater opponents. This suggests the same three stages of the journey as implied in the three sets of seven cards which make up the Tarot trumps. The guardians of the Grail castle are Knights Templar, suggesting the same mystical connections that caused their association with the Tarot.⁵⁰

As Perceval sets off on his journeys, his mother dresses him in fool's clothing. He is so naive at this stage that she is afraid others will attack him unless he appears as a fool.⁵¹ All of the versions of the legend are full of Hermits or wise men. The Lord of the Moors is killed by hanging him upside down like the Hanged Man.⁵² Galahad describes the experience of the Grail in mystical terms as a Death.⁵³ The Grail hero meets the Devil in the form of a Black Hand in the Perilous Chapel. Finally, although many may come to the land of the Grail, only the one specifically called by God can actually win through to the Grail.⁵⁴ This is an association we identified with the Judgment card in the first chapter.

The closest associations with the Tarot, however, are with the Minor Arcana, that is, the four suits of playing cards. Kings, queens, knights and pages abound in the stories. The four suit marks may be related to the Grail itself (cups), the lance that pierced the side of Jesus (staves), the sword that beheaded John the Baptist (swords) and the discs may represent the Grail itself or perhaps the Golden Circlet or crown of thorns. Thus, the four Grail Treasures, or relics, may have influenced the Tarot suit marks.⁵⁵ And we must not forget the Ace of Cups in the fifteenth century hand-painted decks.

The correlations with the court cards, the suit marks and the Ace of Cups may be strong enough evidence to support a direct influence of the popular legends on the rest of the deck. However, in spite of numerous similarities in symbols, the Grail legend does not stand

up well as the major source for the trump cards. The sequence of symbols is wrong. Both portray a journey or quest but the symbols of the stages of the journey are different. There are many kings and queens, but emperors are rare or non-existent. Empresses and Popes never appear. The trumps contain no indication that cup and lance are associated with the goal of the journey. Personifications of Justice, Fortitude and Temperance do not occur in the legend. On the other hand, the mysticism of the Eucharist is not evident in the Tarot. There is no Grail which produces delicious foods, and no wounded king to be cured. There is no Question to be asked.

It appears then that the similarities in symbols are simply due to Grail poets and Tarot designers drawing from the same set of allegorical and mystical symbols to communicate their message. Just as we found with the theory of Triumphal processions, the correlation of symbols may imply familiarity and influence but not cause-effect. Both Petrarch's poem and the Grail legend were the common property of the Renaissance. Some of the images may have been taken from or influenced by these sources. But the Tarot is not simply pictures of a parade or illustrations for the Grail Legend. The evidence is not strong enough to compel us to accept either theory.

Theory of No Symbolism

The next point of view we must consider is less a theory than an attitude which maintains that there is no symbolic system whatsoever in the Tarot Trumps. The Trumps are simply a sequence of arbitrarily chosen images much like modern Tarock decks use pictures of animals or country scenes to illustrate the Trump cards.⁵⁶ This attitude is the result of three factors; first, scholarly research reveals that Tarot was played as a game long before it was used for fortune-telling or picked up by occultists; second, there is a reaction of scholars against the nonsense contained in many occult interpretations of the Tarot; third, the Trumps appear much less symbolic if the original designs are represented by the surviving fifteenth century hand-painted decks. We will return to this question of the primacy of the hand-painted decks below. But first we must consider the reasons for this attitude and the evidence for and against it.

Investigators in any serious field of inquiry develop sets of premises and assumptions, broadly accepted, but only loosely based on hard evidence. Such assumptions are critically needed to structure research in areas where evidence is sparse or lacking. Since such assumptions are accepted by all investigators, they serve as guiding principles or paradigms, permitting a unified attack on difficult questions. While such paradigms are needed, they tend to lock investigators into a single view of the subject.

Studies of the origins of the Tarot deck are certainly not free from

such paradigms. Much of the progress in modern decades can be legitimately viewed as the result of rejecting the occultist paradigm in favor of what we might call the "playing-card history" paradigm. This approach emphasizes the Tarot as merely a species within the genus "playing-card".

The benefits of this approach are clear. The approach has assembled clear documentary evidence for the fifteenth century origins of the Tarot in Northern Italy. It has also succeeded in extricating Tarot research from the thick cobwebs of occultist nonsense. However, in emphasizing a scientific and historical approach, the playing-card paradigm has changed the direction of Tarot research. As is always true of a scientific paradigm, the playing-card history approach tends to define (and limit) those questions which are considered "interesting" and legitimate. Thus, while motivating exemplary scholarship into the Tarot as a game, it has turned attention away from studies of Tarot symbolism. Because of the rejected occultist approach to symbolism, any investigation of the *question* of symbolism arouses suspicion of a return to the rejected occultist *method*.

The result of this modern attitude is to consider the Tarot as merely a game. This keeps research a safe "arm's distance" from occultism. But since it maintains the "no symbolism" attitude as the safest plan, it places the burden of proof on the investigator of symbolism to demonstrate that there is any symbolism to be explained. Thus, we must take up this gauntlet before any of the studies in this series can be seriously considered by modern Tarot scholars.

Simply because the Tarot was always used as a card game does not preclude the possibility that it is also a symbolic system. We know of other early decks of playing cards, such as those of Thomas Murner in 1509 and 1515 which were used to teach logic and law. Through the years, cards have been used frequently to teach other subjects such as geography. On the other hand, as early as 1377, John of Reinfelden offered allegorical interpretations of the cards in the ordinary deck. Thus, it seems possible to establish both the use of playing cards for more serious purposes and the association of playing cards with allegorical interpretations.

There were, of course, attempts to develop Tarot-like games with very different points of view. The fifteenth century Sola Busca deck⁵⁷ uses a series of seemingly arbitrary ancient gods on the Trump cards. There is also the poem of Bertoni of 1550 associating the trumps with the ladies of the Ferrara court.⁵⁸ Boiardo (1441-1494) describes a deck of virtues in which the images are arbitrarily chosen.⁵⁹ But all of these decks are clearly different from the Tarot. The arbitrary nature of the images is easy to see and there is not the impression of a symbolic system such as one gets when viewing the Tarot Trumps.

There is also the evidence of early manuscripts. Some seem to

imply that there are allegorical interpretations for the cards, e.g., Aretino, 1540; Lollio, 1550 and Bargagli, 1572.⁶⁰ Steele, describing a manuscript written between 1450 and 1480, reveals that the Tarot was considered a complex symbolic system during the period of its creation. For example, the manuscript implies that the World card represents God, although probably as the Anima Mundi, as we have indicated. There are also a number of manuscripts⁶¹ dated 1488, 1489, 1491 and 1579, which represent ordinances against gambling and cards. All of these ordinances exempt the Tarot game from the prohibition. This at least indicates that the Tarot was considered as something different, perhaps as something more than a card game.

The rules of the game of Tarot itself suggest something of an allegorical interpretation. The Trumps are assigned values, with the higher trumps winning over lower ones. But the assignment of numbers itself implies a sequence such that the states represented in later cards seem to be "higher". The Fool card is assigned no number. We have implied in the first study of this series that the Fool represents the viewer, the spiritual neophyte who is making the journey. Thus the Fool is outside the sequence of images. In most versions of the game, the Fool can never win. He can be played at any time and is "irrelevant" to the sequence of the Trumps. Thus, the Fool card is somehow outside the game, an interpretation which follows closely our suggestion in the first chapter.

In addition to all of the documentary and indirect evidence suggesting a symbolic meaning to the Tarot trumps, there is also the mood of the times. In the description of the mindset of the Renaissance presented at the beginning of this study, we clearly showed that this was an age amenable to symbolism. This symbolism appears in its poetry and in its art. Thus, we have the series of prints known as the Tarocchi of Mantegna.⁶² These prints were probably never intended as a game of cards and have universally been interpreted as a symbolic representation of the universe. And yet there is an undeniable similarity between these prints and the images of the Tarot. It becomes difficult then to consider the Tarot as arbitrary when a closely related set of images is considered as a serious symbolic system. The development of an arbitrary set of suggestive images in an age when all of art and poetry was concerned with allegory and symbolism seems unlikely.⁶³

But the strongest evidence for the symbolic meaning of the Tarot trumps is the cards themselves. Essentially every writer on the Tarot has sensed their symbolic significance. Few if any modern viewers would fail to see the "strangeness" and potential meaning of the cards. Thus, if the evidence presented above is insufficient, a careful examination of the cards themselves should suffice to dismiss the point of view that the Tarot images have no symbolic intent.

There remains a single argument to be discussed, the implication that all of this symbolism is due to viewing later additions to

the original Tarot designs. This argument holds that after the Tarot got into the hands of the common people, late in the fifteenth century symbolic meaning may have been added to the Tarot by changing the images. The original designs are represented by the oldest Tarot decks which have survived, the hand-painted decks. The symbolism in these decks appears to be "watered-down" and does not seem to convey the sense of mystery like the supposedly later printed decks. Thus it can still be maintained that the Trumps were originally designed as arbitrary images and any meaning we now find was added later.

Primacy of the Hand-Painted Tarot Decks

If the fifteenth century hand-painted decks were the original designs for the Tarot, even investigating the symbolism of the cards seems fruitless. The designs of these cards show little if any of the mystery and intrigue to be found in the early printed decks. If the hand-painted cards are the original design, then the decks were probably designed in the courtly circles of Ferrara and Milan for the amusement of the wealthy court ladies. There is no reason to postulate any symbolism, the cards were just a game.

It is precisely this point which makes feasible much of the modern approach to the Tarot. If the designs were frivolous, then it seems reasonable to view them as a presentation of a Carnival Triumph or of a popular poem such as Petrarch's. It also seems reasonable to view the Tarot as influenced by the Grail legends which formed the popular entertainment of the courts. In this view, there is no mystery, no symbolism, no occultism; only a game.

But, on closer examination, it is clear that the hypothesis of the primacy of the hand-painted decks is just an element of the "playing-card history" paradigm. It is a widely accepted assumption based on no hard evidence. To demonstrate this, I will present a number of arguments, though some are closely interrelated.

1. The Preservation of hand-painted versus printed decks

The only evidence backing the theory is that the hand-painted decks are the oldest ones which have survived. But simply because they have survived does not demonstrate that they were not preceded by earlier printed decks. The hand-painted decks are expensive and beautiful works of art. Therefore they were preserved as valued family treasures. In contrast, printed decks are inexpensive and easily replaced. A printed deck is played with until it is soiled, or damaged and then simply discarded.

Because of the difference in the probability of preservation of hand-painted versus printed decks, it is not at all remarkable that the oldest preserved Tarot decks are hand-painted. We would expect the valued hand-painted decks to survive even if there were earlier versions of the deck available in printed form.

2. Luxury decks and their influence on later designs

It seems a well-founded principle that luxury cards, such as the hand-painted Tarot decks, have little influence on the design of decks used by the common people. These decks are specifically commissioned by the wealthy and the artist is usually encouraged, if not ordered, to individualize the deck for the patron. This would explain the frequent use of heraldic devices and clear references to historical events and personages which appear on the hand-painted decks.

It is usually considered that the modifications introduced by the artist are so extensive that the resulting deck cannot be considered as a reliable indicator of the original design. This argument is applied by scholars to the earliest German decks of Stuttgart and the Ambraser decks. These hand-painted decks are not considered to be the original designs *because* they are luxury items.⁶⁴ In addition, because the decks are carefully maintained as family heirlooms, these decks seldom influence the design of later decks, simply because they are never seen outside the residence of the patrons.

3. Conservatism of Playing Card Manufacturers

Another relevant principle of playing card research is the remarkable conservatism of playing card manufacturers. Card players wish to replace worn decks with nearly identical ones so that they can continue to rely upon established patterns of recognition in play. This would be particularly important in playing Tarot since the earliest trump cards appear to have been unnumbered. Thus, any alteration in the design would force the players to re-memorize the patterns and sequences.

The result is that card manufacturers quickly fall into patterns which change little over long periods of time. When we consider this conservatism in relation to the printed Tarot decks, it argues that the earliest printed decks are far more likely to reflect the original design of the cards than the hand-painted luxury decks.

4. Preachers of Repentance

One of the interesting phenomena of fifteenth century Italy was the popular preacher. Even while the officialdom of the Church was subjected to wide criticism, the people still honored and respected the individual mystic and saint. The talented preacher still held the populace in the palm of their hand. The most famous of these preachers are well known to history, such as Bernadino of Siena and Savonarola of Florence. But for every name that has been preserved in the history books, there are dozens whose names are forgotten.⁶⁵

The preacher would begin his series of sermons in the pulpit. But soon the crowds would become so large that he would move to the city square or to the steps of the cathedral. After whipping his listeners into a frenzy of religious fervour, he would call upon

them to make a demonstration of their repentance. This demonstration would take the form of a great bonfire, onto which were tossed all forms of sinful and frivolous amusement: dice, games, paintings and playing cards. Playing cards were a popular contribution because you could always buy a new one cheaply when the initial fervour wore off. So we must add the phenomenon of the popular preachers of repentance to the reasons why early wood-block printed Tarot decks have not survived.

5. Early Renaissance Painters as Creators

If we admit any symbolic basis to the Tarot, then we must attribute to the painter of the first hand-painted deck a level of creativity for which there appears to be no justification whatever. The earliest decks are usually attributed to Bonifacio Bembo. Reviewing his other work, the Tarot would have been the only creative work he ever attempted. It is far more probable and far more in keeping with what we know of early Renaissance art to suppose that Bembo was asked to paint the cards based on a popular, printed model. Since our impressions of the artist are largely based on late Renaissance geniuses such as da Vinci and Michaelangelo, we must recognize that the Italian artist of the first half of the fifteenth century was more like our modern commercial artist than like the later geniuses.⁶⁶ He operated from a storefront shop and was more craftsman than creator. He would paint and decorate chests, furniture, etc., to the specifications of the patron and following closely the patterns established by earlier artists. In fact, the majority of the work was done by apprentices rather than by the master. Thus, it seems unlikely that Bembo was given a free hand to create the deck.

It is particularly illuminating to examine correspondence between artists and the families who commissioned the early hand-painted Tarots.⁶⁷ Isabella d'Este asked a friend to check that an artist was painting her allegory according to her exact specifications. She was disturbed to hear that he was painting her Venus nude, just to show off his talents. Galeazzo Maria Sforza sent pictures to the artist to be used as models and might have several artists bid on a job. Gian Galeazzo Sforza threatened to fine an artist if he did not appear immediately to accept a commission. In such an atmosphere, it is unlikely that the artist was free to create the Tarot images. It seems far more likely that he was handed a deck of cards and told to produce a luxury version suitable for play at the court.

6. Visconti-Sforza decks as Source for Later Designs

We mentioned above that luxury decks are seldom used as the model for later, popular decks. This is because the decks are valuable and kept under lock and key. Given what we know of the character of the Dukes of Milan, it appears unlikely that they would have invited the card printers into their parlor to watch the royal ladies at play.

On the other hand, it is quite unlikely that the people would have

wanted to imitate any game played by the Dukes. There existed what Machiavelli called "an ineradicable hostility"⁶⁸ between the people and the nobles. During the period when the Tarot was being designed there were constant small wars going on between the city-states. The people were recruited and taxed unmercifully. As a result there was a constant ferment of revolution. While it is believable that the people would have wanted to play a game invented by nobility which they admired and envied, it is less believable that they wanted to imitate the deck designed by the rulers they hated.

7. Missing Cards

There are seven partial decks now existing which appear to be derived from the original deck designed by Bembo. Among all of these survivors there is not a single example of the Devil or Tower cards. The probability of losing these cards by chance from among the surviving decks is twelve in 10,000! So I would argue that they were not lost by chance. They never formed a part of the hand-painted decks. There are four partial decks belonging to a different series, usually designated as the Charles VI decks. The Tower card appears in this series but the Devil is missing still.

Arguing in a slightly different manner, we can compare the survival of the Trump cards with the court cards. If we ask what is the probability that the court cards were lost by chance, given the distribution of cards which have survived, the answer is 98.78%. In other words, it is quite likely that the court cards which are missing from the decks were lost by chance. If you ask the same question about all of the surviving trumps (both the Bembo and the Charles VI series), the answer is 81.33%. This is a relatively high probability, but if you assume that the Devil never was a part of the decks, the probability increases to 94.25%. If you consider only the Bembo decks, the probability of random survival of the cards is 98.32% if the Devil and the Tower cards were never a part of the decks. Thus, the probability of random loss of court and trump cards is very similar only if you assume that these cards were never a part of the decks.

Thus, if we accept that the hand-painted decks were the original designs, we are faced with the awkward problem of explaining why the Devil and the Tower were added to printed decks later. We must also explain why the Tower appears in one series and not in the other. The explanation is, of course, quite simple. As we pointed out in the first study of this series, the Devil and Tower cards symbolize dark psychological states of development. Even if this interpretation is unacceptable, these two cards are certainly the darkest and most dismal of the sequence. Thus, when the ducal patron commissioned a deck to be played at court, he requested that these dismal cards be omitted from the deck since they were unsuitable for the royal ladies! Harkening back to the principles established in the second chapter, I would offer this as the simplest explanation which explains the facts and, therefore, the theory of

choice. While it is not possible to *prove* either that Bembo created the designs or that he copied them from a printed deck, we can call upon our well-reasoned criteria and choose the simpler theory.

Summary

In summary, I would argue that we possess the hand-painted decks, not because they are the original designs, but because they were carefully preserved as family treasures. The Italian ruling families took care of them as they would any of their treasures. The early wood-block printed decks which likely preceded them would have been crude but more reflective of the symbolism originally intended. When the royal family decided to play the popular game, they commissioned a painter to produce an "expurgated" version. It is likely that this happened at least twice, resulting in the Bembo and Charles VI series. It is difficult to see one of these as copied from the other. It is more likely that they are two independent attempts to produce a luxury deck, both based on a popular model.

Therefore, it cannot be taken as a conclusion based on fact that the hand-painted decks are the original designs of the Tarot. Slightly later, but cruder printed decks may more faithfully reflect the original designs. The crude decks are likely to be faithful reproductions because of the conservatism of card manufacturers, as outlined above. The hand-painted decks were likely kept locked in the family treasure trove and would not have influenced later designs. It is certainly unlikely that the royal decks would have formed the basis for the printed decks which appeared in many places just a few decades later.

Thus, while it may be comforting to think that the frivolous designs of the hand-painted decks were the original and the symbolic printed decks a later addition, this scenario doesn't fit the facts well. The printed decks are more likely candidates for the original designs, and these decks clearly reflect a symbolic system which forms the basis of our studies. This does not mean that the nonsense of the occultist interpretations is acceptable. But it does mean that a serious study of the symbolism of the cards is both acceptable and desirable.

Conclusions

Our lengthy discussion of the theories of origins in Triumphal processions, Grail legends and the concept of there being no symbolism at all, may have seemed a distraction from our main attempt to develop the world-view of the Renaissance. However, it was necessary to show the Renaissance fascination with mysticism, God-union and magic before we could place these theories into perspective. In large part, these theories reflect a transposition of the modern, skeptical, scientific mindset into the Renaissance. They are likely

theories of origin for the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, but unlikely for the Renaissance.

These theories also provided an excuse for developing additional elements of the culture of the Italian Renaissance, including the hated despotic rulers, constant wars, respect for the individual preacher, etc. Thus, they helped to illustrate the complexity of the Renaissance mind and the need to thoroughly immerse oneself into this milieu in order to understand the symbolism of the Tarot. Understanding the individual components of this mindset and how they may have contributed to the Tarot will be the subject of the remaining chapters of the book.

The major elements which I hope the reader takes from this study can be briefly summarized. Renaissance man was preoccupied with the magic, mysticism and enigmatic imagery he found in the late Hellenistic and Roman literature. He synthesized these components with the Christian and Italian elements already a part of his culture. The synthesis was then projected in his art, poetry and, we hypothesize, in the Tarot. He was concerned to synthesize all sources of wisdom into a single, integrated system. Thus, it is unlikely that the explanation of the Tarot symbols will be found in any single source. We must examine a great number of separate sources and look for the way that these disparate sources were integrated in the cards. The remaining studies, therefore, will focus on individual elements or sources, developing the historical background to the point that we can understand how and why each element might have formed a part of the syncretism.

Notes and References

1. Hayes, Baldwin and Cole, *History of Europe* (Macmillan, 1949) p 420.
2. Changes in the influence of the Church, particularly reflected in the struggle between Emperor and Pope, are fully discussed by Ullman, *Medieval Foundations of Renaissance Humanism* (Cornell University Press, 1977).
3. See particularly Leclercq, Vandenbroucke, and Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* (Seabury Press, 1968) pp 506-516.
4. Numerous examples of the obsession with acquiring manuscripts are given by Burckhart, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Harper and Row, 1958). Many scholars placed themselves deeply in debt to accumulate books.
5. Lindberg, *The Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning to the West* IN Lindberg (ed.) *Science in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1978) pp 52-90. We know, for example, that Marquis Leonello d'Este of Ferrara (1441-1450) was a pupil of Guarino of Verona, a Latin and Greek scholar (Chambers [ed.] *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance* (University of South Carolina Press, 1971).
6. This theme has been thoroughly developed in the classic study of Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Macmillan, 1922).
7. The importance of Euhemerus in reconciling the Christian mind to the study of paganism is a major concept developed by Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (Princeton University Press, 1953).
8. An excellent discussion of how the late ancient writers were influenced by magic is provided in the early chapters of Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Norton, 1958).
9. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness* (Dutton, 1969).
10. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, Greece and Rome, Part II (Doubleday, 1962) pp 219 f.
11. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951; trans. Graves). Also see Haight, *Apuleius and His Influence* (Cooper Square, 1963).
12. Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Coelesti Hierarchia* II, 5: cited in Wind, *op. cit.*, pp 12 f.
13. Luke, *Dark Wood to White Rose, a Study of Meanings in Dante's Divine Comedy* (Dove, 1975).
14. Wind, *op. cit.*, p 12.
15. *Ibid.*, p 10.
16. Allen, *Mysteriously Meant, The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).
17. The reader can find ample justification for the submergence of the individual in the *Rule of St. Benedict* (Meisel and del Mastro, trans., Doubleday, 1975), which contains the guiding principles accepted universally by European monasticism.
18. Ullman, *op. cit.*, pp 64 f.
19. Cassierer, Kristeller and Randall, *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (University of Chicago Press, 1948) p 224. To the Renaissance mind, the Cosmos was divided into three parts: The Divine World, the physical world and the "celestial" world between. Since man possessed both body and soul, he was a sort of microcosm, containing within him all of the worlds.
20. Burckhart, *op. cit.*, chapters II to VI.
21. *Ibid.*, p 147.
22. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (Duckworth, 1972) p 170.

23. See, for example, Murray, *The Art of the Renaissance* (Praeger, 1963).
24. Habig (ed.) *St. Francis of Assisi, English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Franciscan Herald, 1973).
25. Stock, *Technology and Economic Progress in the Early Middle Ages* IN Lindberg, *op. cit.*, p 43.
26. Pederson, *Astronomy* IN Lindberg, *op. cit.*, p 305. See also, Debus, *Man and Nature in the Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 1978).
27. Pico della Mirandola, cited in Wind, *op. cit.*, p 111. Sympathetic magic is a logical consequence of the concept of Cosmos. The Cosmos is the expression of God's order and harmony. Seeking the harmony in art or aesthetics or magic was a sort of theology, a seeking for the attributes of God in nature. The beauty in nature was an expression of the Divine. See Heninger, *Touches of Sweet Harmony* (Huntington Library, 1974) pp 5 ff
28. Hansen, *Science and Magic* IN Lindberg, *op. cit.*, p 491.
29. Moakley, *The Tarot Cards* (New York Public Library 1966).
30. Dante, *The Divine Comedy* (Pocket Books, 1969) Paradisio. Canto 1.
31. Hind, *An Introduction to a History of Woodcut* (Dover, 1963) pp 488 f.
32. Seznec, *op. cit.*, pp 110, 157, 161, 165.
33. Moakley, *op. cit.*, pp 95 f.
34. *Ibid.*, p 99.
35. Decker, *Early Tarots: Copies and Counterparts* (Journal of the International Playing-Card Society, IX: 26).
36. The dove appears in several versions of the legend. See, for example, von Eschenbach, *Parzival* (Penguin, 1980) p 240.
37. For example, Evans (trans.) *The High History of the Holy Grail* (Attic Press, 1969) p 80.
38. *Ibid.*, p 82.
39. Walter Map, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (Matarasso, trans., Penguin, 1969) p 12.
40. Gilson, *Les Idees et les Lettres*, cited in Map, *op. cit.*, pp 15 f.
41. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Doubleday, 1957).
42. Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (Penguin, 1969; Cowen, ed.) For an example of Malory's copying, compare Book XVII, Chapters 20-23 with the description of the Grail experience in Map, *op. cit.*
43. Evans, *op. cit.*
44. Wace and Layamon, *Arthurian Chronicles* (Mason, trans., Dutton, 1962) pp 18 f.
45. Eschenbach, *op. cit.*, p 72.
46. Evans, *op. cit.*, p 217.
47. Map, *op. cit.*, p 283.
48. Eschenbach, *op. cit.*, p 392.
49. Evans, *op. cit.*, p 84.
50. Eschenbach, *op. cit.*, p 239.
51. *Ibid.*, p 75.
52. Evans, *op. cit.*, p 193.

53. Map, *op. cit.*, p 279.

54. Eschenbach, *op. cit.*, p 389.

55. Weston, *op. cit.*, p 66.

56. Dummett, *The Game of Tarot* (Duckworth, 1980) p 387. I do not wish to deprecate the exceptional scholarship of Dummett by implying that he has naively rejected any symbolism in the Tarot. However, he does reflect the modern attitude which tends to consider the symbolism of the cards as less than interesting as a subject of scholarly inquiry.

57. Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of the Tarot* (US Games, 1978) pp 126 f.

58. *Ibid.*, p 30.

59. *Ibid.*, p 28.

60. *Ibid.*, pp 28 ff.

61. Dummett, *op. cit.*, pp 38 f and 403.

62. Kaplan, *op. cit.*, pp 35 ff.

63. Since we postulate that the original decks were printed by wood-block, it is interesting to find two works which develop the importance of symbolism in early printing and engraving: Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1968) and Hand, *op. cit.* It is very clear from Chambers, *op. cit.*, that Renaissance patrons of the arts were very concerned with the subject matter of the works they commissioned. They wanted allegories, elaborate fantasies, complex combinations of mythology, and themes based on triumphs or even signs of the zodiac. They were interested in having the paintings present a *program* of symbolism, not just an arbitrary image.

64. Dummett, *op. cit.*, p 402.

65. Burckhart, *op. cit.*, pp 450 ff. The discussion of the popular preachers is based on this section of Burckhart. He regards this as a general phenomenon, a true Italian specialty of the fifteenth century.

66. Cole, *Masaccio and the Art of Early Renaissance Florence* (Indiana University Press, 1980). Cole develops in detail the theme of the painter as craftsman rather than creative artist. Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy* (Oxford, 1940) pp 48 ff. describes the struggle of artists to be viewed as more than manual laborers and imitators throughout the fifteenth century.

67. The correspondence can be found in Chambers, *op. cit.*, from p 140 to 159.

68. Machiavelli, *Florentine History* (Everyman Library, 1976) p 99.

Neoplatonism***The Neoplatonic Revival In The Italian Renaissance***

Having reviewed the broad intellectual patterns which were dominant in the Renaissance, we are now in a position to focus our attention on specific developments of greatest interest to our story. The attitude and thought patterns presented in the third study were universal. We may safely conclude that all educated men in the Renaissance had been exposed to these concepts and had largely accepted them.

When we turn to Neoplatonism, however, we are discussing only one of several lines of philosophical development that occupied the Renaissance scholar. Aristoteleanism and the scholastic philosophy of the University of Paris remained a powerful influence throughout Europe. The Neoplatonic revival which occurred in the Italian City-States did not hold universal sway. But this revival was certainly important within Italy and does contain the main elements of the mindset reflected in the Tarot.

In many respects, Neoplatonism must be considered a minor trend in the history of philosophy in Western culture. It is a minor trend because, following the Renaissance, other forces led philosophy in new directions. The philosophers we discuss in this study were not powerful influences on later thought. This makes our task more difficult since many of the concepts presented here will be unfamiliar to the twentieth century reader.

But Neoplatonism is not a minor philosophy when judged by its influence on the Italian Renaissance. The men we will consider in this study are regarded as the most influential thinkers of their times. Certainly they must stand to the forefront on the criteria of creativity and depth of their thoughts. Thus, we may take them as spokesmen of an important set of concepts which were commonly held among their contemporaries. They were disregarded in later ages, but they were the most respected thinkers of their own age.

Because the philosophical system of Neoplatonism is so unfamiliar to us, it forms a difficult starting point for our studies of detailed components of the Renaissance mindset. Nevertheless, it is the proper place to begin because these thinkers dealt with all of the major ingredients of our story. Thus, we may use their philosophy as a stepping stone to all of the succeeding studies. Much of our exploration will merely present individual components of the Neoplatonic syncretism in greater detail. These philosophers constructed a grand view of reality which included as ingredients: numerology, Kabbalah, Gnosticism, mystery Religions, magic,

astrology and many of the other influences reflected in the Tarot. These writers had a major interest in reconciling a kind of natural or white magic into the major intellectual currents of their day. Thus, we may take their writings as demonstration that concepts now considered "occult" were, in their day, accorded the highest respect and considered the major components of a coherent philosophical picture of reality.

To the occultist reader, this study should demonstrate that there is no reason to search further than the Renaissance to find all of the mystical ingredients of the Tarot. To the modern sceptic, this study should demonstrate that the mystical interpretations suggested by occultists were not superimposed on the Tarot by later interpreters. These mystical and occult ideas were very much in the forefront of intellectual endeavor during the period when the Tarot was designed.

To any reader who is unfamiliar with the Neoplatonic philosophers of the Italian Renaissance, the material in this study will seem incredible. To the twentieth century mind, the synthesis of magic and religion, of medicine and astrology, of paganism and Christianity may seem absurd. But once again I must recommend that he leave aside his modern mindset and attempt to absorb the world-view of the Renaissance man. I promise he will find the effort worthwhile and I hope he will find that the Renaissance mindset revealed in this study is precisely the mindset reflected in the symbols of the Tarot.

Before we begin, one further methodological note is needed. For this and succeeding studies, a particular order of presentation has been adopted which I would like to explain. We know from Chapter Three that the Renaissance was strongly affected by late Hellenistic concepts which may be unfamiliar to the modern reader. Therefore, we will begin each study with an historical survey to introduce the concepts. Following this, we will attempt to demonstrate that these concepts were known and respected during the period when the Tarot was designed. Finally, we will show how each line of thought might have influenced the design of the cards. In this way, I hope to develop an in-depth coverage of each topic with sufficient background in the original ancient authors to allow the reader to judge for himself how each subject might have influenced the Tarot.

Platonic and Neoplatonic Philosophy

If I may be excused the irreverence, I will attempt to summarize a complex school of thought in a few pages of this study. While it is desirable that the reader thoroughly understand the fundamental principles of these ancient philosophers, it is certainly not necessary for our purposes. Therefore, a rather superficial survey will suffice. It is important that the reader understand *what* the philosophers held, it is less important that he understand *why* these

concepts were held to be true. It is certainly not necessary that he agree with them or that he work his way through the complex proofs offered in their defense. It is sufficient that the reader understand that the Neoplatonism revived in the Italian Renaissance was the product of a number of thinkers and developed in the ancient world over a number of centuries. The story must begin, of course, with Plato.

Plato

A simple entry into the complex thought of Plato is afforded by his theory of knowledge. Plato was profoundly struck by the difference between particular objects and the universals of human knowledge. The particular object, e.g., one specific tree, was material. On the other hand, the universal, such as "treeness", was the very antithesis of materiality. It belonged to a different mode of existence, it was non-material. It could not be known through the sense organs, only through the intellect.

Now the problem was how material sensations could ever lead to a non-material concept. Because cause and effect must be similar in some respect, material causes can never result in a non-material effect. Simply sensing a lot of trees would never lead to "treeness". Besides, one did not need to see many trees to understand "treeness". One knows "treeness" along with the very first tree seen. In one of his dialogues, Plato demonstrates that a young boy does not learn geometric principles by abstracting them from material objects. The child seems rather to "remember" the principles, or at least produce them from some source other than material things. In the "Analogy of the Cave" he points out that particular objects are like shadows cast on the wall of a cave. True understanding of the sunlit world outside the cave could never be derived from this source. The existence of the universals in the human mind cannot be explained by particular objects. Their immateriality must be explained by an immaterial cause.

Thus, while the particulars exist in a material world, the universals can only be explained by the existence of a non-material world, the world of Ideas. This world exists as surely as the material world. The world of Ideas, the spiritual world, is structured into a kind of hierarchy with more and more general ideas standing above and antecedent to less general ideas. At the summit of this world is the idea of the One, the Good, the True. This constitutes the Platonic concept of God.

This Platonic concept is obviously very close to the Judeo-Christian God. Many Christian writers embraced the Platonic view of the world. These included influential philosophers such as Augustine², and the majority of the mystics such as Master Eckhart.³ Therefore, the general concepts of Plato were easily reconciled with Christianity and the Renaissance mindset. In fact, the historical

affinity between Platonism and mysticism must have been particularly attractive to the Renaissance.

The sharp distinction that Plato drew between the material and spiritual world was probably the result of the influence of the Mystery Religions on his thought. He himself suggests that he was an initiate and that the experience profoundly affected his view of the world.⁴ The supremacy of the world of the spirit, the world of Ideas, led him to view the life of the philosopher as the ideal life. A life submerged in the contemplation of the Divine Ideas raised man to his greatest heights. It is not surprising that many philosophers and mystics found in Plato the highest expression of their own mystical ideal.

But it was not the purity of Platonic doctrine which reached the Renaissance scholar. The works of Plato were not well known at that time.⁵ By far the most commonly available manuscripts were the work of later commentators who came to be grouped under the title of Neoplatonists: Philo, Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, and Iamblicus.⁶ These authors accepted Plato's view of reality. However, they were less interested in explaining reality and more concerned with the logical consequences of this world-view for man. If this were a true view of reality, what should be man's response? They carried even further the implied relationships to Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions and emphasized ethical and religious aspects of Plato. They were concerned with adapting the categories of Plato's thought to the world of inner experience. They developed a form of natural mysticism which was the philosophical counterpoint to the Mystery Religions.

Plotinus

The giant among these thinkers was Plotinus, born in Egypt about 203 AD. He studied in the active philosophical schools of Alexandria before settling upon Ammonius Saccas as his teacher. He traveled east with an expedition of Emperor Gordian in order to learn Persian philosophy first-hand. When the expedition failed, Plotinus came to Rome, now in his fortieth year. He remained in Rome for the rest of his life and became an influential teacher. He was considered as much a spiritual director as a philosopher and his advice was valued, even by the Emperor. Since Plotinus is the most systematic and logical of the Neoplatonists, we will focus on his teachings as characterizing the philosophy which was rediscovered in the Renaissance.

To Plotinus, the division between the material and spiritual world is absolute. God is absolutely transcendent, the One. He is completely beyond any duality and no attributes conceivable by the human mind can be legitimately applied to Him. Only negative statements can be made: He has no multiplicity, no matter, no limitation, no defect, etc. Any positive statement would imply some limit

and He transcends all limits.

The gap which existed between the One at the summit of reality and man was insurmountable. As a result, man could never acquire any intellectual knowledge of God. One could not even posit that God existed, only that He was not nothing. The supreme philosophical question, then, was how the transcendent God could be considered the cause of the material world. And the complementary question is, how can man reach back across the chasm to reach God. This is basically a religious question, and Plotinus was very much a natural theologian.

Plotinus was also a mystic. He achieved God-union at least four times over a period of seven years.⁷ And he was also a mystagogue, one who could lead others to this supreme experience. Thus, the Renaissance, like the Romans, saw him not only as an intellectual but also as a spiritual teacher. The Renaissance philosophers saw philosophy, not as an end in itself, but as a means for reaching God. Plotinus maintained that man had within himself the power to reach God, no extrinsic force was needed. Man needed only to exercise talents which had been given him by God. The supreme act of union was the consequence of a totally natural ability, latent in every man. Surely, it can be seen how this point of view endeared him to the Renaissance Humanist.

We see in Plotinus at least two points of direct interest to our story of the Tarot. We will return in the next study to the Mystery Religion which form one of the bases underlying all of western occultism, and so we will let the subject lie for the moment. We will also return to the second point of interest, the theory of Egyptian origins of the Tarot in a later study. But we must ask at this point whether it is really so hard to grasp the concept of an Egyptian origin. The Renaissance designers of the cards believed that the essence of the philosophical system they were presenting had been given to them by the Egyptian mystagogues, Plotinus among them. The designers were merely transmitters, the originators were Egyptian.

But to return to the philosophy of Plotinus, his insistence on the absolute transcendence of God left him with the problem of explaining how God could affect the material world. An enormous gap was created between the two poles of reality. Some sort of intermediary was needed to bridge this irreconcilable duality. In Christianity, this intermediary is Christ, the God-Man who partakes of the Divine Life and the material life simultaneously. In this way he is able to reconcile the two poles.

For Plotinus, the intermediary between God and matter was supplied by his theory of emanations. He offers his explanation, fully realizing that God cannot be conceptualized. Thus, his theory takes on the character of a metaphor which is as close as he believes we can get to these transcendent problems. He does not maintain that his explanation can be fully grasped by the intellect. Rather, he

suggests that it must be grasped by intuition. I would suggest that this is very much the attitude adopted by the Tarot designers who chose enigmatic symbols to represent the stages of their hierarchy.

Through emanation, the One produces the Nous (i.e., thought or mind). Just as the mind produces a thought which is distinguishable from the mind which produced it, in just such a way, the One produces the Nous. But this does not imply that the One was changed in any way by this process. The Nous was produced like light emanating from the sun, without diminishing or changing the sun. Plotinus also uses the metaphor of a mirror. The image in the mirror is produced as a separate entity without affecting the object which produces the image.

In the next step of emanation, the Nous produces the World-Soul, the Anima Mundi, just as moonlight is produced by the reflection of the sun's rays from the moon, without affecting either the sun or the moon. The World-Soul is then the direct agent which produces and governs the material world.

Plotinus bridged the gap between the One and matter by a pair of intermediary principles. For the transcendent One to influence matter, the tremendous differences in their modes of being must be reconciled. It seemed logical to achieve this by positing the existence of some form of principle which was less than God but yet greater than matter. There is no compelling reason to come up with only two principles: Nous and Anima Mundi, instead of one or three. Instead of using logic, Plotinus relies upon intuition. Later Neoplatonic philosophers, especially Iamblicus, were to multiply the number of intermediary beings into a complex hierarchy of angels and demons. It would appear that the Tarot designers adopted a similar strategy of increasing the number of intermediaries between the Anima Mundi (World) and man (Magician).

The same system of intermediaries was called upon by Plotinus to explain how human souls were brought into contact with matter. Each soul originated in the Nous and was placed into contact with matter through the agency of the World Soul. But in making contact with matter, the soul does not "leave" the World of Ideas. In the Nous there is no spatial or temporal reference. So while the soul animates the body, it still remains in the world of the spirit, in contact with the One through the Nous.

This concept of soul/body being parallel to spirit/matter is important. Man is a sort of microcosm, and within his nature captures the same principles that explain all of reality. Within himself he unites the World of Ideas and the World of Matter. He contains both poles of the irreconcilable duality, and also contains within himself the means for transcending this duality. The microcosm concept provides the motivation for studying philosophy. In understanding the relationship of the One to matter, one may discover the basic principles that govern the relationship of soul to body. In turn, by studying the inner nature of man, one may learn something of the

nature of all reality.

The concept of the microcosm is also critical to understanding Renaissance attitudes toward magic. Man unites spirit and matter and therefore forms a vital linkage between the heavens and the earth. By operating within his own consciousness, he can affect the external world. By magic rituals, he also can influence the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds. Because he is, in himself, a union of spirit and matter, he can influence all interactions of Spirit and Matter.

There are striking similarities between the theory of emanations and the Tarot. If the cards are viewed in sequence from card twenty-one to card one, there is at least a suggestion of the intermediate steps between the world of spirit, symbolized by the World card, and the world of man, symbolized by the Magician card. It may also be significant that the pivotal eleventh card, intermediate between the extremes, shows a symbol of spirit (woman) making direct contact with a symbol of matter (lion).

The hierarchy generated by the theory of emanations also points out to man the route back to the One. Ethics or natural religion is the process of return, the climb back out of matter by purification. This return is reflected in the theory of virtues offered by Plotinus. At the lowest level are the aesthetic virtues. By appreciation and contemplation of beauty, the mind is led back to the World Soul, the active cause of that beauty. At the next higher level are the rational virtues which exercise the intellect, the highest faculty of man. The rational virtues involve the profound contemplation of truth and the World of Ideas. This contemplation brings man into contact with the Nous, as the intellectual source behind the beauty of the world.

The highest virtue, according to Plotinus, is ecstasy. The transcendent One cannot be reached by any natural exercise of man's mind or will. To reach God-union involves an ecstasy which "takes man out of himself". This is a type of intellectual trance which permits man to be temporarily subsumed into the One. Plotinus describes the experience as an ail-embracing love which seizes the soul in rapture.

The highest goal of man, the highest virtue, was the achievement of a mystical state. Contemplation of the beauties of nature and the intellectual contemplation of the Divine Ideas led to a momentary union with God. Thus, the return to the One is accomplished through the same two intermediary steps of World Soul and Nous. The progress from matter back into the world of the spirit is the theme reflected in the Tarot cards when they are viewed in sequence from one to twenty-one. And now the pivotal card, eleven, can be seen as the spirit freeing itself by achieving dominion over matter, just as the woman controls the lion.

The concept that a mystical state is the highest form of knowledge is a pervasive belief found throughout history from primitive peoples⁸ to modern man.⁹ It is reflected in the rites of the

medicine man¹⁰ and in the writings of modern poets.¹¹ Though it might seem strange to the rational, scientific mind of the twentieth century, it certainly did not seem strange to the Renaissance mind. Throughout the Middle Ages, the mystical ideal was propounded and admired. Neoplatonic mystics such as Master Eckhart³ had tremendous influence on their contemporaries. Even Thomas Aquinas, the greatest synthetic philosopher of the thirteenth century, admitted of ecstasy as the highest state of knowledge, the only state, in fact, in which the essence of God could be known directly.

The great achievement of Plotinus was to develop the concepts of Plato into a philosophical foundation for mysticism. His synthesis was accepted throughout the Middle Ages and Christian mystics have always tended to be Neoplatonists. We will find this a dominant theme in Chapter Seven where we investigate the influence of Christian mysticism on the Tarot designers.

Later Neoplatonists

The application of Plato's synthesis to mysticism reached its zenith in Plotinus. Nevertheless, there was a group of later philosophers and mystagogues who developed the ideas further and who were known and influential in the Renaissance. Therefore, we must invest some brief period in covering these lesser thinkers.

As we mentioned in the introduction to this study, we must understand the mindset of the ancient world if we are to comprehend what the Renaissance discovered and accepted. The key to understanding the fifteenth century is the third century. Over the sequence of studies, we will develop, therefore, an increasingly complex picture of the ancient world. Several introductory comments need to be made at this point to help explain the strange amalgam of philosophy, religion and mysticism which we find in the later Neoplatonists.

The third century can be described as a period of anxiety. The first cracks began to show in the strong armor of Rome. Rome was still supreme in the political sphere but the emperors were weaker and the empire more corrupt. The weakening of the Pax Romanum led to a universal insecurity. This insecurity had long existed in the ancient world and was reflected in the proliferation of Mystery Religions which held the promise of a higher life for man. There were also Gnostic and Hermetic systems which promised secret knowledge leading to salvation.

Combined with this insecurity was a mood of syncretism, of synthesis. Beginning with the conquests of Alexander and continuing under the dominion of Rome, safe travel was guaranteed among all the cultures of the civilized world. Local ideas were mixed and there was a pervading interest in finding an underlying unity to the diversity of beliefs. Thus, we see strange bedfellows like magic and religion, philosophy and mysticism, astrology and theology. This

syncretism is obvious in all of the late Neoplatonists and was readily accepted by their Renaissance readers.

The first of the Neoplatonic writers we must consider is Porphyry. Most of the Latin writers, such as Augustine, saw Plotinus through the spectacles of Porphyry. His real importance was that he popularized Plotinus. Nevertheless, he did add new components into the Neoplatonic syncretism which influenced later writers.

Porphyry added Neo-Pythagoreanism to the synthesis. Later, his student Iamblicus was to write a biography of Pythagoras, and apparently Porphyry also wrote such a work which has not survived. Neo-Pythagoreanism was an unabashedly mystical system which relied heavily on numerology and number mysticism. As we will see in a later study, these concepts were communicated through the Middle Ages in the texts used to teach mathematics. Porphyry's contribution was to popularize this number mysticism and to combine it with the other elements of the Neoplatonic system.

Porphyry was more of a religious writer than Plotinus, being directly concerned with morals and ascetics. But his religious approach was thoroughly synthesized with magic. Plotinus maintained that man could reach God-union through philosophic contemplation. Porphyry agreed that contemplation was necessary, but too difficult for the common man. Therefore, he introduced the practice of theurgy, a system of ritual purification based on a magical view of the cosmos.¹²

The incorporation of ritual magic was carried one step further by Iamblicus. After studying under Porphyry, he returned to found a school in his native Syria. Iamblicus maintained that philosophical contemplation was not sufficient to arrive at God-union. Only ritual magic could achieve this result. Thus, theurgy was made superior to philosophy.

Iamblicus also continued the incorporation of Neo-Pythagoreanism begun by Porphyry. He wrote several works dealing with mathematics. He also wrote *De Mysteriis* which portended to explain the philosophic foundations of the Mystery Religions. Although Iamblicus seems more magician than philosopher, his writings were very influential in the East, just as Porphyry was in the West.

All three of the Neoplatonists we have considered, Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblicus, dealt explicitly with allegorical interpretation. Iamblicus even derived principles for its proper application. Allegory was felt to be the proper method for communicating higher wisdom in a form that could be grasped by the intuition, rather than the intellect. It was a form of communication for the incommunicable. And it was precisely this concept which was picked up by the Renaissance, and very possibly by the designers of the Tarot.

Following the death of Iamblicus in 326, Neoplatonism continued to be taught and to influence the intellectual world of the Mediterranean. An influential school was maintained in Athens from about

432 to 529. A second center in Alexandria reached its peak in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. It ceased to operate in 641 when the Moslems captured Alexandria.¹³ These schools influenced many of the late Latin writers available in the Renaissance.

Thus it was that the philosophy of Plato was presented to the Renaissance through the eyes of mystics. The goal of human life was the mystical journey, the flight of the alone to the Alone.¹⁴ In the eyes of modern interpreters this is very different from the original concepts of Plato. But in the eyes of the Renaissance, the gold of Plato had been refined and perfected by these authors.¹⁵ The Renaissance embraced the idea of a natural mysticism which developed an innate talent of man through magic. This fit nicely with the Renaissance love of nature and proclivity toward magic as the proper response to the study of the beauties and wonders of nature.

The mystical philosophy of Neoplatonism was, then, neatly preadapted to the world view of the Renaissance scholar. It was ancient and mysterious. It was developed during the Golden Age of Rome and could therefore be regarded as the highest achievement of ancient wisdom. It satisfied his spiritual and moral aspirations in a manner totally consistent with his emphasis on man's innate abilities. It was a natural process that began with an appreciation of the beauty of nature and ended with the practice of ritual magic. It is easy to see why the scholar grasped this philosophy to his bosom.

Communication of Neoplatonism to the Renaissance

Our next step must be to show how Neoplatonism was communicated to the Italian Renaissance. Only in this way can we argue that the concepts were known and accepted by the designers of the Tarot.

When the Renaissance scholar rediscovered Neoplatonism,¹⁶ he recognized many themes that had been discussed by the Medieval mystics. This was because Neoplatonism had become the philosophy of the Christian mystics.¹⁷ Augustine was a Neoplatonist, feeling that he had been led to Christianity through his study of Plotinus. Porphyry's *Isagogue*, a commentary on Aristotle, was translated into Latin by Boethius and was influential in philosophical disputes during the Middle Ages. Many of the Franciscan theologians, such as Bonaventure, were Neoplatonists. Thus, the Renaissance inherited many Neoplatonic concepts through the Christian mystical tradition.

The primary source for Neoplatonism was the manuscripts which were collected throughout the early Renaissance. The late Latin and Greek authors of these manuscripts reflected the philosophies of their times and the most influential of these was Neoplatonism. Thus, the Renaissance found Neoplatonism throughout the ancient manuscripts which it regarded as containing the highest wisdom.

As a result of their own mystical tradition and the manuscripts they valued, the Renaissance had ready access to Neoplatonism and ample reason to accept it.

The intellectual heritage of Plotinus and the mystics who followed him was not only adopted by the Renaissance, but was subjected to further development and elaboration. While they accepted the philosophical framework in toto, they were not content with merely accepting it. The ideas underwent further development, primarily by being melded into a number of parallel intellectual, mystical, and magical trends of thought. Thus, a continuance of the syncretism of Hellenism was also characteristic of the Renaissance.

Early Renaissance Neoplatonism

Before we look at the full flowering of Neoplatonism in the mid and late fifteenth century, there are a number of preliminary efforts which must be considered. The Florentine Academy did not burst into being from nothing. It had some antecedents which deserve our attention.

Renaissance Neoplatonism really began with Petrarch.¹⁸ Petrarch considered himself a Platonist, but knew Plato only through the writings of Neoplatonists like Augustine. Petrarch advocated a life of solitude in which the rational soul remained unperturbed by the shocks of circumstances. While not a mystic, he did advocate the love of nature and solitude and the practice of philosophical contemplation.

Between Petrarch (1374) and the Florentine Academy (1483) interest in Neoplatonism expanded. Manuscripts continued to be discovered and some knowledge of Greek was developed. Marsiglio, a friend of Petrarch and an Augustinian monk, formed an intellectual circle concerned with Neoplatonic studies. This is probably the first of the Neoplatonic Academies. This group was particularly interested in using allegorical interpretation to delve into the hidden mystical meanings of mythology. Other early Renaissance philosophers, such as Coluccio Salutati, show the growing influence of Neoplatonism.

Early in the fifteenth century, the example of Marsiglio was followed by others such as Leto's group in Rome and Pontano's circle in Naples. These groups had increasing access to early manuscripts and their information about the late Hellenistic world was far better than their predecessors.

Thus, the stage was set when the Greek delegates arrived for the Council of Ferrara in 1438. The Council remained in Ferrara for six months then moved to Florence and finally to Rome. The purpose of the Council was to explore a reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christianity. Largely because of the growing respect for Greek learning, Renaissance Italy entertained the notion of reuniting the Christian world. But from this point of view the Council was a failure. However, the presence of these Greek scholars in Italy was to have great impact on Italian philosophy.

As might be expected, the Greek church of Constantinople had sent its finest scholars to represent it at the Council. The scholars brought any manuscripts with them and offered to the Renaissance scholar an opportunity to learn enough Greek to translate many of

the other manuscripts they had collected. Because of their knowledge of late Hellenistic philosophy, these scholars were to have a profound effect. Many of them remained in Italy. Bessarion was reconciled with the Roman church and later raised to the status of a cardinal. Others remained in Italy, not because they were reconciled with Rome, but because Constantinople was overrun by the Turks in 1453.

In addition to their activities at the Council, the Greek scholars contributed directly to the philosophical writings of the Renaissance. Besarion wrote a treatise against the cullumniators of Plato, presenting well-reasoned arguments for the acceptance of Neoplatonism. Pletho maintained that Proclus and Porphyry were the surest interpreters of Plato. He was also very interested in the more occult aspects of late Neoplatonism.²⁰

Because of the historical records associated with the Greek delegates to the Council, we are able to establish that Neoplatonic thought was readily available in Northern Italy. The timing of their coming and subsequent influence is precisely correct to connect them with the original design of the Tarot. The intellectual circles associated with the courts of Ferrara and Florence had direct access to Neoplatonism at precisely the right time. There seems sufficient circumstantial evidence, therefore, to maintain at least the possibility of a Neoplatonic influence on the designers of the Tarot.

The Florentine Academy and Marsilio Ficino

If we were to adhere strictly to the rules of evidence, our story of the influence of Renaissance Neoplatonism on the design of the Tarot would have to end here. If current opinion is correct in placing the origins of the Tarot during the 1440's or slightly earlier, then the developments which we are about to present would have occurred too late to influence the design.

Nevertheless, unless we look at these Italian Neoplatonists, we will be unable to see how the ancient concepts were assimilated into the unique character of Italian culture of the fifteenth century. The problem is that the earlier Italian academies left us very few writings. Therefore, we must rely on these later and more prolific writers as expressing the synthesis of Neoplatonism and Renaissance culture. We have no direct evidence on how the Tarot designers might have integrated Neoplatonism into their worldview. But we can look at the writings of their immediate descendents and take them as reflecting the same attitude and including the same elements of the synthesis. With this in mind, we will proceed to examine the flowering of Neoplatonism in the Florentine Academy.

Marsilio Ficino was born in Figlione near Florence in 1433, the son of Cosimo de' Medici's physician. His intellectual capabilities and creativity were evident even at an early age. Therefore, when one of the Greek delegates, Pletho, convinced Cosimo to found a Platonic Academy, the opportunity was presented to Ficino. In 1462,

Cosimo offered him an estate in Careggi near Florence and invited him to found a school of philosophy.²¹ Thus began the Florentine Academy, named after Plato's own school in ancient Greece. It rapidly became the center of philosophic speculation for the Renaissance.

Ficino was a complete Renaissance man, subject to all of the influences we identified in Chapter Three. In addition to Plotinus, he was influenced by a number of writers of late antiquity. Among these were apocryphal writings attributed to Zoroaster, Orpheus and Pythagoras. Ficino firmly believed that these writings of the third century and later, were actually of far greater antiquity.²² Through these writings he, like the Neoplatonists who preceded him, was exposed to late Neoplatonism with its Gnosticism, Mysteries and Magic. Ficino's Neoplatonism is particularly clear in his "Theologia Platonica".²³ Here he describes the hierarchy of being and the human soul as the nexus between the higher and lower spheres of nature.

Ficino was particularly enamoured of the writings of Hermes Trismagistus, an Egyptian Gnostic writer who was considered the greatest mystagogue of the ancient world.²⁴ Ficino's world is a world of magical and mysterious forces which man must call into play for his own spiritual development. Philosophy was not a matter of idle speculation. It was the study and *practice* of the wisdom of the ancients. The intellect had been given to man in order to lead him back to God.

Therefore, Ficino was anxious that this Academy be not only a center of learning but a kind of Neoplatonic spiritual community where intellectual activities and ritual magic would combine to lead man to God-union. He accepted that the highest purpose of man was to achieve the ecstatic God-union described by Plotinus. The contemplative life was a gradual ascent of the soul toward higher degrees of truth through the rational virtues. All other modes of knowledge were viewed as preparations for this end. The method employed to reach God-union was a combination of an intellectual life devoted to exploring reality and the practice of magic which formed a type of liturgy for this natural theology. For Ficino, magic was an integral part of the contemplative life. In this, he reflects the importance of theurgy introduced by Porphyry and Iamblicus. And this combination of Neoplatonic world-view and magical practice seems also to be reflected in the Tarot.

Ficino saw the universe as a unity. Linked by the Emanations, both material and spiritual worlds formed a single dynamic unity. Within this paradigm, all parts of the universe affected all other parts and astrology was a logical element of any intellectual synthesis of reality. Stars and man formed parts of the same unity, the same natural system of mutual influences. Of particular importance were the planets, named after and attributed to Roman gods. Each planet carried with it a specific type of influence related to the god.

The astrological theories present in Ficino's thought also appear

to be carried over into the Tarot cards and are often mentioned by modern interpreters.²⁵ In addition to the obvious references to Moon, Sun and Stars, all the planets known at the time seem to be represented in the cards (See Chapter Thirteen), even though authors disagree as to the proper attributions.

The influence of the planets extended throughout nature. Plants were also under the influence of specific planets.²⁶ This was merely another logical extension of Sympathetic Magic. As we saw in Chapter Three, resemblances in nature were taken as clues to magical applications. If a plant's leaves resembled liver tissue, God intended it to be used in treating liver ailments. Since the universe was a dynamic unity, certain plants were linked by a symbolic resemblance to certain planets and carried within themselves the attributes of that planet. Thus, Venus plants were soothing and could be used to extract love potions. Mars plants were burning and Saturn plants were deadly. Precious stones were not excluded from attribution, nor were colors, perfumes and other natural objects.²⁷

The Renaissance scholar considered sympathetic magic as a logical consequence of the study of nature. The basic principle can be stated simply: Like affects like.²⁸ In other words, there is always a similarity between cause and effect. When dogs breed, they produce dogs, not horses. If one wishes to produce a specific effect, one seeks a causative factor that resembles the effect desired. To produce a fever, one chooses a red, spicy plant, since these factors symbolize heat and Mercury. If sympathetic magic seems strange to us, it is only because we have lost the rich symbolism which permeated the Medieval and Renaissance culture. But we must not forget that atmosphere of symbolism was very much in the forefront when the Tarot was being designed.

Ficino also placed great reliance on talismans. The talisman was an image into which certain powers had been instilled by magical operation. Because of the obvious connection between these magical images and the Tarot symbols, we will have occasion to return to this subject several times in later studies. For our present discussion, it is only important to realize the connection between imagery and Neoplatonic theurgy. The talisman and, perhaps, the Tarot symbol, were not simply pictures. They somehow embodied the Divine Idea they symbolized.²⁹

The contemplation of a symbolic image was not simply an intellectual exercise. Use of the image was effective in producing an effect since the image "focused" the power of the Divine Idea. We see this Neoplatonic concept commonly in interpretations of the Tarot. Contemplation of the symbols is a magical operation, having not only an effect on the meditator, but a magical operation on the world. Thus, the suit of swords not only symbolized the element of air, but could actually be used to produce powerful winds.³⁰ It is precisely this Neoplatonic concept which we saw advocated by the Golden Dawn adepts in Chapter Two. The magician would meditate

on the Tarot image and use that as a guide to focus and control astral influences.

But to acquire this magic force, the talisman must be activated by ritual operations which had as their purpose the calling down of the Divine Idea into the image. Man has within himself this power because man is intermediate between matter and spirit. He alone possesses both material body and spiritual soul and his soul remained directly associated with the *Nous*. Therefore, man can serve as a causal link between the World of Ideas and the world of particular objects. This concept appears to be represented in the Magus card which shows one arm uplifted with a magic wand, like a lightning rod, drawing down the powers from above. The other arm is lowered, focusing the power into the natural world.

Ficino based all of his magical concepts upon the theory of the "spiritus". Spiritus is a kind of spiritual ether which permeates all of reality and is the medium through which Divine influences are communicated. This is the mechanism by which the *Anima Mundi* governs the world. Man can both receive and influence this spiritus since he is in direct communication with it by means of his spiritual soul. This recalls once again the Fortitude card, lying midway between the World (*Anima Mundi*) and man (*Magus*). This initial contact between the spiritual woman and the material lion represents the Spiritus, the actual point of contact between the two worlds. The Tarot card seems to represent something like the Renaissance Neoplatonic concept as enunciated by Ficino.

Ficino linked the rituals involved with calling down the Divine Ideas into talismans with elements derived from the Mystery Religions. In particular, we know that both Ficino and Pico della Mirandola studied and performed the Orphic hymns.³¹ A product of the Orphic mysteries, these hymns were considered to be among the most ancient of human works. Apochryphally attributed to Orpheus himself, they are full of enigmatic language thought to refer to the most profound secrets of antiquity. In chanting these hymns, though they did not understand them, they supposed that they were activating and focusing the forces of the universe. These forces were effective even though the performer did not understand the magical cause-effect relationships involved.

Thus, Ficino represents in many respects, the epitome of the Renaissance Magus. Immersed in the life of the spirit, the life of Neoplatonic philosophy, he was an example of the heights and breadth which the human mind could encompass. Following the Plotinian principle that the rational virtues led to God-union, Ficino pursued a life of the intellect in order to apply his understanding to the spiritual benefit of himself and his fellow-man. Immersed in the Neoplatonic writers, he saw philosophy as the servant of magic. Magic was the actual application of the principles. The final dignity of man was as Magus, as magical operator. Encompassing within his nature both spirit and matter, he could control the

influence of one world upon the other. He was also capable, though his intellect and his soul of making direct communication with God, of becoming the Divine man.³²

Throughout my presentation of Ficino I have tried to stick closely to the attitudes he enunciated rather than to unique contributions he made. The attitudes were widespread and can reasonably be expected to represent the mindset of earlier Neoplatonic scholars. We know that Ficino took most of his cosmology and vocabulary directly from the earlier intellectual circles.³³ Thus, we are probably justified in regarding him simply as the culmination of a trend which was present earlier and available to the designers of the Tarot. We can safely consider Ficino as a spokesman of concepts and attitudes that had their origins in the earlier part of the century. In short, he reflected the mindset of the Renaissance intellectual, the mindset shared by the Tarot designers.

Pico della Mirandola

It may be stretching our assumptions a bit far to include one more philosopher, Pico della Mirandola. He was a count of Mirandola³⁴ born in 1463. He was presented with the finest Humanist education available in his time. He studied canon law at Bologna and Aristotelean philosophy at Ferrara and Padua. In Padua, he was a student of Elia del Medigo, a Jewish philosopher. He was a frequent visitor to Florence and was well acquainted with the philosophy of Ficino and the Academy.

In 1486, Pico published a series of nine hundred theses which he proposed to defend in public debate. These theses are a prime source of our understanding of his philosophic synthesis. The heretical nature of some of these propositions brought him to the attention of the papacy which resulted in the condemnation of the theses and his arrest. Upon his release, he returned to Florence where he lived out the remainder of his short life, dying in 1494 at the age of thirty-one.

To attempt to summarize the philosophy of Pico is as futile as capturing the wind in a bottle. His prominence was due to the fact that he synthesized within his system the full scope of the intellectual world of the Renaissance. As a result, his writings are a virtual encyclopedia of the elements which might have contributed to the design of the Tarot. If it were not for his late date of birth, we might even be tempted to suggest Pico as the designer. The attitudes he reflects in his writings are those we would expect of the Tarot designers. But this is merely because Pico was an eloquent spokesman for the syncretism of his times. Thus, Pico serves our purposes well if we hypothesize that he was an accurate reporter who put into writing the major points of this Renaissance synthesis.

We must continue to keep foremost in our minds that magic and mysticism were not merely tolerated in the Italian Renaissance. They

formed a significant component of their syncretism. The educated man was well acquainted with the ideas expressed by Pico. If his expressions were in serious disagreement with the dominant currents of thoughts, the educated reader would have been well aware of the disagreement and Pico would have been challenged. The strongest evidence we have that Pico accurately reflects the mindset of the times is the popularity and respect with which he was regarded in his own time. It seems unreasonable that he would have held the high regard of the scholars of his day, themselves steeped in magic and Neoplatonism, if he were not an accurate reporter of these traditions.

Pico was perhaps the most eloquent spokesman of Humanism in his age. His essay, "On the Dignity of Man" is considered a classic statement of this ennobling vision of man. Along with Ficino, Pico embodied the ideal of the Magus, the educated man steeped in mysticism and magic. He firmly believed that there was no force in heaven or earth which the magician could not control once he understood it.

For Pico, the highest attainment of human life was God-union, achieved through the Plotinian ecstasy, which he called "enthusiasm". Enthusiasm was a loss of consciousness of the body, a feeling of being carried away from this life, into the life of the spirit, into the world of the Divine Ideas. This loss of identification with the body was a kind of mystical death — a separation from material existence. There was a sense of oneness with the ultimate reality. This identification with the One was a death in the sense of annihilation of the individual ego. This seems very much the message suggested by the Death card of the Tarot.

There was a sense of giving up of the self in order to be united with the One. This self-surrender, combined with rapturous pleasure, caused Pico to agree with Plotinus in identifying ecstasy with physical love. In both, the self is sacrificed in an effort to become one with the beloved. Pico's enthusiasm was a self-annihilation seen as a supreme form of love.³⁵

Thus, the closest analogy to "enthusiasm" would be an experience of death combined with the ecstasy of physical love. Pico believed that this was well known to the ancient world and hidden in representations of the Greek god of love, Eros. I would like to pursue this implication in some detail. It will help us understand how the Renaissance mind applied allegorical interpretation to the ancient wisdom it discovered. It will give us insight into the detail with which the Magus interpreted symbolism. It will be of immediate interest in outlining all of the possible connotations which the Renaissance designer might have brought to the Tarot cards. It will illustrate that we should never expect to find a single level of meaning in any Renaissance symbol, much less the Tarot cards.

Eros is the god of Love. Symbolically, love is the force which causes an attraction between opposites. If reality is basically dual,

then love is the "stuff" which holds the universe together. Superficially, Eros symbolizes the physical attraction between man and woman. On a second level, he symbolizes the attraction which holds body and soul (i.e., spirit and matter) together. On a third level, love forms the linkage between man, as representative of the material world, and the Transcendent One. On the deepest level, Eros symbolizes the ecstasy of God-union. Plotinus uses the union of lovers as a metaphor for the soul's union with the One.³⁶ Eros symbolizes all of these levels simultaneously. The symbol is suitably enigmatic because the masses see Eros on a mundane level and never suspect the deeper meanings.

The allegory continues with the details of the symbol. Eros is depicted as blind or blindfolded. Exoterically, this means that the lover is blind to the defects of the beloved. Esoterically, blind love refers to the rapture during which the mystic loses all sense perception. Proclus insinuated this when he said that the highest mysteries must be seen without eyes and heard without ears.³⁷

Exoterically, the bow and arrow carried by Eros refer to the lover being "smitten with love". Esoterically, Pico suggests that love is closely associated with death. Eros had long been used on tomb images. Hermes Trismagistus stated that man must recognize that he is immortal and that the cause of death was love.³⁸ In other words, the arrow of love is a deadly arrow which symbolizes the mystical death inherent in ecstatic union, the death to the ego. The arrow of love appears in the life of the mystic, Teresa of Avila, who had a vision of an angel piercing her heart with an arrow, resulting in ecstasy.³⁹

Thus, the innocent, blindfolded cherub, shooting his arrows willy-nilly through mankind was seen by the Renaissance as a symbol of God-union. Love was the fundamental bond between God and man.⁴⁰ Ecstatic enthusiasm, analogous to the ecstasy of physical love, allowed the mystic to achieve God-union. Thus, love was a kind of voluntary death.⁴¹

If Eros symbolizes the love-death of ecstasy, and if such an elaborate allegorical interpretation was proposed by the greatest thinkers of the Renaissance, then a long and close look must be taken at the Lovers card of the Tarot. In many representations, the man is offered a choice of chaste or mundane love. Exoterically, he should choose chaste love in order to progress on his spiritual path. Esoterically, the more earthly lover is more likely to lead to ecstasy. Frequently, the cherub hovering above the trio seems to be aiming at the bare-foot, passionate lover. Viewed within the allegories prevalent in the Renaissance, the Lovers card represents an invitation to ecstatic union with God. It offers a simplistic meaning to the unprepared mind, while leading the initiated viewer to a deeper significance.

This diversion into a detailed analysis of the Eros symbol is important for our overall understanding of the Tarot. Elaborate, mystical and magical interpretations of symbols were not something

invented in the imagination of occultist Tarot interpreters. Such elaborate interpretations occupied the best minds of the Renaissance. They took symbolism and its multiple layers of meaning very seriously indeed. Augustine had said that the most hidden meanings were the sweetest.⁴² Dante tells his readers to search for truths hidden beneath the surface.⁴³ Joachim of Flora felt that he could express his mystical ideas better in enigmatic imagery than in plain words.⁴⁴ Thus, allegorical interpretations of the Tarot are not only defensible but can be shown to be an important method of communication during the period when the Tarot was designed.

Just as Pico found hidden mystical meanings in classical representations of Eros, so he applied allegorical interpretation to all of the ancient wisdom to which he was exposed. Since he felt this was the appropriate method for expressing mystical knowledge, he also used enigmatic symbols throughout his own writings. The highest doctrines must be kept safe from the common herd by the use of the knots of riddles.⁴⁵ This propensity for the use of the "knots of riddles" is certainly striking in the Tarot images. To the occultist this should demonstrate that there is no reason to seek beyond the Renaissance to justify mystical interpretation of the cards. To the modern sceptic it should demonstrate that the Renaissance designers were inclined to hide many layers of meaning behind their innocent symbols, and that among these layers we should fully expect to find the mystical and magical connotations suggested by the occultists.

For Pico, the writings of the ancients, as well as the world about him, were full of veiled references to the powers of magic. Magic was simply the proper establishment of the links between heaven and earth. This natural magic was in no way in conflict with the intellectual life or with Christian ideals. White magic was the natural consequence of a deep contemplation of nature and the wisdom of the ancients. According to Porphyry, Magus means interpreter or worshipper of the divine in the Persian tongue.⁴⁶

Pico also included talismans and memory arts into his complex system. He was renowned in his time for his prodigious memory.⁴⁷ The complex study of the art of memory and its relationship to the Tarot will occupy us again in Chapter Fourteen. Our interest at present is to show that the Renaissance Magus was intent on incorporating all aspects of human knowledge into his grand synthesis.

The calling down of the Divine Ideas into a talisman or memory image went to the core of Pico's understanding of magic itself. The Magus weds lower things to the powers of higher things.⁴⁸ It is this concept of uniting the lower with the higher, matter with spirit, which we must develop more fully at this point. This is of particular interest because the union of opposites is an important theme in the Tarot. We find this same emphasis in Pico's writings.

The balanced union of opposites is evident in Pico's theory of

beauty. Beauty is a concordant discord,⁴⁹ a blending of opposite elements. Beauty cannot subsist without contrast. The reconciliation of opposites is implied in numerous Renaissance works of art, such as Botticelli's *Mars and Venus*. From the union of Mars and Venus comes a daughter named Harmony. Harmony or balance is the core of beauty. Is there perhaps a suggestion of this same idea in the juxtaposition of the Lovers, Chariot and Justice? Is it suggested that the balance (Justice) of Love (Lovers) and War (Chariot) is required for further progress?

Balance was the key to much of the esoteric moral theology of Pico. Discipline and pleasure must be kept in balance. The union of martial spirit and gentleness was at the core of the concept of Chivalry. Art was the harmonious balance of light and dark. Mysticism was the reconciliation of all duality in an ecstatic experience of union with the One. In this synthesis, Pico drew upon the numerology of Pythagoras. Though we will return to numerology in Chapter Twelve, we can indicate here that Pico accepted a type of philosophizing through numbers which reached its highest significance in seeing the Two collapse into the One at the summit of reality.

The union of opposites as a symbol for mystical experience can be found throughout the literature of the world.⁵¹ The essence of the idea is that one must stop trying to reach God by sense perception and intellectual knowledge. These forms of knowledge require duality. Knowledge of God must be an immediate experience of unity, not an understanding requiring a subject and an object. Thus, the coincidence of opposites is another expression for God-union. In this union, all duality is subsumed. The union of opposites is only achievable by leaving behind all human modes of thought and being caught up into the One. In this way, the union of opposites, the ecstatic union and the theory of beauty are reconciled and synthesized in the philosophy of Pico. This balance and subsuming of the opposite poles also seems to be hinted at in the Tarot.

But there is an additional element of Pico's kaleidoscopic philosophy which must retain us. From his Jewish teachers he acquired a knowledge of Kabbalah. Unlike other Renaissance scholars who occupied themselves with Hebrew in a superficial manner, Pico delved deeply into Jewish mysticism. His "Heptaplus" was an allegorical and Kabbalistic interpretation of the Mosaic books.⁵² Pico wove the concepts of Kabbalah deeply into his view of the world and included them among his nine hundred theses. The complex concepts of Kabbalah, which will occupy us again in Chapter Ten, fitted in nicely with the other elements of his system. Kabbalah is, in essence, a combination of Judaism with Gnosticism and Neoplatonism. This combination is evident in the complex hierarchy of the "Faces of God" which are interposed between the transcendent God and man. Most of the Kabbalistic interpretations of the Tarot are based on identifying the cards as paths between the stages

of this hierarchy. Magic and an ecstatic union resulting from the coincidence of opposites are also important concepts in Kabbalah.

Conclusions

If it seems to the reader that we have lingered long over the complicated lines of thought in the Renaissance Neoplatonists, it is because of the importance of these philosophers to our story. So many lines of circumstantial evidence converge here, that it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that it was within this milieu that the Tarot originated. Though Ficino and Pico were not the originators of the deck, nevertheless, they were the eloquent spokesmen for the complex syncretism found in the Tarot cards. Most of the lines of interpretation suggested for the Tarot can be found in the ancient Neoplatonists and were faithfully carried into the Renaissance by these philosophers. The amalgam seems strange to us but represented the highest wisdom to them.

The Renaissance Neoplatonists included in their synthesis virtually all of the lines of thought and modes of interpretation which have ever been suggested for the Tarot. The only real exception seems to be alchemy. Although alchemy was known to be prevalent in Italy during the preceding century, neither Ficino nor Pico seems to have turned their attention to this topic and its obvious relevance to the rest of their system. But we will see in a later study that even this strange science may have contributed to the mind-set of the Tarot designers.

In many respects, our elaboration of the Italian Renaissance Neoplatonists forms a central pivot in our total presentation. If a Renaissance origin of the Tarot is believable, it is because virtually every theme, implication and interpretation found in later interpreters, especially the French and English occultists, is found right here in the works of these philosophers. They wove together into a synthetic world-view, all of the divergent lines of mystical and magical thought that are found in the Tarot. And they wove their picture well, showing that all of the themes are consistent with a basic system of thought prevalent in their day. Thus, our argument to the occultist reader that the Tarot is a child of the Renaissance is essentially complete. There is no need to postulate any origin longer ago or farther away. All of the lines of ancient wisdom they wish to find in the cards can be nicely explained by a Renaissance origin. The remaining chapters will focus on specific elements of the total picture, weave the cloth more tightly and tie up loose ends. But they deal with details. The tapestry is essentially complete in the philosophers of the fifteenth century Italian Renaissance.

Our arguments to the modern skeptical reader are also complete. It is not reasonable to assume that all of the "occultist nonsense" was superimposed on the Tarot by later interpreters. All of this

"nonsense" was considered high wisdom by the Italian Renaissance. They delighted in complex, multiple-layered allegorical interpretations and used this approach in other examples of their poetry and art. If we are to understand the symbolism of the Tarot, then we must accept that the Renaissance mindset was a complex syncretism of many lines of thought which would be considered occult today. This is not to say that the occultist interpretations are correct. It is certainly possible to construct a complex, multi-layered and *incorrect* allegorical interpretation. At the same time, the evidence in this chapter seems to lead to the logical conclusion that such complex interpretations *should* be applied to the Tarot. For these were the interpretations which occupied the Renaissance intellectual. Is it reasonable to assume that the Renaissance constructed complex allegorical interpretations of Eros and then totally ignored this approach when the Lovers card was designed? Is it reasonable to assume a simplistic meaning to the symbols when we know that the Renaissance scholar delighted in hiding his meaning behind such simple symbols?

Thus, our consideration of the Neoplatonists forms a keystone in our total presentation. It shows the basic factors of allegory, syncretism, mysticism and magic which are needed to interpret the Tarot. It argues for hidden meanings and mystical innuendos. It argues against reducing the Tarot to any one of the multiple lines of thought which converged on the Renaissance. Indeed, it forms a strong base on which we can depend as we continue our explorations. It justifies these explorations because our study of Ficino and Pico shows that all of these lines of thought came together in these spokesmen of Renaissance syncretism.

Notes and References

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2. Augustine, *The City of God* (Penguin, 1972).
3. Blakney (ed.) *Meister Eckhart* (Harper and Row, 1941).
4. Plato hints at his familiarity with the Mysteries in *Meno* (pp 359 f) and *Phaedo* (p 52) IN Hamilton and Cairns, *op. cit.*
5. Mascia, *A History of Philosophy* (St Anthony Guild, 1962) pp 255 f.
6. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (Oxford, 1962), Plotinus, *Enneads* (MacKenna, trans., Faber and Faber, 1956), Porphyry *On Abstinence from Animal Food* (Centaur, 1965), Proclus, *Elements of Theology* (Dodds, trans., Oxford, 1963). For Iamblicus, see Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* Volume I, Part II (Doubleday, 1962) pp 219 ff.
7. Katsaros and Kaplan, *The Western Mystical Tradition* (College and University Press, 1969) p 145.
8. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (Harper and Row, 1958).
9. Laski, *Ecstasy* (Greenwood Press, 1968). See also Sargent, *The Mind Possessed* (Lippincott, 1974).
10. Eliade, *Shamanism* (Princeton University Press, 1964).
11. See Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Penguin, 1959) and Eliot, *Four Quartets* (Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1943).
12. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (Duckworth, 1972) p 3.
13. *Ibid.*, p 138.
14. Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI, 9.
15. Santillana, *The Age of Adventure, The Renaissance Philosophers* (New American Library, 1956) p 13.
16. The Renaissance believed that the Neoplatonic writers were presenting an accurate picture of Plato. The works of Plato himself were not well known at that time. The *Timaeus* was available in a fourth century Latin translation by Chalcidius. The *Meno* and *Phaedo* were translated into Latin by Henricus Aristippus in the twelfth century. These dialogues are among the most mystical of Plato's writings (see footnote 4 above), which may account for their being translated in the first place. There were a few additional texts translated by Leonardo Bruni in 1404 and Ambrose Traversari brought manuscripts from Constantinople in 1423. With these few exceptions, the Renaissance knew Plato only through the Neoplatonists.
17. The dependence of Medieval mystics on Plotinus and the Neoplatonic philosophers is emphasized by many authors, among them Furse, *Mysticism, Window on a World View* (Abingdon, 1977) pp 87 ff.
18. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968). Pages 28 ff contain most of the material given here on the early Renaissance Neoplatonists.
19. A number of modern scholars believe that the Tarot was designed at the court of Ferrara. The Neoplatonic concepts in the Tarot and the presence of these Greek Neoplatonists at the court of Ferrara in 1438 make it tempting to place the origins of the Tarot at this point in time and space. While this would be an interesting hypothesis, there is really little direct evidence which warrants this specific a conclusion.
20. Robb, *op. cit.*, pp 46 ff, is my primary source for the information on the Greek scholars in Italy.
21. Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford University Press, 1964) p 40.

22. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) pp 36 ff.
23. Allen, *The Star-Crossed Renaissance* (Octagon, 1973) p 4.
24. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Norton, 1958) pp 122 f.
25. For example, see Saint-Germain, *Practical Astrology* (Newcastle, 1973) and Thierens, *Astrology and the Tarot* (Newcastle, 1975).
26. For numerous examples of the planetary attributions of plants, see Culpepper, *Complete Herbal* (Foulsham and Co.) originally published in the seventeenth century.
27. See Chapter 13, Table 13-1.
28. Hansen, *Science and Magic* IN Lindberg, *Science in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1978).
29. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1964) p 66.
30. This concept is fictionalized in Williams, *The Greater Trumps* (Eerdmans, 1950).
31. Walker, *op. cit.*, pp 3 ff. Ficino stated that the soul received the sweetest harmonies through the ears and related music to the motion and order of the heavens, the Divine Music. *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* Volume 1 (Shepherd-Walwyn, 1975) p 45.
32. Yates, *op. cit.*, p 111.
33. Robb, *op. cit.*, p 64.
34. Facts on the life of Pico della Mirandola are taken from Kristeller, *op. cit.*, pp 54 ff.
35. Wind, *op. cit.*, p 63.
36. Wallis, *op. cit.*, p 86. The reference is to *Enneads* VI, 7, 34, 14-16.
37. Wind, *op. cit.*, p 57.
38. Shumaker, *Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 1972) p 220.
39. Teresa of Avila, *Life* (Peers, trans., Doubleday, 1960).
40. Robb, *op. cit.*, pp 68 ff.
41. Wind, *op. cit.*, p 161.
42. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (Columbia University Press, 1938) p 137.
43. *Ibid.*, p 137, the reference is to Inferno IX and Purgatorio VIII.
44. Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford, 1972) p 20.
45. Cassierer, Kristeller and Randall. *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (University of Chicago Press, 1948) p 250.
46. *Ibid.*, p 246.
47. Mascia, *op. cit.*, p 257.
48. Cassierer, et al., *op. cit.*, p 249.
49. Wind, *op. cit.*, pp 88 f.
50. *Ibid.*, p 86.
51. Watts, *The Two Hands of God* (Collier, 1974) reviews this theme as found in a wide variety of literary sources from virtually every culture in the world. See also, Eliade, *The Two and the One* (University of Chicago Press, 1979).
52. Brehier, *The Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Baskin, trans., University of Chicago Press, 1965) p 255.

Table 4-1. A summary of some of the lines of thought and "occult" sciences which have been associated with Tarot interpretation and which can be found in both ancient and Renaissance writers on Neoplatonism. The numbers in the Table refer to page numbers in this study where each topic is mentioned.

	Ancient Writers	Renaissance Writers
Lines of Thought		
God-union is the goal of life	104	114
Allegory should be used in conveying secret wisdom	108	118
The universe is essentially Dual	104	119
Egypt is the source of all wisdom	104	112
Synthesis of disparate lines of thought	107	115
Sources for the Synthetic System		
Mystery Religions	107	114
Gnosticism	107	112
Astrology	107	112
Ritual and Sympathetic Magic	108	113
Numerology	108	119
Memory Arts		118
Kabbalah		119

Chapter Five

Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions

We have examined Neoplatonism, the dominant philosophy of late antiquity, and shown that the Renaissance readily adopted this system. Our next task is to examine the "religious" systems which developed hand-in-hand with this philosophy. In large part, when the Renaissance accepted Neoplatonism, it got these systems, whether it wanted them or not.

Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions represent syntheses of Neoplatonism with a variety of Oriental influences from Persia, Babylonia, Egypt and the Middle East. The gnostic religions were an amalgam of Neoplatonism, Oriental mythology, and Judeo-Christian beliefs. Gnosticism is, in large part, an early Christian heresy. The Mysteries, on the other hand, blended Oriental gods with traditional Greek and Roman mythologies. They can be described as late paganism. Each of the religions manifested its own individual traits, but all were products of the same Hellenistic syncretism.

As we saw in the last chapter, one of the characteristics of the Renaissance mindset was syncretism: the blending of apparently contradictory systems into a harmonious whole. This is plain, for example, from the way they mixed magic and mysticism, paganism and Christianity. The genesis of this syncretism will be easier to understand by the end of the present study. The ancient world had ended in a spirit of syncretism and the Renaissance merely picked up where others had left off. Syncretism was another of the guiding principles of antiquity which was assimilated by the Renaissance.

We will begin our study with a history of the religions of the ancient world. It is difficult to understand these complex and many-sided religions without some understanding of the political and cultural settings in which they developed. Then we will show that these concepts were available to, and accepted by, the Renaissance scholar. Finally, we will explore how these concepts might have contributed to the symbols of the Tarot.

Causes of Syncretism in the Ancient World

Prior to Alexander's conquests, religion was mostly a local affair.¹ Each tribe or small nation had its own gods, myths and traditions. The Macedonian conquests broke down these local barriers and formed a unified civilization, the Hellenistic world. Alexander's activities accomplished several important things. First, his conquests broke down the integrity and autonomy of the Greek city-states, thus opening Greek civilization to "foreign" gods and ideas.

Second, he encouraged free trade, exchange of ideas, and incorporation of Eastern ideas into the milieu of a new World State. Third, he imposed a common language, Greek, upon the entire ancient world. This provided facile communication among groups with disparate backgrounds.

The mixing of religions was encouraged by intermarriages between Alexander's soldiers and local women of conquered nations. The common language enhanced trade relations and Eastern nations established trading colonies in Greek and later Roman areas. The exchange of slaves and the garrisons of soldiers further enhanced the exchange of ideas.

Alexander accelerated the process of syncretism, but he did not initiate it. It was an ancient custom for rulers to pacify the conquered by exiling the leading stratum of society. This prevented continuous and uninterrupted development of local religions and cultures. But, at the same time, it enhanced the mixing of gods, myths and beliefs. The custom of exiling the conquered set the stage for syncretism. Still, at the time of Alexander, the Middle East was a pot-pourri of religions.

After Alexander, the process was greatly accelerated. Religions, such as Judaism and Zoroastrianism, were no longer protected state institutions. They could no longer afford to retain their primitive mythologies. They had to stand on their own two feet against introduced competitors. This led to many systems being abstracted into defensible doctrines. This process of abstraction facilitated syncretism, since it is on this abstract level that religious beliefs can be synthesized.

The Greek philosophical systems and the Greek propensity for dealing with the abstract provided the framework for transforming the Eastern myths into theories. Much that emerged from the mixture of Greek and Oriental thought was clothed in Greek garb: Oriental symbols and myths fitted into Greek paradigms.

Another effect of Alexander's disruption of the local dynasties of gods was a new individual freedom. The Greeks had long valued freedom and Alexander destroyed the enslaving loyalty to local gods. There was a growing demand for "popular religion" which could satisfy the needs of individual man for salvation. The official religion of the state was no longer viable. There was a need to replace the institutions which had primarily served the rulers by keeping the worshipers content and subservient. The stage was set for new religious concepts that served the free individual and his needs.

The trend toward individualistic religion has always been accompanied by a trend toward mysticism. Formal political ceremonies are replaced by individual experience. This is one of the reasons for the rapid spread of the Oriental religions. They offered a more sensuous, passionate ritualia, closely associated with individual experience. This level of personal experience calls forth a more primitive layer of religion, the chthonic gods, the earth mother, the gods

of soil and fertility, and the gods of the underworld. Here we find, not the aristocratic deities of Homer, but the gods of the common man who lives close to the soil and the change of seasons.

Such religions were never openly acceptable in intellectual Greece, nor later in aristocratic Rome. Therefore, the religions of the Orient went underground and became secret religions of salvation. The mystery religions were seldom popular with officialdom. They were too chaotic, uncontrolled, mystical. Although some Greek states and Roman emperors supported the Mysteries, they were, for the most part, kept in the background if not actively persecuted.

The opposition of official circles was partially responsible for the secrecy which was associated with initiation into these cults. Secrecy, of course, maintained the psychological impact of the ceremonies, which would be ruined by foreknowledge. At the same time, the religions had much to fear from the state if the meaning of their symbolism was fully revealed. Their systems did not support the state. In fact, they viewed all forms of law and order as part and parcel of the evil plot to entrap the spirit of man in matter. In large part, the secrecy was adopted by the Renaissance along with the concept of syncretism. The Renaissance also hid their symbols beneath layers of allegorical interpretation in order to avoid the wrath of officialdom.

The spirit of free exchange and syncretism which began with Alexander was expanded under the "Pax Romanum". The Roman legions took over most of Alexander's conquests and expanded to the north and west. The Romans continued the policies of free movement and the synthetic religions continued to expand.

Common Elements of the Ancient Mysteries

Because of their synthetic origins, the ancient religions were quite complex. Therefore, before we deal with the individual systems, it will be wise for us to take an overview and look for the common patterns. Because the religions shared many of the same roots, we can find underlying principles which were widely accepted. For example, almost all of the religions shared belief in pantheistic mysticism, rebirth, union with God, revelation, dualism, magical names and attributes for gods, and the aim at salvation.²

All of the religions relied for their popularity on the underlying superstitions and insecurities of the people. We had opportunity to note this general insecurity in the last chapter. The superstitions of the Greeks led them to fear the fatalism of the stars and the possibility of spells and enchantments. Apparently this insecurity has deep roots since it remained an ingredient of the common people throughout European history.

The religions promised to impart secret knowledge which would free man from the fatalism and enchantments of this life. The secrets of Gnosticism and the initiations of the Mysteries promised to free

man and unite him with God. They promised a knowledge of God, but they also offered a more immediate reward in the form of secret magical knowledge useful for obtaining material results.

The religions addressed the insecurity of the ancient world by synthesizing elements drawn from many sources. However, they all relied on Neoplatonic philosophy, Egyptian magic, Persian dualism, and Babylonian cosmology. We will deal with the Hermetic or Egyptian magical elements more fully in the next chapter. It remains for us to look more closely at the other three major sources.

Neoplatonic Philosophy

The first unifying element was Neoplatonism. All of the Oriental systems eventually accepted and were accepted by this philosophical umbrella. It formed the core which made the systems seem familiar and acceptable to the Greeks and later to the Romans. Since Neoplatonism accepted the underlying unity of reality, it had little difficulty in accepting disparate views. It respected positive religion, considered the sacred books as divinely inspired, and venerated the esoteric doctrines of the Mysteries.³

From Neoplatonism, the religions took the concept of a totally transcendent God and a vast gap between the divine and the mundane. The mythologies deal with the hierarchy of intermediate beings needed to bridge this gap. Some systems even accepted the theory of emanations in order to produce this intermediary world. Religion became a matter of salvation, a matter of reaching back across the vast gap to the One. The religions also tended to be mystical. All of these elements show the clear influence of Neoplatonism.

These were escatological religions, concerned with the last things: death, salvation, resurrection. This concern for salvation was not introduced by Neoplatonism since it formed a part of the primitive traditions from which the religions arose. In this case, Neoplatonism served to reinforce these concepts, rather than introducing them.

Persian Dualism

All of these religions can be characterized as dualistic. Dualism is a common element of considerable influence, and the origins of this concept can be traced largely to Persia. The first level of Gnosis or secret knowledge was the revelation that reality was basically a dualistic system: matter and spirit, good and evil, light and dark, angels and devils. This dualism seems to stem from the basic Iranian or Persian myth of Zurvan, the transcendent God,⁴ later identified as Eternity or even Time. Zurvan gave rise to two emanations: Ohrmazd, the principle of good and light, and Ahriman, the principle of evil and darkness. The angels are warriors on the side of

Ohrmazd and the devils are allies of Ahriman. We find this angelology and demonology familiar because it was adopted by Judaism during the Babylonian Captivity⁵ when Zoroaster, the prophet, was actively preaching (circa 588 BC).

Man and the physical universe were creations of Ohrmazd as weapons in the fight against evil. They were created after Ahriman was lulled into a long sleep.⁶ Thus, both man's body and his soul are creations of good. When man strives after the good and resists temptation, he is furthering the eventual victory of Ohrmazd over Ahriman. After the final victory, there will be a final judgment and resurrection of those who have furthered the cause of light against the cause of darkness. It is clear that many elements of this mythology were accepted and incorporated into the syncretistic religions, and Judaism and Christianity were no exceptions.

Clearly the elements of dualism do not arise from Persian mythology alone. There is something very fundamental about the idea of dualism which causes it to arise in Chinese Taoism and also in Greek philosophy. Plato and Plotinus clearly distinguish the World of Ideals and the World of Particulars as irreconcilable duals. If the Iranian version of dualism was accepted into the eclectic systems, it was because it fell closely into line with other sources of dualism.

To account for plurality in the experience of everyone, the Greek philosophers had posited two principles: static being and something-other-than-static-being. The interaction between these duals then accounted for material existents. Without assuming two opposite principles, the explanation of any variety or plurality seemed impossible. Everything would be frozen into the One of Parmenides.⁷ Thus, dualism was a universally accepted principle.

Like most of the other Greek philosophers, Aristotle was a dualist. All material objects were a union of matter and form. Matter was the principle of static being underlying all things. Form was the principle which superimposed on matter the individuality of the object.

This dualism was basic to all of these religious systems. Dualism is fundamental to reality and transcending this dualism is the route to salvation and God-union. It is the duality of the Iranian myth and the Greek philosophers: good-evil, being-nonbeing, matter-form, particular-ideal. But the philosopher's task is to explain reality. The task of the religions was to tell the individual what to do about it, i.e., how to transcend duality.

This same dualism appears in many of the Tarot symbols. Certainly we cannot restrict the source of this dualism to any single root such as Iranian mythology. Nevertheless, given the interest in the ancient religions during the Renaissance, it seems reasonable to assume the Persian myths played their own small role in bringing this symbolism to the Tarot.

Babylonian Cosmology

The final element held in common by all of the religions was

Babylonian cosmology. Greek philosophy had established the vast gap that existed between matter and the Transcendent God. Neoplatonism filled this gap with emanations that graded from the most spiritual to the most mundane. The religious systems filled the gap with celestial spheres, surrounding the earth and separating it from the endlessness of heaven, the abode of God. The gap between man and God is given a very definite spatial and cosmological basis.

The individual human soul is born into matter by passing downward through these spheres, acquiring certain "human" traits at each step. Critical to the salvation mythology was the concept that, after death, the enlightened and sanctified soul would find its way back up through the same spheres, leaving off its mortal baggage step by step and once again achieving the God-union from which it began. To pass the "archons" or guardians of the spheres required the secret passwords and magical secrets imparted to the initiate of the religions.

From Babylonian sacerdotal cosmology, the religions accepted the concept of seven planetary spheres surrounding the earth like shells. The eighth sphere is the sphere of fixed stars and the endless space of God lies beyond. In the mysteries of Isis, the initiate put on and took off seven garments or animal disguises.⁸ The gates of Mithraic temples formed a ladder of eight superimposed doors.⁹

A Survey of Individual Religions

Having looked at the elements held in common, we are now in a position to survey the individual religions. It may seem that such a survey will take us far from the Renaissance and the Tarot. But, in fact, there is reason to believe that many details found their way into the Renaissance and into the Tarot symbols.

Gnosticism

In the most general sense of the word, Gnosticism refers to the whole system of thought that underlies the Mysteries, magical and astrological cults, and to some extent even Christianity.¹⁰ The word refers to the secret knowledge contained in their myths, to the whole speculative system based on that knowledge, to the knowledge of how to live correctly in preparation for the future ascent, and to the secret means needed to make the ascent successfully.¹¹ It is knowledge of God and reality. To be given this knowledge is to gain access to God which is itself the goal of the process. To be informed is to be saved. The Gnosis is therefore an insight which immediately grants redemption.¹²

At its most occult and personal level, Gnosis is also mystical experience.¹³ As such, it is merely another expression of the mystic

insight into a transcendental unity underlying the perceived multiplicity. This same insight underlays every established religion in every culture of the world.¹⁴ In this frame of reference, the system of intermediaries, the system of graded intelligences bridging the gap from God to man is merely another expression of an insight shared with Hindu, Buddhist, Egyptian, Persian and Judeo-Christian traditions. At this level, Gnosticism is just an expression of animism, of the insight that there is a spiritual reality that permeates matter, and of the intuition that this duality of spirit and matter can be transcended within the context of the present life.

Therefore, we cannot look to transcendence as the distinguishing feature of these systems. Instead, the distinctive characteristic is the "Gnostic Myth". God is so alien to matter that He could not directly be responsible for its creation. Creation is either the result of a radical duality of Light and Dark which are at war, or else the product of an emanation of God.

For the radical dualist, creation is the result of the "capture" of the Light. The material universe is the result of Light being mixed in with evil Darkness. Salvation consists in saving the Light and restoring it to its original unity. Mythologically, this is represented as the Light of God which shone out into the darkness. The Darkness is greedy for the Light and engulfs it, mixes it with darkness, and breaks it up into tiny sparks in order to retain it. The world struggle consists of the powers of heaven trying to retrieve the light and the powers of darkness trying to retain it.

Other Gnostic systems were less radically dual. They relied less on Iranian dualism and more on the theory of emanations. They followed the later Neoplatonists in multiplying the chain of beings, resulting in complex hierarchies. For example, Basilides included the Nous, Logos, Phranesis (Intelligence), Sophia, and Dyamis (Strength).¹⁵ Further subdivisions¹⁶ led to the complex world of angels and demons suggested in many Tarot images (cards eight, eleven, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, seventeen, twenty, twenty-one).

In Gnostic myths, the intermediary Archons become jealous of the creative powers of God and seek to imitate them. They, or their leader, the Demiurge, create the earth as the center of matter and surround it with the cosmic spheres where they rule. They imprison a portion of light in their creation and take up their stances as guards to be certain the spirit remains captive. In this way the Babylonian cosmology is worked neatly into the system. This cosmology is also reflected in the Tarot since symbols of each of the seven planets lie between man (Fool) and the Anima Mundi (World).

The divine powers are anxious to recover the sparks entrapped in matter and therefore create man. In some systems the body of man is created by the Archons to entrap the divine essence in individual souls. In other systems, man is a creation of the Nous. Man's role is to achieve God-union, thus freeing the divine spark.

Mythologically, man is symbolized by Adam Cadmon, archetypal

man. Primal man descends into matter to retrieve the divine essence. As he passes through the spheres, he acquires human traits like shells or garments. These traits are both virtues and defects. They hide his divine nature but, at the same time, they make it possible for Adam to relate to other parts of material creation.

By the time Adam reaches earth, his divine nature is so occluded that he becomes enamored of matter and his true nature is "asleep". Though he is immortal, he suffers the lot of mortality; though he is androgynous, he is overcome with passion.¹⁷ The result is ignorant man, represented by the Fool card, who has forgotten that he is the divine androgyne, represented by the World card. The fall of man is represented by the Tower card and the Wheel graphically symbolizes the spirit trapped in matter. In this state, Adam is an alien walking in the world. But he does not realize that he is an alien.

Although it may be somewhat fanciful, one can see the Tarot cards from three to eight as different levels of social entrapment. Justice is preoccupation with law and order. The Chariot is preoccupation with aggression and war. The Lovers represent passion and physical love. The Pope represents conventional, exoteric religion. The Emperor is desire for wealth and physical power. The Empress represents procreation, motherhood and family. All of these symbols could represent the social and material preoccupations created by the Archons to distract man from his true mission.

It is important to realize that the story is kept consistent by constant recourse to allegory. Once again we see allegory used to communicate secrets and hide an alternative meaning. Through allegory, the true meaning may even blatantly contradict the apparent.

One of the most fascinating uses of allegory involves the gnostic interpretation of Genesis. The gnostics had their own creation myth which seemed irreconcilable with the story of Adam and Eve. But the ingenuity of allegory was equal to the task. The "god" of Genesis is actually the Demiurge who tries to convince Adam that he is really in paradise. The serpent is the divine messenger who convinces Eve to accept the Gnosis, i.e., to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Once they understand that reality is basically dual, Adam and Eve are truly free.

This interpretation of Genesis shows the use of allegory to completely reverse the meaning of a story, thereby making it possible to reconcile the story with other contradictory components of the system. And we must not forget that this application of allegory was well known in the Renaissance. The allegory is also important because it shows that there was a certain shock appeal to the initial Gnosis. This valued it as a special and secret knowledge that completely transformed the consciousness of man by showing him that things were the exact opposite of what they seemed to be.

Thus, Gnosis was the first step to salvation. It was the awakening of the sleeping divine nature in Adam Cadmon. It was the Magus of the Tarot deck informing the Fool of his true nature. Man is

not in a garden of paradise. It is only after he climbs *out* of the entrapping garden, like the children in the Sun card, that he begins the journey of salvation. Man realizes that in this life, he is basically an alien and the earth is as foreign to him as the landscape of the Moon card seems to depict it. The Gnosis is a call out of matter, a call for the spirit to rise from the tomb of its entrapment. This theme seems to be depicted in the Judgment card. The concept of the "call" is fundamental to Eastern Gnosticism. In fact, the Manichean and Manichean sects were known as religions of the call.¹⁸

Once man has received the call, the Gnosis, he realizes his true nature and his true position in the world. He is divine and reunion with God is his salvation. This information has been deliberately hidden from him by the Archons. All of the social activity, economics, and passion conspire to hide his true mystical mission from him.

At the next level of Gnosis, he is given occult secrets in the form of magic words and formulae to be used as he climbs back through the planetary spheres. Exoterically, this was to be used for the journey after death. Esoterically, it was given as magical means to achieve God-union during the present life. In this respect, the magic of Gnosticism and the theurgy of Porphyry and Iamblicus are identical in purpose. The task is so difficult that magical means are needed. The soul requires the magical to reach God, restoring the sparks to the Divine unity. This represents his own personal salvation and his special role as savior of all material existence. This is the mission and dignity of man: to accumulate within his own being as much of the "goodness" or "sparks" of the earth as possible and carry them back to God.

This mystical journey is symbolized in the Tarot cards from twelve to twenty-one. First, the Gnosis inverts his view of material existence (twelve). This leads to the mystical death (thirteen), the meeting and challenge of the Demiurge (fifteen) and then the successive passage through the planetary spheres (seventeen-nineteen). Then comes the final call (twenty) and the experience of union (twenty-one).

The Gnostic systems were successful for centuries because they provided answers for the human dilemma. They explained the presence of evil in the world. They provided a cosmology very much in keeping with the science of the age. They provided a means of salvation for the individual. They offered a unique dignity to the common man by assigning him a mission of fundamental significance to the world. They also provided the spiritual means to carry out this mission. Because they satisfied these basic yearnings, Gnostic religions spread rapidly through the ancient world and permeated the popular consciousness. Because of its ability to assimilate almost anything through allegorical interpretation, Gnosticism appealed to a wide assortment of peoples.

Pessimistic versus Optimistic Gnosticism

I fully realize that I have just told the reader far more about Gnosticism than he really wanted to know. I confess to being fascinated by the scholarly studies which have made it possible for us to see Gnosticism as a coherent, syncretistic system, very much in keeping with the world-view of the ancient world. This research has been enormously accelerated by the discovery of an entire library of Gnostic works¹⁹ which has opened up new vistas.

Rather than detain the reader further by analysis of the individual gnostic sects, it will suffice to roughly divide these systems into two groups: Pessimistic (or radically dual) and Optimistic (or unitary systems with emanations). The Pessimistic gnostics start with the duality of good and evil and take a negative view of matter as the product of evil. These systems, exemplified by Manichaeism, were even more radical than the original Zoroastrian dualism. The Persians believed that the material universe was basically good, having been created as a weapon against evil. Human reproduction, for example, was a virtuous act since it increased the warriors on the side of good. The Iranian viewpoint is to avoid evil, not to avoid the world.

The Manichaean view is totally negative. Matter is evil and must be rejected. The ethic is a complete renunciation of matter to achieve a separation of the light or spirit from the darkness or matter. The material universe is impregnated by the influence of the archons. It must be escaped by asceticism.²⁰ There is no possibility of transcending duality. There is only the choice of Light over Darkness.

We need not stretch our imaginations to see Pessimistic Gnosis in the darker cards of the Tarot. The ascetic, the Hermit, sees material existence as a meaningless rat race (Wheel of Fortune). Therefore, he chooses to reverse his orientation (Hanged Man), accepting a voluntary death to this material life (Death). He accepts the frightening challenge of radical Darkness (Devil) and rejects it, overthrowing all reliance on the "towers" or securities of this life (Tower).

The Syrian and Egyptian religions take a more optimistic view of reality. Gnosis involves the realization of the goodness and divinity hidden in creation. Matter is permeated with the divine. This is the basic insight of Plotinus, that the world is from God and looks toward Him.²¹

The optimistic gnosis developed the myth of the "Pistis Sophia".²² In this Christian-Gnostic text, Sophia is an emanation of God and the consort of the Demiurge. The archons are her children. She leaves her consort, which is seen as a serious sin, and goes exploring. Once she leaves the highest realms, her rebellious children, jealous of her "light", kidnap her. Christ responds to her lamentations and her cries for forgiveness. He lifts her out of her prison and surrounds her with light like a wreath to protect her from the archons. Note the similarity of this description to the image on the World card.

There is also a curtain set by Sophia between the Light and the inferior regions. This recalls the veil of the Papess card.

As we will see, it was a mixture of pessimistic and optimistic Gnosticism which was accepted in the Renaissance. Lacking detailed analyses, they found only pieces conforming to both systems. The mixture must have been confusing. But it was certainly not beyond the powers of allegory and syncretism to fuse the pieces into a coherent world-view.

Mystery Religions

It is clear by now that all of the syncretistic systems of the ancient world were built from common roots. Plotinus provided the conceptual framework for an inner ascent ending in mystical ecstasy. To this, Gnosticism added the mythology and symbols. The Mystery Religions added the gods and the liturgy.

The Mystery Religions, which date from the sixth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D., focused on the mystical journey and ecstatic God-union. Their concern was not with elaborate doctrine, but with experience. Some were almost free of dogma but most contained a series of initiations ranging from simple ceremonies to elaborate liturgies with more complete theologies.

The Mysteries were basically sacramental dramas and it is the initiation ceremonies which evoke our greatest curiosity. Unfortunately, initiation involved a vow of secrecy. Thus, neither we nor the Renaissance had the slightest direct information of the ceremonies themselves. Some intriguing hints are offered by ancient writers and Christian apologists, but no real information is available. Therefore, the initiation ceremonies, the heart of the Mysteries, could have little bearing on the Tarot. Our interest will, therefore, focus on the known tenets of the system and those aspects of the liturgies which were well known.

The Mysteries took from Gnosticism a belief in the divine spirit trapped in matter. Here the belief took the form of materialistic pantheism, the divine interpenetrated the universe. The Mystery Religions were firmly on the side of Optimistic Gnosticism.

Like Gnosticism, the Mystery Religions relied heavily on allegory. But here the intent was to incorporate relatively primitive customs and rituals into an otherwise intellectual system. These primitive elements constituted the archetypal content which gave the religions their emotional appeal and facilitated mystical experience.

The primitive elements came from a variety of sources and were the informing feature of the individual systems. From Thrace came the Great Mother, Cybele, and later Ma, another Earth Goddess. In ceremonies associated with these goddesses, the initiates drove themselves into wild ecstasies by dancing and then cut themselves on arms and legs with sharp knives. These actions caused a trance in which they felt themselves united to the One in a primitive form of

Plotinian ecstasy.

From Phrygia, Dionysius brought the orgiastic Bacchantes to Thebes and Thessaly. Later he brought the Orphic Mysteries to Attica.²³ The Dionysian cult of wine became integrated with pre-Aryan religious elements²⁴ which were close to the hearts of the common people and formed the basis of their superstitions about nature. These beliefs involved the Earth Goddess or similar personification (perhaps suggested in the Empress card) who was involved in the fertility of the fields. Living close to the soil, the common people were well aware of the powers and beauties of nature and impressed with its mysterious and supernatural elements. Therefore, Cybele, the Earth Mother, was a familiar folk legend long before she was introduced to formal religion. Even the Eleusian Mysteries, the official mysteries of intellectual Athens, involved the Earth Goddess, Demeter, Goddess of Grain. According to the sacred drama, Demeter searched in the underworld for her kidnapped daughter, Persephone.²⁵ She struck a bargain with the Lord of the Underworld to allow her daughter to join her on earth for half of the year. Her joy during this period is reflected in the fertility of the earth in Spring and Summer. For the other half of the year, Persephone must return to the Underworld. Demeter's grief is reflected in the barrenness of Fall and Winter.

This emphasis on the natural process of the seasons endeared the Mysteries to the common people. The emphasis on nature also facilitated their acceptance in the Renaissance. But perhaps most importantly, they struck deep, archetypal notes in the European peoples which caused the endurance of many of these concepts in European folklore ever since.

In the case of the union of Dionysius with Orpheus, the primitive elements involved religious concepts that had been in Greece for two or three centuries before Alexander. Orpheus was the mythical musician who traveled to the Underworld to retrieve his wife Eurydice. Unlike the majority of the Mystery Religions, the union of Orpheus and Dionysius resulted in a Pessimistic system in which the divine, Dionysian spark is entrapped in the evil Titanic body. Orpheus transformed the orgiastic practices of Bacchus into its exact opposite: purification, asceticism and initiation. The initiation involved the union with God in the form of Eros, the god of love. Here we must recall the Renaissance interpretation of Eros given in the last study. Eros was taken to represent the ecstatic union but in a hidden, enigmatic symbolism.

The Mystery Religions, therefore, transformed the mythology of Gnosticism and the intellectual systems of Neoplatonism into experiential mysticism. This was accomplished by adding primitive and archetypal pagan elements. Unlike Gnosticism, which evolved into a Christian heresy, the Mystery Religions remained distinctively pagan. In fact, it was this form of paganism which infiltrated the Renaissance as much as the formal hierarchies of Mount Olympus.

Mithraism

Although we cannot examine each of the Mystery Religions in detail, Mithraism deserves some additional elaboration. Mithraism was a religion of the Romans, particularly the Roman soldiers. This is one of the better understood of the Mystery Religions and the authors from whom we have developed our understanding were also known in the Renaissance.

Mithraism is basically a liturgical version of Persian or radically dual Gnosticism. It has its origin in the Indian Vedas and the Persian Avestas where Mithra is a minor god or emanation. In late Zoroastrianism, he is retained as an important lesser deity.²⁶ Eventually, in Mithraism, he came to be the primary intermediary between man and Zurvan, the supreme and transcendent god. He combined the Logos or first emanation of God with the Demiurge or creator and protector of creation. He is sort of a benign Demiurge, anxious to help rather than entrap.

Mithraism retained the Babylonian system of planetary spheres, each ruled by a demon. There were seven gates in the spheres and the initiate was given secret instructions on how to pass the guards. Increased information was conveyed in each of the seven grades of initiation. In one grade, Miles or Soldier, he was handed a crown on a sword, similar in form to the ace of swords in the Tarot deck.

Other influences on the Tarot might be taken from bas-reliefs in which Mithras is accompanied by a small dog, like the Fool card. He is shown slaying a bull with one hand grasping the nostrils, reminding one of the Fortitude card. He is also accompanied by two small boys who hold torches, one pointing up and the other pointing down. This image recalls the Devil card.

The Journey to the Underworld

One element of the Mystery Religions, and particularly Mithraism, is of particular interest to us. The combination of nature mysticism and astrology gave to the Sun a place of prominence. Mithras himself is often identified with the Sun. This ties the Mystery Religions with the sun-god myth and with some of the themes of the Tarot.

Tracing back to the beginnings of Egyptian civilization was the concept of a god who died daily and sunk into the ocean. There he underwent the "night sea journey", the journey through the Underworld. At dawn each day, he was reborn in splendor. This mythology was associated with the death and rebirth experienced by the initiate and has been shown by Jungian psychologists to symbolize a journey into the unconscious.

The night sea journey is the same as the exploration of the Underworld depicted in the Tarot cards. After undergoing preliminary trials (Hanged Man), the initiate undergoes a mystical death. His

guide (Temperance) leads him into the Underworld for a confrontation with the Devil. Then he is led upward to the dawn from the dim light of the lightning flash on the Tower card, to the Star, the Moon, and finally to full Sunlight.

That this initiatory mythology is actually a journey into oneself is an interesting commentary on the psychological insights underlying the Mysteries. As Clement of Alexandria stated it, to know oneself is to know God.²⁷ This same insight is reflected in surviving ceremonies for purification preceding initiation.²⁸ These ceremonies recommend a thorough knowledge of self.

These conceptualizations of the mystical journey, largely held in common with the early Christian Church, were a pervading influence in the Renaissance when the achievement of the Plotinian ecstatic union was held to be the highest goal of man. The myth of the sun-hero and the journey within are certainly reflected in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and they also appear to have been important in the design of the Tarot.

Survival of Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions

Components of the ancient religions survived long after the formal structures became extinct. For this reason, many elements of these systems were available to and influential in the Renaissance. There were three basic ways that these systems endured. First, significant portions of the concepts were incorporated directly into Christianity. Second, many elements remained as part of the folk wisdom and customs of the Europeans. Third, a Gnostic cult actually survived over the centuries and was still alive and well in southern France and northern Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The almost unbelievable survival of Gnosticism will be considered in Chapter eight. But we can consider the other two routes to survival at this point.

Syncretistic Religions and Christianity

The assimilation of pagan concepts into Christianity should not surprise us since many gnostic elements had already been incorporated into Judaism during the Babylonian Captivity. The story of the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" in Genesis hints of Gnosticism. By the return from Babylon, the angelology of the Persians had been firmly established in Judaism. God and the Devil have conversations at the beginning of the book of Job which do not exactly establish them as equals, but certainly suggest the influence of Iranian dualism.

In the New Testament, Paul acknowledges that his readers are familiar with these pagan systems and argues that Christianity is the *new* Mystery Religion, now made open and available to everyone. Baptism is the new initiation, the death and rebirth in Christ.

Paul uses the word "Gnosis" to signify the message of Christ which awakens men's spirits and makes possible their salvation.

Probably the clearest indication of Gnostic influence in the New Testament can be found in John, who identifies Christ as the Logos (i.e., Word) or first emanation of God and also as Light, or principle of Good:

In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God . . . Through Him all things came to be . . . All that came to be had life in Him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. ²⁹

Although there is still debate on the matter,³⁰ it seems that Christianity adopted much from the Mystery Religions. For example, it accepted the three stages of the mystical journey: purification, illumination and union. In addition, the common meal of the Mithraic liturgy is similar to the Communion meal of the early Church. Also, it seems impossible to argue away that Mithraism celebrated the birth of the sun-god on December 25. At that point, the sun-god was at the deepest point of his winter journey. From thence to Spring, he would be "rising" and they prayed for his successful journey so that Spring would arrive on time the following year.

Gnosticism also seems to account for much of the asceticism in the early Church. Asceticism plays little role in classical Judaic thought. Christ was not an ascetic and commented that bystanders would think him a glutton because he ate and drank where John the Baptist had fasted. Although ascetic practices were part of the Essene cult,³¹ to which the Baptist and Jesus may have belonged, this cult probably acquired these practices from Iranian Pessimistic dualism. It seems strange then that early Christians left Alexandria for the Egyptian deserts to live an austere life. They went by the tens of thousands to live, or so they thought, the perfect Christian life. And yet, Christ never preached any such message.

There can be little doubt that the source of this ascetic ideal was Pessimistic Gnosticism. The writings of the Desert Fathers³² clearly show that they were subduing the evil body so that the pure soul could rise to God. It is also suggestive that these hermits were largely from Alexandria and Syria, two of the centers of development of Gnosticism. The continuance of the ascetic life into the Middle Ages and the incorporation of asceticism into the mystical ideal, particularly in the contemplative monasteries, show that Pessimistic Gnosticism was deeply ingrained in Christianity.

It must be remembered that during the first five centuries of its existence, Christianity was constantly threatened by these syncretistic systems. The early Latin and Greek writers of the Church were preoccupied with discrediting Gnosticism and the Mysteries. But

in the final analysis, Christianity won the battle by assimilating these systems as much as by defeating them.

European Folklore

The ancient religions also continued in the superstitions of the European people. These systems left a residuum which is found in the writings of magicians and astrologers throughout the Middle Ages. Of particular interest is the use of talismans and magical images in late Gnosticism.³³ Although there is no evidence that Gnostic amulets had anything to do with the Tarot designs, the concept of magical images was certainly a relic of Gnosticism. It was picked up by medieval Kabbalah and by magical systems of all kinds.

These pagan systems also survived in the folklore and seasonal festivals of Europe.³⁴ The themes of death and rebirth associated with the change of seasons are common. Seasonal festivals for mid-winter and midsummer, the apogee and perigee of the sun-god's journey, are universal. It has even been suggested that the ritualia of the Mysteries were transformed into literary form in the legends of the Grail Quest.³⁵

Ancient Paganism in the Renaissance

There is little doubt that the ancient religions were known in the Renaissance because they were frequently mentioned by the Church Fathers and by late Latin writers such as Plutarch, Lucian, Cicero, and Catullus. Both Augustine and Plotinus discussed Gnosticism at some length. All of these writers were widely read in the Renaissance.

The Renaissance also had access to more esoteric versions of the doctrines in the magic texts of the Middle Ages. A particularly influential source was the Chaldean Oracles,³⁶ believed to be written by Zoroaster, the first magician.

Of course, we also have direct evidence of an influence in the Renaissance. Both Ficino and Pico della Mirandola were familiar with the Orphic Mysteries. They had access to the Orphic hymns and incorporated their performance into their system of ritual magic.

Whatever evidence Renaissance man found in manuscripts was confirmed by traces of these same ideas which he found all around him. The concepts were supported by Christian mysticism, Kabbalah, astrology, alchemy, folklore, and Neoplatonism. Therefore, it would not be surprising if the scholar found the religions strangely familiar. They were certainly not difficult to incorporate into a syncretism so similar to the syncretism which initially spawned them.

As we pointed out in Chapter Three, Renaissance man saw himself as an integral part of nature. Nature was beautiful and full of wisdom. In fact, he believed that through the study of nature man could discover the Gnosis for himself. Nature contained both the

lesson of duality and also the secret wisdom needed to transcend the duality in mystical union. Thus, Optimistic Gnosticism, which emphasized the divine nature of the universe, could be readily accepted.

But this does not imply that the Renaissance rejected the elements of Pessimistic Gnosticism which came its way. The Renaissance inherited a thousand year old tradition of asceticism associated with the achievement of mystical states. From the Desert Fathers to the contemplative monasteries, the ascetic ideal was lauded as the shortest path to mysticism. The simultaneous acceptance of materialistic pantheism and asceticism might grate upon our sense of consistency. But apparently it bothered the Renaissance not at all. Given all of the other, apparently contradictory, tenets which he worked into his system, the problem really should not concern us.

Gnostic ideas were always "rebel" ideas. Law, order, and officialdom were traps set by the archons. Gnosticism delighted in applying allegory to discredit established religion and laid claim to a secret knowledge unavailable to others. This must have had real appeal in the Italian city-states which were sensing a new freedom, never available in the Middle Ages. They were testing, if not challenging established ideas. Gnosticism must have flamed this new sense of freedom. We may suggest this as another reason for the acceptance of Gnosticism in the Renaissance. Particularly attractive must have been the concept of allegory which admitted "rebel" ideas under the cover of perfectly innocent symbols.

Gnosticism was also accepted because of the dignity it assigned to man in the salvation of the world. Man played a critical role in the retrieval of the divine Sparks and, therefore, man was essential to reestablishing the unity of the Godhead. In addition, man has within himself the divine Spark, the latent ability to effect his own salvation.

Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions were so closely tied to Neoplatonism that it is difficult to separate them in the Late Latin writers. It is difficult to see how the Renaissance scholar with his proclivity for assimilating all ancient wisdom into his system, with his love of the magical and the mystical, with his feeling that God-union was the end of human life, could such a scholar have resisted the temptation to add at least a few elements of these ancient mystical systems to his own symbolic system?

Influence of Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions on the Tarot

Although we have made numerous suggestions during this study about the potential influence of the Mystery Religions and Gnosticism on the Tarot symbols, it will be useful to summarize some of the major points here. The Fool, the uninitiated man, stands at one extreme of the deck and the Initiate, the divine androgyne, stands

at the other. At the center point, between these extreme human conditions, is Fortitude, showing a point of direct contact between spirit and matter.

There are symbols of the fall of the spirit into matter (Tower) and of the call of the spirit back out of the tomb of the body (Judgment) There are cards representing the astrological spheres which must be passed through (Star, Moon, Sun) in the second half of the deck. There are numerous symbols of duality in pillars, vases and other pairs of objects as well as symbols of spirit/matter and male/female dualities.

There are cards which might suggest the Earth Mother (Empress) and Sophia (Papess) who protects the secret Gnosis under a fold of her gown. There are cards for the hierophant or Initiator (Pope) and symbols of asceticism (Hermit, Hanged Man). There are abundant examples of angels (Lovers, Temperance, Judgment) and devils (Devil).

But the most striking feature is the resemblance between the Tarot cards and the mystical journey into the Underworld, the night sea journey of the sun-hero. From the preparatory ordeal of the Hanged Man, the aspirant subjects himself to voluntary Death, meets his Guide (Temperance) and is conducted to the throne of the Devil. Thereafter he begins the return trip through the celestial spheres (Star, Moon, Sun) reawakening after the call (Judgment) as the divine androgyne, Adam Cadmon reborn.

Although we will find in later studies that the influence of the ancient pagan religions was only one of the numerous factors which are synthesized into the Tarot, still some Gnostic elements seem to be clearly depicted. To the occultist reader, I hope I have demonstrated that it is unnecessary to postulate an origin of the Tarot any further away than the Renaissance to account for these elements of the Mysteries. To the modern skeptic, it seems undeniable that some elements of these religions were accepted in the Renaissance. Given that these systems were available to the Renaissance, I see little reason to deny that they could have contributed to the symbolic system of the Tarot.

Actually the strongest arguments linking the ancient religions to the Renaissance and the Tarot must be left for later chapters. One of the difficulties of presenting the complex syncretism which formed the milieu within which the Tarot was designed, is the need to present the web of concepts in a linear fashion, one after another. The Renaissance saw no such linearity. They looked for the underlying unity in a large number of partially connected lines of thought. The task of analyzing the individual threads of the web is difficult precisely because of the many cross-connections among the systems. These cross-connections make it easier to see why the Renaissance viewed them as a unity, but it does complicate the writing task.

The strongest argument that Gnosticism could have influenced

the Tarot involves the presence of dualist heretics in northern Italy during the period when the Tarot was being designed. These heretics can be traced in a direct line back to the original Manichaeans. But this story will have to wait for several intervening chapters which discuss the influence of more orthodox mystical traditions.

The next strongest argument is based on the high place accorded to Hermetic philosophy in the Renaissance. The writings of Hermes Trismagistus were considered the most important contributions from ancient paganism. Actually, Hermes was a name used by late Neoplatonic and Gnostic writers. The acceptance of Hermes was simply another route by which Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions infiltrated the mindset of the Renaissance. We will deal with Hermes and the Egyptian tradition in the next chapter.

Notes and References

1. Most of the material in the section on syncretism is based on Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Beacon, 1958) and Angus, *The Mystery Religions* (Dover, 1975).
2. Angus, *op. cit.*, p 54.
3. Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Dover, 1956) [hereafter referred to as Cumont, *OR*] pp 201 f.
4. Zaehner, *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Biblo and Tannen, 1972).
5. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (Viking, 1960) p 287.
6. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi* (Oxford, 1976).
7. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (Nijhoff, 1975) p 123.
8. Jonas, *op. cit.*, pp 166 f.
9. Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (Dover, 1956) [hereafter, Cumont, *M*] p 144.
10. Kirk, *The Vision of God* (James Clarke, 1977) p 95.
11. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p 284.
12. Peuch, *The Concept of Redemption in Manichaeism* IN *The Mystic Vision* (Princeton University Press, 1968).
13. Pulver, *The Experience of Light* IN *Spiritual Disciplines* (Princeton University Press, 1960) p 252.
14. Tanner, *Mystery Teachings in World Religions* (Theosophical Publishing House, 1973).
15. King, *The Gnostics and Their Remains* (Wizard, 1973) p 261. One wonders if Dyamis (Strength) is the Divine Idea represented in the Fortitude card.
16. Quispel, *Gnostic Man: The Doctrine of Basilides* IN *The Mystic Vision* (Princeton University Press, 1968) p 235.
17. Jonas, *op. cit.*, p 150.
18. *Ibid.*, p 74.
19. *The Nag Hammadi Library* (Harper and Row, 1977). The collection of texts which were included in this library illustrates how eclectic these religious systems were. We find texts on Hermetism or Egyptian magic, Porphyry's life of Plotinus, manuscripts attributed to Zoroaster, and a number of Christian and Jewish texts.
20. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1964) p 22.
21. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II, 9.
22. Mead (trans.) *Pistis Sophia* (University Books, 1974).
23. Wili, *The Orphic Mysteries and the Greek Spirit* IN *Mysteries* (University of Princeton Press, 1955) p 66.
24. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (Biblo and Tannen, 1971) p 16.
25. Otto, *The Meaning of the Eleusian Mysteries* IN *Mysteries* (Princeton University Press, 1955).
26. Cumont, *M*.
27. Angus, *op. cit.*, p 106.
28. Cumont, *OR*, p 54.

29. John 1:1-5 (from the Jerusalem Bible).

30. Rahner, *op. cit.*,

31. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Doubleday, 1966). In addition to the Essenes, other ascetic sects existed throughout the Middle East. Some of these sects have survived to the present day. The best known examples are the Christians of St. John, the Sabians, and the Druses (see Doresse, *op. cit.*, pp 315 f). The legend of Mohammed's ascent through the heavenly spheres also indicates some influence of Gnosticism on early Islam.

32. MacDermot, *The Cult of the Seer in the Ancient Middle East* (University of California Press, 1971).

33. King, *op. cit.*, p 250.

34. Frazer, *The New Golden Bough* (Phillips, 1959) and Graves, *The White Goddess* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979).

35. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Doubleday, 1957).

36. Julianus, *Chaldean Oracles* (Heptangle, 1978).

Egypt and the Hermetic Tradition

It is now time to turn our attention to the "absurd" occultist tradition that the origins of the Tarot are to be found in Egypt. One of the purposes of this chapter is to demonstrate that this tradition is not as far-fetched as it appears. The Tarot was obviously designed during the Renaissance. But the Renaissance considered ancient Egypt as the fountainhead of all its wisdom. We must now consider why the Renaissance held Egypt in such high esteem and why this respect was still upheld by eighteenth and nineteenth century interpreters of the Tarot.

Several of the important points have already been made in earlier studies. In Chapter Four we showed that Neoplatonism was the dominant philosophy of the Italian Renaissance. The principal spokesman for Neoplatonism was Plotinus, an Egyptian. A major center for the development of this philosophy was Alexandria, again in Egypt. We suggested in Chapter Five that many of the elements of the Tarot could be traced to Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions. Alexandria was an important center for these syncretistic systems and was particularly important in late Gnosticism. The account of the Mysteries most accessible to the Renaissance scholar was Apuleius' story of the Isis religion¹, again Egyptian.

Both of these chapters make it easier to understand why the Renaissance Neoplatonists would have viewed ancient Egypt as the source of their mystical and magical knowledge. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the Renaissance designer of the Tarot might have ascribed the esoteric meaning of his symbols to the Egyptian mystagogues. The designer was merely the transmitter, not the originator.

The purpose of this study is to draw together into one place all of the concepts which the Renaissance ascribed to Egypt. Recall that the occultists merely maintained that the *ideas* were Egyptian. The ideas were placed into modern dress during the Renaissance. We may find this quite a reasonable scenario given the Renaissance attitude toward Egyptian wisdom.

We also indicated briefly at the end of the last study that we would find in the "Egyptian Connection" one of the strongest arguments for the influence of Gnosticism on the Renaissance. We will return to this point shortly when we consider the mythical Hermes Trimagistus. But this must wait until we consider some preliminary sources of Egyptian influence.

Hieroglyphica

One of the shortest routes to the Renaissance scholar's heart

was through the discovery of a new manuscript. In 1419, a Florentine priest named Cristoforo de' Buondelmonti returned from the island of Andros with a manuscript entitled, "Hieroglyphica".² The manuscript was authored by Horapollon Niliacus, an Alexandrian of the second to fourth century. The manuscript claimed to offer an interpretation of the hieroglyphics.

Here was an allegorical and mystical interpretation of the strange images found in Egyptian temples and tombs. This was enough to warm the heart of any Renaissance Magus. What is more, the interpretations were made under the strong influence of Alexandrian Neoplatonism. It is little wonder, then, that the Italian Neoplatonists showed great enthusiasm for this manuscript which seemed to confirm all of their theories of allegory, magical images and an Egyptian source for all of wisdom. Of course the Renaissance considered it to give the true meaning of the images which dated back millennia before Christ. It didn't occur to them that it was a fabrication of a late Neoplatonist. To them it seemed to move backward the origins of their theories by thousands of years to the dawn of civilization.

The manuscript was therefore considered to be an important find. The Egyptian mysteries were laid bare. The interpretations in the text were to have wide influence in the Renaissance, both in literature and in art. For example, there is the extraordinary influence in the frescoes painted by Pinturicchio for Pope Alexander VI in the Appartamento Borgia of the Vatican.³ It was this same pope who supported Pico della Mirandola and freed him from any suspicion of heresy.

The mystical interpretations of the hieroglyphics reinforced the Renaissance interest in the use of pictures instead of words as an appropriate way to communicate hidden wisdom. Pico maintained that pagan religions, without exception, had used "hieroglyphic" imagery to protect their secrets.⁴ The occultists have always maintained that the Egyptian hieroglyphics contained hidden mystical meanings.⁵ For example, de Gebelin considered the word Tarot to be Egyptian: Tar meaning road and Ro meaning royal. Unfortunately, this was fifty years before the discovery of the Rosetta stone. So he either invented the derivation or believed he had access to secret knowledge about the meaning of Egyptian words.

The hieroglyphica inspired the Renaissance to look for similar modes of expression. The equivalent was found in the "emblemata", allegorical pictures which concealed a moral lesson. The use of emblemata became a dominant theme of Renaissance art. A surface image would be used to conceal body positions or other subtle details which hinted at the real message. So the Hieroglyphica leads us back to the Renaissance interest in allegory and enigmatic images. And, as we have continuously suggested, the Tarot is just such a set of enigmatic images.

But if the widespread influence of the Hieroglyphica inspired the

Tarot designers to use enigmatic images, it apparently did not inspire them to look for these images in the hieroglyphs themselves. The Tarot images are notably lacking in the simple natural elements of the Egyptian language: feathers, chicks, vultures, beetles, rabbits, etc. The images of the Tarot are far more complex and show a closer affinity to Renaissance art and emblemata. Nor does the Tarot convey the standard Egyptian mythology. The myth of Osiris and Set is missing.⁶ Gone is the judging of the soul after death and the journey by boat to the Underworld.⁷ These thoroughly Egyptian themes were not even known until the nineteenth century when the hieroglyphics were deciphered.

The importance of Horopollo to our story is that he reinforced the concept of mysteries hidden behind enigmatic imagery. It is clear that he presented this idea to a ready audience which had been led to the same conclusion by a variety of other sources. Horopollo also reinforced the Renaissance impression that Neoplatonic theories were far older than they really were. If Horopollo's interpretation of the hieroglyphics were accurate, then ancient Egypt was truly the source of all the wisdom revered in the Renaissance.

Egyptian Mystery Religions

Of the descriptions of Mystery Religions available to the Renaissance, the most explicit was found in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*.¹ Apuleius was considered one of the greatest magicians of the ancient world.⁸ His description of the initiation into the Mysteries of Isis was very suggestive, without ever revealing the secret details of the ceremonies.

The Mysteries of Isis are unique in that we know their precise origin. Although Isis was a traditional Egyptian goddess, her consort, Serapis, was a deliberate invention. According to Plutarch, Ptolemy Soter designed Serapis and many other features of this religion in an effort to reconcile his Greek and Egyptian subjects. He also made Isis equivalent to Demeter, the earth goddess around which the Eleusian Mysteries were centered. The identification of Isis and Demeter facilitated the extraordinary expansion of the cult.⁹ Thus, the new religion was a careful amalgamation of concepts attractive to both Greek and Egyptian. Of course, this was no great feat in a period when syncretism was a common mode of thought. Thus, both Plutarch and Iamblicus were able to look at the Egyptian gods and see their own theories reflected in them.

The Mystery Religion of Isis expanded rapidly. Isis and Serapis were the only Oriental deities who maintained their high place all the way to the end of Roman paganism. Thus, the Isis Mysteries are commonly mentioned by the late Latin writers available to the Renaissance. When any of these writers mentioned mystical experience, he was likely to make reference to Isis.

Like all similar religions, the Isis Mysteries involved an

initiation ceremony. As the ritual is described by Apuleius, the aspirant reached a state of ecstasy in which he imagined that he was crossing the threshold of death and meeting the gods of heaven and hell face to face. We have pointed out in the last chapter how such an experience is suggested in the Tarot cards from twelve to twenty-one. If such an interpretation seems fabricated, one need only look closely at the description of the experience given by Apuleius.¹

The author says that he approached the gates of hell and put one foot into the Underworld. In other words, he uses the phraseology that was universal in the Mystery Religions for the mystical death and the ritual journey to the underworld. But he then says that he was permitted to return from death, passing up through all of the elements. He also makes the interesting comment that at midnight he saw the sun shining as though it were noon. This implies that intense light was an integral part of the experience. We have suggested that this is represented in the Tarot cards by the increasing light from the lightning of the Tower card to the full sunlight of the Sun card.

The initiatory experience related by Apuleius was the primary description of the ancient mysteries available to the Renaissance. Thus, if the mystical journey is reflected in the Tarot, we would expect it to follow Apuleius' account: death, hell, celestial spheres. This is precisely the sequence which appears in the final third of the Tarot.

Hermes Trismagistus

However important the Renaissance may have believed Horapollo and Apuleius to be, they were still only minor writers. Their fame and prestige was far outshadowed by Hermes Trismagistus, the greatest mystagogue of ancient Egypt.

The writings of Hermes were considered to be as old as the Bible, probably coming from the same period as Moses. In this belief the Renaissance was supported by a number of ancient writers whose opinions were held in high regard. The Christian Fathers, Lactantius and Augustine, both maintained the antiquity of Hermes.¹⁰ The late Neoplatonists held the books of Hermes to be divinely inspired.¹¹ Cicero in *De Natura Deorum* maintained that there were originally five Mercuries. The last one fled to Egypt and gave the Egyptians their laws and their hieroglyphics. He was given the Egyptian name Thoth and was identical with Hermes Trismagistus. By this account, Hermes is given semi-divine status. He is designated as the inventor of the hieroglyphs, the enigmatic mystical symbols of Egypt. Is it any wonder then, that Hermes or Thoth is identified as the ancient source of the Tarot, enigmatic mystical symbols thought to derive from Egypt?

Although not all ancient writers considered Hermes divine, they largely agreed that he was the most ancient mystic and magician.

He had some competition for this title from Zoroaster, but in the Renaissance the primacy of Hermes reigned supreme. Hermes was the original psychopomp, the patron of magic, the revealer of "Hermetic" knowledge; Hermes was the divine mystagogue. Certainly the reader will not have to stretch his imagination too far to see the typical image of the Magician card in this description of Hermes.

Hermes was considered a Gentile prophet throughout the Middle Ages.¹² His writings contain a clear reference to the story of creation in Genesis. Ficino later claimed that the use of the cross in ancient Egyptian symbols and Hermes' mention of the Son of God confirm his position as a true prophet.

If this were not enough, Hermes was also the most ancient of the philosophers. Many of the ideas of Plato are clearly reflected in his writings. Indeed, the entire Neoplatonic tradition was regarded simply as a later development of the pristine Egyptian wisdom of Hermes.¹³

A number of works of Hermes were readily available in the Renaissance. These included the Asclepius which had been translated into Latin, supposedly by Apuleius. There was also the Picatrix, an Arabic work, known to be in the library of Pico.¹⁴ There were dozens of descriptions of the thought of Hermes in the writings of late antiquity. All of these sources confirmed the antiquity of Hermes and led to the conclusion that the true source of all ancient wisdom was Egypt. Plato himself acknowledged Egypt as the site of great wisdom. Plato was believed to have studied in Egypt for thirteen years. Either he or his teacher studied under Pythagoras, who himself had studied in Egypt.¹⁵

The Hermetic material available for study in the Renaissance falls into two branches. On the one side are the philosophical treatises. On the other are the astrological, alchemical and magical texts. And, if Hermes is the epitome of the ancient wise man, then you could not accept the philosophical writings and reject the magical texts. Both came recommended by the same authority. Of course the philosophical works were accepted because they strongly reflected Platonic and Neoplatonic concepts which fit perfectly with the philosophic structure being erected in the Renaissance. Thus, not only the authority of the texts, but also their contents recommended them. And if they accepted the philosophy, of course they must also accept the magic. Viewing the texts available to the Renaissance, the scholars would naturally conclude that the blending of magic and philosophy was the epitome of the wisdom of the ancients.

The high regard in which Hermes was held can be appreciated from the following story. About 1460, a monk, Leonardo da Pistoia, in the employ of Cosimo de Medici returned from Macedonia with a Greek manuscript of the Corpus Hermeticum. Although the text was incomplete, it was considered an exceptional find. So important was the text considered, that Ficino stopped translating the

dialogues of Plato in order to translate this manuscript first! Naturally, since Plato derived his wisdom from Hermes, this seemed appropriate. Another example of the prestige of Hermes is given by his prominent portrait in the mosaic pavement of the cathedral of Siena, erected some time after 1480.

Unfortunately, the confidence in the antiquity of Hermes was poorly placed. In point of fact, the works were written by a variety of writers in the second and third centuries AD. The reason that Hermes accurately predicted the coming of Christ was that Christ had already come! One can find many concepts similar to Plato because the authors of the Hermetic works had read Plato!

In fact, there seems to be very little that is genuinely Egyptian in the Hermetic texts. Some commentators will allow for some influence of native Egyptian ideas. But the majority feel that the texts only reflect the Greek concepts of late antiquity.¹⁶

How is it that these Neoplatonic writers ascribed their ideas to Hermes? The simple fact is that in the second century, as in the Renaissance, what was ancient was considered, by the very fact that it was ancient, to be very wise and holy. The second century also believed that the source of all wisdom was to be found in ancient Egypt. They simply communicated this belief to the Renaissance. The ancient and mysterious religion of Egypt, hidden behind its enigmatic hieroglyphics, had immense appeal to both periods. The idea of secret magic, preserved for millenia by the priests and performed in underground initiatory chambers beneath their Temples, was captivating to both sets of scholars.

Still, to the modern mind, attributing one's writings to an ancient authority seems a falsification. We must realize that adopting a famous pseudonym was not at all uncommon in early Europe. A well-documented case is that of Dionysius the Areopagite, an influential mystical writer. It was long believed that he was the individual mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁷ Thus, the writings seemed to have Apostolic authority. In reality, the writings were from the fifth century.

Perhaps an ancient pseudonym was used at times to falsely enhance the prestige of a work. However, a less odious, and more likely motive can be found in humility and gratitude. The author was acknowledging that he was merely the transmitter of wisdom, not the originator. The originator of the concepts, to whom proper credit for authorship belonged, was the ancient mystagogue. From him the author had learned everything and to him the author owed everything. Surely, no one has accused Plato of lying because he placed all of his teachings into the mouth of his teacher, Socrates.

Given this motivation and the commonness of the practice, the Renaissance designers of the Tarot might well have attributed the origin of their symbolic system to Egypt. If the designers believed that all of the basic concepts contained in their symbols were due to Hermes, their belief is understandable. If they then attributed the

origin of the cards to Egypt, either to enhance their authority or to humbly acknowledge their source, we should not be surprised.

The Philosophic System of the Hermetic Writers

In large part, the Hermetic writers were simply presenting another version of Neoplatonism. We will immediately recognize the tenor of the system in the creation myth. Hermes has a vision of Poimandres, the Nous of Absolute Power who relates the story of creation through visions and narrative. The first emanation of God is the Nous, from whom comes the Logos, the Son of God. The divine Nous, being androgynous, also produces a second emanation, the Demiurge who in turn produces seven "governors" whose rule is called Destiny, i.e., Fortuna in Latin. The soul of man is produced from the Nous and falls into matter, through the seven spheres of the governors. There are choirs of daemons associated with the chief governor, the Sun. The influence of astrological concepts is clear in that each soul is placed under the charge of the specific daemon who presides over the moment of its birth.

Following death, the soul undertakes the journey back to God through the spheres, casting off the chains which have bound it to matter. For the Renaissance, the description of these familiar mythical elements in the Hermetic writings surely confirmed their truth. Under such circumstances, there can be little doubt that the Renaissance welcomed this myth with open arms.

The Hermetic texts are a strange mixture of Pessimistic and Optimistic Gnosis, clearly indicating that they were the product of a number of different authors. In some passages, the body is a dark jail, a living death, a tomb. Matter is contemptible and asceticism is recommended.

But in other books, there is a strong tendency toward Optimistic Gnosis as characterized by materialistic pantheism: all things are God. Nothing in the universe lacks a soul. Nothing in the world is devoid of consciousness: planets are gods; spirits or daemons rule the stars. The view of man is optimistic, so optimistic that it might have been written by a Renaissance Humanist.¹⁸ Indeed, the reasons for the ready acceptance of these writings in the Renaissance become clearer and clearer.

This pantheistic view of the universe leads naturally to a mystical doctrine closely aligned with Neoplatonism and the Mystery Religions. God is transcendent and unknowable in Himself. Ultimately, attaining God is a mystical experience, an experience in which the senses are quieted and the divine spark within man is allowed to fly back to God.

It is not clear how the Renaissance mind reconciled the elements of Pessimistic and Optimistic Gnosis. Matter was simultaneously evil and divine. One should both rejoice in the body and practice asceticism. In fact, the contradictions were probably not reconciled,

simply accepted on authority. The Renaissance scholar knew that both had been discussed by Hermes and so both points of view must be correct. If he didn't understand it, at least he was sure that Hermes did!

There are many details in these Hermetic writings which remind us of the Tarot. In one important text, Tat, Hermes' disciple goes through the experience of mystical death and rebirth. It may be only circumstantial, but this occurs in the thirteenth book of the collection and this book has twenty-two chapters. In this treatment, the astral soul of Tat is dissolved and the spiritual self regenerated. One by one, the demonic powers and influences acquired during the descent into the world are replaced. During this process, the initiate is completely passive and merely allows the process to happen. The reader should recall from Chapter One that the Fool is also told to remain passive during his journey.

It is also interesting that the Nous is called "light" as in other Gnostic myths. This recalls the increasing light in cards sixteen-nineteen as the Fool approaches God-union and ends his night sea journey. The final movement to God is achieved through a call from above, i.e., the aspirant is passive and the active role is taken by powers above.

Like the image on card twenty-one, the Nous is androgynous. In the highest mystical state, the aspirant becomes one with the Nous, transcending all duality. The androgyne of the World card is a symbol of this non-dual state. At one point in their dialogue, Asclepius asks Hermes whether God has both sexes. The answer is yes and not only God but all things animal and vegetable!¹⁹

Particularly intriguing from the point of view of Tarot interpretation is the complex world of intermediaries that stand between the earth and God. Below the Trinity of Nous, Logos and Demiurge, come the stars and planets. Below the celestial spheres come the Egyptian and Greek Dieties and a collection of various abstract ideals.

In Table 6-1, I have attempted to identify the intermediaries with cards of the Tarot. The reader must decide for himself if these correspondences seem natural or forced. But it seems possible to come up with a match in all but five cases. The reader may feel free to disagree, but I feel the correspondences argue that the Tarot cards are indeed a symbolic system illustrating the steps which lie between the Anima Mundi and man. This is certainly not a demonstration, only a suggestion.

I have argued throughout the earlier chapters that the Tarot is a system of intermediaries. However, I find little in other Gnostic systems which suggests the steps shown in the Tarot. It is not until we come to the Hermetic writings that we find a set of intermediaries which bear some resemblance to our cards. This lends credence to our contention that it was through Hermes that much of the Gnostic mythology was communicated to the Renaissance and came to influence the Tarot. At least it seems to me that the type

of intermediary in the Hermetic writings is the type of symbol in the Tarot Trumps.

Before we leave the philosophical aspects of Hermetism, I must point out that the ideas presented here were not available to the Tarot designers in so clear and systematic a form. The systematic presentation is largely drawn from the Corpus Hermeticum.

Table 6.1. Correspondences between the intermediary entities in the Corpus Hermeticum and the Tarot Cards

Intermediate Entities	Corresponding Tarot Cards
Isis	Papess (named Isis in many modern decks)
Horus	?
Hermes (Mercury)	Magician (clearly Mercury in some decks)
Kronos (Time)	Hermit (carries hourglass in older decks)
Zeus (Jupiter)	Emperor or Pope
Ares (Mars)	Chariot
Aphrodite (Venus)	Empress (carries sign of Venus on shield)
Nature	Empress (surrounded by symbols of nature)
Invention	?
Terror	Tower
Silence	Hermit (?) (perhaps as symbol of solitude and isolation)
Sleep	Moon (dreamlike landscape)
Memory	?
Justice	Justice
Necessity	Wheel of Fortune
Fortune	Wheel of Fortune
Hope	Star (represents Hope in many older decks)
Peace	Force (peace between woman and lion)
Contest	Chariot
Anger	?
Quarrel	?
Love	Lovers
Nemesis	Devil
Four Elements	(Represented in Minchiate decks, but not present in the Tarot)

The systematic presentation is largely drawn from the *Corpus Hermeticum*. A manuscript of this collection was returned to Italy in 1460 and translated by Ficino. If we are correct in assigning the origin of the Tarot to about 1440, the *Corpus Hermeticum* arrived in Italy a bit too late to have directly influenced the Tarot designers. But, if we omit the details known only from this manuscript, the loss is not serious. The essential elements of Hermetism were available from a number of other sources, though none quite so systematic. The manuscript overshadowed earlier sources once it was available. But this is not to say that the major features of the Hermetic synthesis were not available piecemeal in earlier decades.

Hermetic Magic

If the *Corpus Hermeticum* added to the Renaissance's understanding of Hermetic philosophy, it added little to the already rich heritage of Hermetic Magic. Throughout the ancient and medieval worlds, the magic of Egypt was supreme.²⁰ Hermes was considered the originator of magic and the progenitor of all the magical texts which multiplied over the centuries. In so far as the Renaissance incorporated magic into its syncretism, to just that extent were Egypt and Hermes revered.

The essence of Egyptian magic was the ability of its priests to call down the astral gods into their statues. Once these divine intermediaries were called into the images, the idols themselves possessed power. The consecration ceremonies were held in secret underground chambers beneath the Temples. In this way the true secrets of the Egyptian priests were kept inviolate from the masses. Notice from Table 6-1 that the Egyptian gods were identified with divine emanations. Therefore, considerable power was vested in the idols when these emanations were captured. This same concept of magic could be applied to the Tarot. By appropriate ceremonies, the Tarot images could be activated by capturing the power of a Divine Idea.

This power over the spirits was an enduring fascination in the ancient world. For centuries, the ceremonies of the Egyptian priests (or reconstructions of them) were performed for the purpose of gaining power. If the proper formulary was used the divine power was compelled to obey the priest. And it was precisely this motive of acquiring power over the spirits which moved the Renaissance magicians such as Ficino.

The methods of theurgy, recommended by the late Neoplatonists such as Iamblicus, involve very much the same logic. By the appropriate liturgical operations, the gods were compelled to obey. In this case, the purpose is not the informing of a statue or image, but the inducement of a prophetic or mystical trance in the subject.

The first thing we must understand about the Renaissance attitude toward magic is the difference between white and black

magic. Black magic involved the invocation of the devil or evil spirits and the acquisition of power through this contact. The contact ordinarily required the loss of the magician's soul. This form of magic is associated with witchcraft, the "evil eye", casting spells, etc. All of the writers on white magic uniformly condemn this brand of magic, even if one suspects them of dabbling in it a bit themselves.

White magic, on the other hand, was praised and recommended throughout the Middle Ages. White magic is really not different from praying and surely that was not to be condemned. The only difference was that with white magic, one was sure that the results of the "prayer" would happen.

White, or true Hermetic, magic actually involved three parts: natural magic, astrological magic and ceremonial magic. White magic appears sometimes as primitive science, sometimes as efforts to change astrological influences, and sometimes as elaborate ceremonialized prayer.²¹

Ceremonial magic is closely related to black magic and only differs in that it invokes only good spirits and does not endanger the magician's soul. Preparations for the ceremonies were elaborate and might involve fasting, solitude, meditation, etc. It is this brand of magic which was most closely related to the ancient Egyptian religions. During the ceremonies the magician would use fumigations, Kabbalistic names for God, mystical symbols, and invoke not only the Holy Trinity but also the lesser "gods" of the Neoplatonic hierarchy.

It is fascinating to see how the Renaissance mind reconciled these lesser "gods" with their Christianity. The Renaissance merely saw these other gods, including the gods of Roman and Greek mythology, as lesser spirits under the dominion of the Trinity. And we have seen in Chapter Three that they evoked Euhemerism to maintain, at least in public, that these gods were simply humans who had been raised to divine status because of their virtuous lives.

It has always fascinated me to think that the Tarot might have been designed as magical symbols to be used in such ceremonial magic. This use of the cards was certainly taken up by the magicians of the Golden Dawn in the nineteenth century. If the images were considered by their designers to represent Divine Ideas, then the precedent for calling the Idea down into the image was well established in the Hermetic writings. But there is absolutely no evidence to support such a wild hypothesis and it must remain a tempting but idle fantasy.

Astrological magic appears to be intermediate between ceremonial and natural magic. As a part of natural magic, the celestial gods were thought to preside over and inform various aspects of nature. Therefore, quite a variety of astral correspondences had to be memorized to properly apply the products of the natural world.

But astrological magic could also be ceremonial magic. The

celestial bodies were endowed with intelligence and could be invoked and compelled just as any of the other deities of the hierarchy. This type of ceremonial magic was performed by Ficino as he tried to redirect the celestial influences or "spiritus" by magical means. The stars had a powerful influence on human life. But this influence could be altered if the magician knew the proper ritual.

The third class of white magic, natural magic, is merely the study of the Universe, invested by God with secret wisdom. Natural magic is synonymous with the Sympathetic magic we introduced in the last two studies. Not only was it highly regarded by the ancient writers, but it also fit in perfectly with the Italian love of the beauties of nature and the Renaissance concept of man as an integral part of the natural world. It was simply the observation of nature and the application of what was learned.

In an incredulous age, such as ours, magic appears to be superstition, ignorance and foolishness. But to an age of Faith, such as the Renaissance, magic was enlightened. The unquestionable veracity of the Bible clearly affirmed the existence and efficacy of all forms of magic. Recall that the Egyptian magicians of Pharaoh were able to duplicate most of Moses' tricks done with his staff. Saul consulted the witch of Endor to summon up the spirit of Samuel for consultation. There are innumerable miracles called into being through the pious prayer of virtuous men. And, certainly, there were helpful spirits or angels who assisted man through their magical powers. In the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples are led to safety out of prison by an angel.

But magic was not merely a matter of belief. Sympathetic magic appeared to be the logical consequence of a metaphysical understanding of nature. The universe had purpose, it was there for man to understand and use. The paradigm used to understand nature involved the Aristotelean principles of matter and form. Matter was the principle of extension and change. It corresponded to the dark, female, receptive principles of Gnostic and Hermetic dualism. Form linked the physical object to the Platonic World of Ideas. It was the bright, male, active principle. It is the form we discover when we recognize that all trees are somehow the same. For the Neoplatonist, form was the Divine material trapped in matter. The forms were the divine sparks which were to be extracted from nature by the human intellect, collected in the human soul and returned to the Divine unity.

Thus, when things "resemble" each other, it means they have the same "form". If they have the same form, they were "informed" by the same Divine Idea. They had the same cause and there is a close metaphysical relationship between them. Their powers or activities have a certain sympathy or predisposition for each other. An operation performed on one can have an effect on the other because they are linked by their forms through the World of Ideas. Since a clear crystal resembles water, it can be rolled in the mouth to quench thirst.²² Likewise, eating fried animal brains increases

intelligence and carrying a piece of lion skin increases courage.

Forms also "rub off" with use, so that an object intimately associated with a person acquires some of his properties. Thus, a harlot's mirror induces lechery. Even thinking long and hard about something causes its "form" to be assimilated. This is the basis of the superstition that the cravings of a pregnant woman must be immediately satisfied, no matter how bizarre. If she strongly desires some object for long enough, a similar form will imprint itself upon the physical form of the child. Pregnant women should only gaze upon beautiful and healthy things, for harelips are caused by looking at hares too long.

Acquiring a form through thinking about it also had its positive connotations. Through contemplating the Sun and wearing "solar" clothing, colors, gems, etc., the bright solar attribute was bound to rub off on one's personality. This concept may also be involved in the Christian tradition of meditating on the life and person of Christ in order to become more Christ-like. The transference of forms underlies most of the meditation practices associated with white magic, and the Tarot as well. The idea is not really far-fetched. Modern psychologists often combine meditation and positive suggestions to alter the mental attitudes of patients.

The methods of Egyptian magicians are now known directly from translated papyri.²⁰ There was sympathetic magic involving wax figures and charms. There was ceremonial magic based on words of power. And there were images into which power had been invested. So many of the traditional concepts of Hermetic magic actually had a basis in ancient Egyptian beliefs.

Other Egyptian Influences

Since we are collecting all of the Egyptian influences into one chapter, there are several miscellaneous points which need to be added. For example, we would be remiss if we did not at least mention Alchemy. Although we will devote Chapter Eleven to this subject, it must be noted here as another source of ancient Egyptian wisdom. As Hermes was considered the originator of all things magical and wise, he was, of course, considered the inventor of Alchemy as well. The art was widely practiced in northern Italy and is mentioned by Petrarch. So it is quite feasible that Alchemy was considered as another Egyptian influence to be synthesized into the Tarot symbols.

Another influence included in the kaleidoscopic intellectual background of the Renaissance were the writings of the Desert Fathers. As we will discuss in the following chapter, one of the earliest forms of piety in Christianity involved the retreat from the world into the deserts of Egypt. These hermits went there to pray, meditate and live a life wholly devoted to Christ. Their theology was a strange mixture of Christian devotion, Jewish demonology, Gnostic asceticism and even possibly Indian mysticism. Through the travels

and writings of John Cassian, the Egyptian desert was to exert a strong influence on western monasticism and was even more important to the spirituality of Byzantine Christianity.

Stories of the great Desert monks of Egypt were common fare throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The dialogues of Cassian were required reading for monks and must have found their way into sermons preached to the people. The hermits' asceticism, ecstasies, familiar conversations with angels and demons would have seemed in perfect accord with Renaissance syncretism. And, of course, the image on the Hermit card seems in perfect accord as well.

A final Egyptian influence is never considered by the Renaissance writers, because it was not even known at that time. It may seem strange to include it, therefore, but the reasons will become clear in a moment. The Renaissance Magus associated the Gnostic concept of passing through the seven spheres with astrology and traced its origins to Bablyon. But it is possible that this concept of passage is also Egyptian in origin.

The extensive archeological work in Egypt over the past century has revealed much about the ancient escatological beliefs of the Egyptians. With the Theban Rescension (1600-1900 BC), there is an increasing concern with the afterlife and numerous tomb engravings and "Books of the Dead" have been found. As an example of these books, we can look at the Papyrus of Ani, written probably between 1450 and 1400 BC.⁷ In preparation for the journey through the underworld, Ani is instructed that he will pass over a great plain on which there are seven halls or mansions. He must pass through the gate of each of these mansions before reaching the realm of the god. At each gate there will be a doorkeeper, a lookout and a questioner. The soul must be able to answer the questions and must give to each guardian his proper secret name or he will not be allowed to pass.

It seems clear that this is the same myth reflected in later Gnostic texts. Of course, this is not proof that the myth originated in Egypt and was borrowed by the Babylonians, instead of the other way around. But if the origin were Babylonian, one would expect to find some semblance of stellar religion associated with it, and there is none. Since there was continuous intercourse between Egypt and the ancient kingdoms of Babylon, e. g., the Hittites, there was ample opportunity for the myth to pass between cultures.

Of course, the Renaissance was unaware of these ancient papyri and could not have known the connection between the Babylonian myth and Egypt. However, it is one more indicator that the ancient world had ample reason to believe that Egypt was the source of all wisdom.

Summary

Given all of the threads which are woven through this study, it

is little wonder that the Renaissance Magus felt that all intellectual roads led to Egypt. He learned his philosophy from Plotinus, Proclus, Porphyry, Clement and Origen, all Egyptians. These philosophers carried on the tradition of Plato, and Pythagoras, both of whom were supposed to have studied in Egypt. The Bible told him that Pharaoh had magicians at his court and Moses undoubtedly learned much in his household. Even Jesus spent part of his childhood in Egypt. It seemed from his study of paganism that all Roman gods were derived from the Greek hierarchy and the Greek from the Egyptian. All of the ancient writers praised the Mystery Religion of Isis and he had available to him in Apuleius an extended description of its mysteries.

He had before him the Hieroglyphica and later the Corpus Hermeticum to attest to Egyptian wisdom. The Hieroglyphica recommended the use of enigmatic images as the proper way to communicate mystical secrets. The Corpus Hermeticum confirmed that Neoplatonism and the Gnosis had their origins in ancient Egypt. And of course, the Corpus reaffirmed the semi-divine status of the greatest mystagogue of the ancient world, Hermes Trismagistus, the Egyptian prophet, who invented not only the hieroglyphics but magic and alchemy as well. With Hermes as their authority, ceremonial magic, astrological magic, and natural magic could all be justified. To the Renaissance, the Egyptian priests had developed and perfected most of the concepts. Later magicians had merely transmitted the knowledge.

Even the Renaissance's own Christian mystical roots could be traced back to the Egyptian desert. And to top it off, there was Augustine, the greatest of the early Christian theologians, attesting to the fact that he had been led to Christianity through Plotinus. If all of this was not enough to convince him that Egypt was the fountainhead of all mystical and magical knowledge, I don't know what would. And if all this did not motivate him to attribute an Egyptian origin for the concepts embodied in the Tarot, which he designed to encapsulate all of this wisdom, I don't know what would.

Notes and References

1. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (Graves, trans., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951).
2. Seznek, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (Princeton University Press, 1953) pp 99 f.
3. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1964) p 115.
4. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Norton, 1958) p 17.
5. In a fascinating occult novel, de Lubicz, *Her-Bak* (Inner Traditions, 1977) tells the story of an Egyptian boy who grows into a priest. The story contains his instruction in the esoteric meanings of the hieroglyphics.
6. Budge, *Egyptian Religion* (Bell, 1959).
7. Budge, *The Book of the Dead* (Bell, 1960).
8. Augustine mentions Apuleius in the *City of God* as a magician. He seems to have been rather universally acknowledged as a miracle worker. See Haight, *Apuleius and His Influence* (Cooper Square, 1963) p 100.
9. Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Harvard University Press, 1979) p 27. The fusion of Isis and Demeter is interesting because of the symbolic confusion associated with Tarot cards two and three. The Papess is often identified with Isis (See Chapter nine). The Empress is Mother Nature and therefore an earth goddess like Demeter. A crescent moon is often depicted on the Papess card, but other decks show the crescent moon on the Empress card. Other elements of the symbolism are also shifted back and forth between the cards. A similar confusion exists in the symbols associated with Mary. She is the Immaculate Virgin like the Papess card. At the same time, Mary is the fecund Mother of God and the Morning Star, i.e., Venus. This calls to mind the Empress card.
10. Yates, *op. cit.*, pp 6 ff. Justin Martyr called Hermes the most ancient philosopher. Cyril of Alexandria credits Hermes with numbers, astrology, grammar and music. See Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes* (Hermes Press, 1978) pp 215 and 252.
11. Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Dover, 1956) pp 201 f.
12. Roger Bacon considered Hermes as the "Pater Philosophorum", the father of all philosophies. Thorndike, *The Place of Magic in the Intellectual History of Europe* (Columbia University Press, 1905) p 84.
13. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (Duckworth, 1972) p 170.
14. Yates, *op. cit.*, p 50.
15. Shumaker, *Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 1972) p 209.
16. Yates, *op. cit.*, pp 2 f.
17. Acts 19:34.
18. Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p 227.
19. Eliade, *The Two and the One* (University of Chicago Press, 1979) p 108.
20. Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (Dover, 1971) p 4.
21. Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p 156.
22. *Ibid.*, pp 118 ff. The examples in this section are taken from this source.

Christian Mysticism

The Tarot and the Christian Mystical Tradition

Although the Renaissance rejected the rigidity of scholastic dogma, the self-abnegation of the monastery, the immorality of the clergy and the worldliness of the papacy, it did not reject Christianity. It rejected the external Church, but took to its heart the mystical tradition of the inner church. It was heir to a long history of mystical thought that was very much in keeping with its view of God-union as the end of human life. The assimilation of Christianity into the Tarot is clear in many cards. The Christian images include the Pope and Hermit, often shown as a Benedictine or Franciscan monk. Other cards such as the Devil and the Last Judgment also suggest Christian sources.

Most historians of the Renaissance have emphasized the *newness* of the concepts introduced from the Hellenistic world and the simultaneous rejection of the dogmatism of the Roman Church. But it must also be remembered that one of the best features of Medieval culture, its mystical tradition, was retained and woven tightly into the Renaissance synthesis.¹ The Renaissance was rebellious but it was careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water.

The basis for the Renaissance synthesis of Christianity with Hellenism was not the external Church hierarchy or theology. The synthesis was with the undercurrent of Neoplatonic mysticism.² This mysticism had always been a critical ingredient in the spiritual life of the Church, even if it seldom found its way into the official dogma. At its core, Christianity is another Neoplatonic Mystery Religion,³ with the mysteries woven tightly around the greatest mystic of the western world, Jesus of Nazareth. The undercurrent of Neoplatonic thought, beneath ritual, dogma and papal authority, runs in an unbroken chain from Jesus to the Renaissance. It was this undercurrent that the Renaissance mystic found, recognized and incorporated into his system.

It is the onus of this chapter to review the 1400 year history of Neoplatonic mysticism in Christianity. When the Renaissance rediscovered the ancient philosophers, they were accepted, in part, because their basic concepts had never disappeared. The Renaissance discovered Plotinus and immediately recognized him as an intimate friend. Neoplatonism was to the Christian mystic what Aristotelianism was to the academic theologian: a firm philosophical foundation beneath and behind his explanation of the universe. As long as mysticism was not associated with anti-clerical and anti-papal tendencies, the Church welcomed the mystics within its fold.

It is impossible to deal with a 1400 year history in a single study and do justice to the fascinating detail of the story. But our task is made simpler by the special purpose with which we approach the history. We are interested in showing the pervading Neoplatonism of this tradition. It was this Neoplatonism which helped assimilate Christian mysticism into the Renaissance picture of reality. We will be particularly interested in pointing out details that seem well adapted to the Renaissance mind and to the themes developed in the Tarot cards.

Jesus and the Early Christian Church

To begin our survey, we must examine the early Church in search of the same Gnosticism, Mystery Religions and mysticism found everywhere else in the Hellenistic world. We will find a surprising number of concepts in the foundations of Christianity which were later embodied in the Renaissance synthesis and in the Tarot. All of the characteristic experiences of mysticism, for example, can be found in the New Testament in the person of Jesus.⁴ The New Testament, combined with Neoplatonic philosophy, is the essential foundation of all forms of western mysticism, both Christian and occult, orthodox and heretical.

As we will see in our study of Kabbalah, Judaism had a long mystical tradition which was drawn upon by Christianity. The patriarchs and prophets experienced direct and intimate contact with Yahweh. From the burning bush to Mount Sinai, Moses had frequent and profound mystical experiences. The miracles and visions of the prophets indicated considerable familiarity with the phenomena of mysticism.

But it was in the person of Jesus that the mystical tradition of Judaism reached its summit. The gospels are full of mysticism. It is our familiarity with these writings which clouds our perception of this mysticism. There are numerous mentions of isolation and fasting when Jesus went off into the desert to pray. There are visions of the heavens opening at the Baptism and of the Devil tempting Jesus. The profundity of Jesus' mystical prayer is evident in the Garden of Gethsemene and at the Transfiguration.

Christian mysticism finds its firmest foundation in the fourth gospel. The Johannine writings are mystical certainly, but also Gnostic and Neoplatonic. The emphasis is on the life of the spirit, the Kingdom of Heaven which is within each of the listeners. According to John, Jesus specifically preached a call to mysticism.

John outlines the essential features of Jesus' message that we will find throughout this study. First, the call is to follow Christ, to become one with Christ in his mystical union with the Father: "The Father and I are One."⁵ Surely, this is one of the most explicit statements of God-union in all of literature. The implications of this

union for the divinization of the mystic are also clear, ". . . before Abraham ever was, I am."⁶ Jesus clearly stated that his followers were to become one with the Father through becoming one with him.

The essential dynamic of this God-union is love. The Gnosis of Jesus, the secret message of salvation, is this love. "God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God and God lives in him."⁷ Much of Christianity has been interpreted in terms of the salvation brought about by the sacrifice of Christ. Most Christians recognize that Jesus performed a salvatory act. Many fewer detect the call to personal mysticism, the call to follow Jesus literally in his experience of death and rebirth. ". . . unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest."⁸ Clearly Jesus refers to the mystical death and bids others to follow him in this experience.

The mysticism of John is often expressed in symbolism, but the message is clearly stated by Paul,

. . . when we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized in his death; in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life.⁹

Baptism is the new initiation, the effective symbol of our joining in the mystical death and rebirth of Christ. Prior to Christianity, this initiatory experience was reserved to the few advanced initiates of the Mystery Religions. The "Good News" preached by Paul was that this initiation was available to all men through Baptism. Paul announced the possibility of mystical union with God through Jesus, the Logos, the intermediary. "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." The Gnosis, the secret knowledge of salvation, is now laid open to all.

To his hearers, well versed in the Mysteries and Gnosticism, Paul preached a new Gnosis, a new mystical message. Baptism was the new initiation, the secret wisdom was life in Christ Jesus. The vision of the deity, promised by the Mysteries, had actually occurred. Christ walked the earth and was seen by men. God was accessible to all. Paul, the educated Hellenistic Jew, presented Christianity as a replacement for the mystical experiences of Gnosticism and the Mysteries. It was natural that he should choose language familiar to his listeners. But in so doing, he clearly established the underlying mystical nature of Christianity and its compatibility with the mysticism of the Hellenistic world.

His listeners accepted Paul's invitation to participate personally in the mysticism of Christ. This is clear from the familiarity with mystical phenomena expressed in the Acts and the Epistles. Speaking in tongues, prophesy, and healing were accepted as natural consequences of the Christian Gnosis. It is obvious that the early

Christians accepted the mystical invitation.

Greek Fathers of the Church

If the Judaic mysticism of Jesus is not clear in John and if the relationship between Christianity and the Hellenistic Mysteries is not clear in Paul, then the earliest writers of the Church resolve any doubts. The period of the Greek Fathers, the second to fourth century, is the period when the full flood of Hellenistic thought poured into Christianity.¹⁰ From the viewpoint of the Tarot and the legends of Egyptian origin, it is interesting that this Hellenistic infusion occurred in Alexandria, the Egyptian intellectual center.

Ammonius Saccas, whom we met briefly as the teacher of Plotinus, was born of Christian parents and likely taught an orthodox Christian mysticism reconciled with Plato's philosophy.¹¹ Thus the very origins of Neoplatonism are closely linked with early Christian mysticism. As we will see, this linkage was maintained through the centuries. Whenever the mystics attempted to explain their experience in theoretical terms, they drew upon Neoplatonism almost exclusively.

Plotinus' concept of God-union was closely linked to the mystical concepts of the Church community. The Christians of Jewish descent largely saw Christianity in the light of their own traditions. However, the communities established by Paul were Greek and Roman and they saw the logical connection between the message of Jesus and the Gnostic tradition with which they were familiar.

Although an earlier writer, Clement of Alexandria, had already seen the linkage between Christian thought and Pagan mysticism, it is with Origen that a truly mystical Christian philosophy began. Origen was also a student of Ammonius Saccas, possibly a fellow student of Plotinus.¹² But unlike Plotinus, who remained pagan, Origen was thoroughly immersed in Christianity. His writings combined Gnosticism, Hermeticism and Neoplatonism with Christianity to form a new syncretism.

Origen's emphasis can be seen in his commentary on the "Song of Songs". He regarded this poem as an allegory of the mystical marriage of the individual soul with God.¹³ The mystical marriage and allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs were to become enduring themes with mystics throughout the ages. And, of course, both of these themes are suggested in the Lovers card.

Origen enunciated a number of themes which are already familiar to us in the rebirth of Neoplatonism in the Renaissance. The highest goal of human life is union with God in love. Origen's propensity for allegory carries over into his interpretation of Exodus, which he regards as the story of the mystic's Journey to God. Further, the final stages of mystical union result from a "call", a gift of God, not a human accomplishment. This seems to be the message in the Judgment card. Given the similarities between his thought and the

Renaissance, it is not surprising that Origen was cited often by the Renaissance Neoplatonists.¹⁴

The Desert Fathers

Origen's synthesis of Neoplatonism and Christianity is not the only important contribution of Egypt to early Christianity and the mystical tradition of western culture. We must also take into account the strange phenomenon of the simple desert hermits, mentioned briefly in the last chapter.

As early as 271 A.D., the hermit Antony (251-356) took literally the admonition of Jesus to sell all that he had and went into the desert to concentrate totally on seeking God.¹⁵ This was the beginning of Christian monasticism and a long tradition of asceticism linked with mysticism. The initiative of Antony was soon followed by an astonishing number of Christians, mostly Alexandrians, who trekked into the Theban desert about three hundred miles south of Alexandria.

The origins and stimulus for this ascetic ideal can be traced primarily to Pessimistic Gnosticism. The Jews did have a tradition of fasting and penance, exemplified in the vow of the Nazarene. Following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it has also become apparent that a Judaic sect existed in which asceticism was an integral part. At the same time, the Gnostic emphasis on dualism must have been a major influence on the hermit's decision to abandon the evil world.

The desert hermits were children of their times: Hellenists, Alexandrians, and therefore Neoplatonists. Their ideals are most clearly stated by Evagius of Pontus (345-399). Evagius integrated Christianity and Neoplatonism into a mysticism which arrived at "acesis" and "contemplation" as the highest ideals of Christianity. Both of these terms were to become a part of the working vocabulary of the later Christian mystics. Yet neither of these words is found in the New Testament. Their origins lie in Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. Both rejected the evil flesh and both were pervasive in the culture in which Evagius lived and wrote.¹⁶ It is clear that Evagius' ideals of asceticism and contemplation made their way into the Renaissance and appear in the Hermit card of the Tarot.

The life of the early desert monks was austere in the extreme. Living in isolation or in small communities, they ate little, prayed the psalms for long hours and occupied themselves with weaving baskets and mats from palm fronds to buy their meager supplies. The legends of their perseverance and mystical experiences were to inspire many generations of Christian mystics.

The appeal of this austere mysticism is hard for us to grasp today. During its Golden Age from 330 to 440 AD, the numbers of Neoplatonic Christians who adopted this harsh life are impressive.

Pachomius, who developed the earliest communities which could be called monasteries, had 7000 monks under his jurisdiction. The deserts of Nitria held another 5000 hermits. Serapion at Arsinoe had another 10,000.¹⁷

The ideal of the desert hermit soon spread into Middle Eastern countries where additional desert communities were formed. Through the Syrian monks, the ascetic and mystical ideal became an integral part of Greek Orthodox spirituality and this remains true to this day. The monks of Mount Athos in Greece maintain the unbroken line of ascetic mystics.

Egyptian monasticism also spread to the western world through the writings and foundations of John Cassian. After living in Egypt and learning the way of life of the hermits, Cassian returned to France and Italy. He both spread the infectious word and founded several monasteries. Cassian's writings on the hermit monks were adopted in Europe and are one of the most important influences in the western monastic tradition.

Augustine of Hippo

Probably the most influential western thinker to be affected by the stories of the Egyptian hermits was Augustine of Hippo (354-430). A Manichaean Gnostic as a young man, he was led to Christianity through the study of Neoplatonism and the inspiration of the hermits. He stated that it was through the "gold" refined in Egypt, and left there for Christians to find, that he was led to God.¹⁸ Surely such a bold statement would not have escaped the notice of the Renaissance Magus.

Although many of his thoughts were anticipated by Origen and Evagrius, it was through Augustine that Neoplatonism was passed to the Middle Ages. He wrote extensively and became the premiere theologian of the Church. His Neoplatonic philosophy became Christian orthodoxy. In his writings, he praises Plotinian philosophy as being very close to Christian truth.¹⁹

But our interest in Augustine is not as the orthodox theologian but as Christian mystic. His Neoplatonism became an essential feature of the western mystical tradition, and his writings were not ignored in the Renaissance. His influence on mysticism was great because he was himself a mystic, describing his experiences of God-union in several places in his writings.²⁰ Attracted by his mysticism, later Christians found in his writings a theological theory to explain their experiences. We will find in the next chapter that mystics, living in an age when Neoplatonism was not considered so orthodox, had great difficulty avoiding the charge of heresy.

The philosophic system of Augustine clearly shows the syncretism of the late Hellenistic world. He is first and foremost a Christian, relying heavily on the Scriptures and the mysticism of John and Paul. But with the Christianity goes a generous helping of the

Manichaeism he espoused as a youth. His dualism is clear, for example, in his statements about human depravity. To these components are added the Neoplatonic ideal of ecstatic God-union. So, in many respects, Augustine is simply another source for the transcendence and dualism found in the Renaissance and reflected in the symbols of the Tarot.

Monasticism and the Middle Ages

Over the thousand year interval stretching from Augustine to the Renaissance and continuing even today, there is an unbroken chain of mysticism, institutionalized in the Benedictine monasteries. Although there were periods of laxity and decay, the monastery was a mystical institution, designed to raise its residents to the experience of God-union. And it must be remembered that the monastery is the oldest and most successful social institution in western civilization.

Through the influence of John Cassian's writings, the early monasteries were modeled after the Egyptian hermitages. Early institutions can be found in Italy (c 336), Marseilles (400-440) and England (540). During the early middle ages, the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monks traveled widely over Europe, founding new monasteries.

The early monasteries were a mixture of asceticism and contemplation. There can be no doubt that Cassian had been influenced by Evagrius and therefore by Neoplatonism. Thus, the asceticism of the hermit was combined with contemplative prayer through which the soul was caught up into ecstatic God-union.

The most powerful single influence on the development of the monastic movement was Benedict of Nursia (c480-c547). He established a rule of life²¹ which was followed throughout Europe. Largely concerned with the orderly conduct of the monastery and such practical matters as the discipline of the errant monk, Benedict nevertheless established the ideals of Benedictine obedience and humility which were the bulwarks of monastic life.

We have already indicated in Chapter Three that the monastic ideal was rejected in the Renaissance. The self-abnegation called for in Benedict's rule seemed in direct conflict with the Humanist ideals of freedom and self-determination. Immediately antecedent to the Renaissance, European monasticism suffered a period of laxity and so the institution was more likely to be satirized than imitated by the Renaissance Magus.

But while the institution was broadly criticized for its worldliness and wealth, the individual mystic monk was admired in the Renaissance, just as in previous Medieval periods. Even in periods of decay, monasticism continued to produce mystics and bore witness to the empirical fact of God-union as a personal experience. The monastery was the institution that preserved this ideal and communicated it to the Renaissance.

Dionysius the Areopagite

In the ninth century, another Neoplatonic philosopher, John Scotus Erigena²² translated the works of Dionysius into Latin. By the 1100's, Dionysius had largely replaced (or supplemented) Augustine as the primary authority for the Christian mystic. Because the author was believed to be the Dionysius converted by the Apostle Paul at Athens, his writings carried Apostolic authority. In fact, the author was a Syrian monk of the fifth century, though some authorities would place him as early as the third century.

Although Augustine had introduced Neoplatonism into Christian mysticism, Dionysius became far more influential because his mysticism is more conspicuous and his Neoplatonism is more forceful. The themes he introduces can be easily recognized in all later Christian mystics, and indeed in the Renaissance syncretism.

For Dionysius, as for Plotinus, God is absolutely transcendent and unknowable. Only negative statements, statements about what He is not, can be made. We can only say that God is not multiple, not finite, and not limited. All of our knowledge of Him is through his attributes, symbols of his being. This concept of knowledge through God's attributes was picked up and greatly expanded by the Kabbalists. The only direct knowledge of God is to be obtained, not through intellectual endeavor, but through the mystical experience.

For Dionysius, theology *is* mysticism. The study of God is a matter of experience, not intellection. By blotting out all sensory knowledge, the Divine enlightenment is able to flow in like water into an empty container. The Divine illumination is a sudden, ecstatic experience that follows a long period of continuous meditation. This period prepares the way by clearing the mind of all other forms of knowledge. The experience is available to all. The Divine light is always ready to flow in. It is we who prevent it by our continuous mental activity. Thus, the attitude to be adopted is one of quiet, calm and receptivity.

Many of these themes are reiterated in the Tarot, suggesting the influence of the Christian mystical tradition and Dionysius on the designers. The period of preparation and isolation is represented in the Hermit card. The attitude of passivity and acceptance is often recommended to the Fool. The symbol of light to designate the entry of the Divine influence into the mystic's consciousness is suggested by the increasing light in cards sixteen to nineteen.

We have seen in previous studies that these themes could also be derived from other sources available to the Renaissance. The exact source of the ideas is not important. What is important is that we are building, brick by brick, a strong edifice of interpretation. As each new element confirms and reinforces the same basic concepts, our interpretations become more and more feasible. If half a dozen different and independent sources indicate that light is a

symbol of Divine illumination, it becomes increasingly apparent that the symbols of light in the Tarot are not arbitrary and not accidental. Our argument is becoming stronger and stronger that the Tarot is related to the tradition of western mysticism, both occult and orthodox, both pagan and Christian.

Dionysius states so succinctly the principles of mysticism that he provided the vocabulary adopted by all Christian mystics to follow. Much of the rest of our historical survey will be involved in reiterating the Neoplatonic doctrines already clearly stated by Dionysius.

Medieval Mysticism

Throughout the Middle Ages, there was seldom a span of fifty years without a well-known mystic in Europe. It will suffice for our purposes to mention only a few. The brightest light of the twelfth century was Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153). Both mystic and active preacher, he wrote a commentary on the Song of Songs²³ which recalls Origen in its emphasis on the mystic marriage and the ecstasy of love.

The twelfth century also saw the beginnings of Scholasticism, the systematic exploration of theology. Hugh and Richard of St. Victor are particularly interesting scholastics because they attempted a systematic presentation of mystical theology. Heavily dependent on the "negative theology" of Dionysius, they emphasized contemplation, ecstatic union and final stages requiring the direct hand of God.

The greatest achievements of scholastic theology are centered about Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Taught by Albert the Great (1206-1280), an avowed Neoplatonist, Thomas owed much to the Neoplatonic tradition.²⁴ There is, for example, a strong element of passivity in his contemplative doctrines. The soul must be perfectly docile to God's leadings. But in several points, Thomas deviated from the tradition. Other theologians, particularly the Franciscan Bonaventura, felt that Thomas underestimated the mystical experience in denying direct knowledge of God in this life.²⁵

In this and other doctrines, Thomas is an excellent example of the dogmatism and rigidity which enters theology when the theologian himself is not a mystic. According to legend, Thomas had a mystical experience late in life and from that time on stopped working on his compendium of theology. He saw his work as inane in comparison with the direct knowledge of God. Thomism was quickly to become the official doctrine of the Church and led to many problems for mystics who found they could not express their experiences of God in his rigid intellectual framework.

Perhaps the best example of this is seen in the German mystics. Beginning with Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) and continuing with his disciples Henry Suso and John Tauler there was a resurgence of Neoplatonic and Dionysian mysticism in Germany and the Low

Countries. Eckhart stressed the primacy of direct experiential knowledge of the Godhead. He incurred the wrath of the Church because his statements did not fit well into the Thomistic framework then accepted. We will return to Eckhart in the next chapter since his writings formed one of the foundations of Pre-Renaissance heretical mystical cults.

Following Eckhart, there was a resurgence of mysticism throughout northern Europe. At the monastery of St. Mary at Helfta there were several famous women mystics over the period 1257-1346.²⁶ There were also groups of laymen who formed informal societies adopting a common life for prayer and to foster the mystical life. Some groups, called the Friends of God, were orthodox. But the groups graded almost imperceptibly into the heretical. The influence of the heretical mystics, called by a variety of titles, pervaded the spirituality of Europe even into the Renaissance.

In the Low Countries, the popular lay mysticism became the *Devotio Moderna* with popular leaders such as Gerard Groot (died 1384). The movement also produced John of Ruysbroeck (1293-1381).²⁷ He was a speculative mystic who wrote some of the most detailed descriptions of the mystical experience that are available in any language. The popularity of the movement can be seen in the rapid spread of "The Imitation of Christ" by Thomas a Kempis, a devotional manual and meditation guide written about 1427. The Imitation existed in over 250 manuscripts by 1450 and was first printed and widely distributed in Venice in 1483. The popularity of the work attests to the strong underlying current of Christian mysticism that existed during the early Renaissance.

The fourteenth century also saw an awakening of mysticism in England.²⁸ These mystics were little concerned with speculation but their roots are clearly Dionysian, his writings being available in English translation. Starting with Richard Rolle (died 1349) there were a succession of mystics including Julian of Norwich, who is known to have read Dionysius in translation, and Margery Kempe (died 1440). Walter Hilton (died 1396) was one of the earliest writers to clearly outline the phenomenon of the dark night of the soul²⁹ in which the mystic experiences abandonment and despair. This psychological state is actually a Christian version of the pagan's night sea journey, which we discussed in Chapter Five and pointed out there the resemblances to the Tarot cards from twelve to twenty-one. The popular "Cloud of Unknowing" came from this same school of English mystics and appears to be a popularization of Dionysius, complete with negative theology, loss of self, and the primacy of love.³⁰

Francis of Assisi

With the German and English mystics we are brought to the time of the Renaissance. The writers we have considered were readily available in the Renaissance and represented the epitome of

Christian mysticism. But before we explore the influence of these writers, we must backtrack to the beginning of the thirteenth century to consider one of the most powerful influences in all of Italian Christianity.

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) anticipated many of the themes of the Renaissance. He was a mystic in whom there was no rejection of nature. He preached to the birds and sang to his Brother Sun and Sister Moon. At the same time, he was an austere ascetic. There was a strong dualism in his contrasts between sin and Godliness. The stories of his life were to have an overwhelming influence in Italy for many centuries. He revived the Christian spirit in Italy and reawakened the desire for mystical union with God. His love of nature, his dualism and his love are still an integral part of the Italian spirit.

The story of the Franciscan friars and nuns he left behind him is a complex one. Even before his death, there was a movement to relax his stringent rules of poverty. The relaxed monasteries contrasted with the "Observants" who attempted to follow Francis literally. Eventually, the more literal interpreters were persecuted out of the order and, as Fraticelli, formed a heterodox, if not heretical group, which we will return to in the next chapter.

In spite of the internal friction the Franciscans produced a number of notable mystics and were well known and respected in the Renaissance. Angela of Foligno³¹ produced an influential spiritual biography. In her story are a number of elements which seem to be carried over into the Tarot. For example, we find the importance of self-knowledge (Hermit), the need for a reversal of former values (Hanged Man), discussion of the dark night of the soul (Devil and Tower) and a good understanding of the oscillations of moods between joy and sorrow (Wheel). She also emphasized the symbol of human love to express the experience of God-union (Lovers) and the need for absolute surrender to the will of God (Hanged Man).

Bonaventura (1221-1274) was an important Franciscan theologian, both Dionysian and Neoplatonic. We have already seen him opposing Aquinas for a lack of insight into the mystical experience. The theology of Bonaventura covers the entire spectrum of mystical concepts. He discusses ecstasy, God-union, the mystical journey through Purgation, Illumination and Union, and he provided a Christianized Neoplatonic vision that simply replaced "love" for Gnosis.³²

It is important for us to remember that the Franciscan mystical writings were available and widely respected throughout Italy during the Renaissance. As with all of the Church's institutions, the worldliness and materialism of the friars was criticized and satirized; but never the individual mystic.

Eastern Orthodox Myticism

We must briefly consider the Eastern Orthodox Church to

understand the full mystical heritage available to the Renaissance. Remember that the Byzantine scholars were present at the Church Council at Ferrara in 1438 and in Florence the following year. We know that these scholars created quite a stir. They brought with them many Greek manuscripts which were translated into Latin. They strongly reinforced the interest in Neoplatonism which was already widespread in Italy. They provided a critical link to the ancient Hellenistic civilization which so fascinated the Renaissance scholar. Because of their broad influence, we must consider seriously the Eastern mystical tradition which was introduced into Italy through these Byzantines.

Greek Orthodox mysticism can be easily summarized as a combination of the asceticism of the Desert Fathers and the negative theology of Dionysius. So it is little wonder that the Byzantines who came to Italy were Neoplatonists. We must remember that the mystic who wrote under the name of Dionysius was a Syrian monk. Other influential writers, such as John Climacus (c579-c649), were also monks of the Middle Eastern deserts.

The sayings of the desert fathers form the basis of much of the Eastern mystical literature. The concepts, found in these sayings, are ascetical and heavily Gnostic. They present the Fool for Christ, the Divine Darkness and emphasize the goal of God-union.³³

A common theme of particular interest to us is the symbolism of light. Visions of light are identified with an immediate experience of God, such as Paul experienced on the road to Damascus. The legitimacy of this symbolism had been debated at Constantinople by Barlaam, a Calabrian monk, and Gregory Palamas. The question was settled in favor of the mystics at the Synod of Constantinople in 1351. So it is likely that this controversy and its resolution loomed large in the discussions of the Byzantine scholars in Italy. It seems reasonable to suggest that the symbolism of increasing light in the Tarot (cards sixteen to nineteen) was at least reinforced from this source.

Christian Mysticism in the Renaissance

At length we are prepared to examine the mystical influences in the immediate temporal and spatial vicinity of the Italian Renaissance. Although the Renaissance has been largely portrayed as a period when old values were dismissed and a new pagan Humanism came to the fore, this is only half the story. As we have mentioned earlier, the institutions of the Church were being rejected, but not the individual saints and mystics. The period preceding the design of the Tarot was as rich in mystics as earlier Medieval times and these mystics were known and admired in the intellectual and cultural milieu of the Renaissance. In fact, some scholars would maintain that medieval religious mysticism was the primary source from which flowed the cultural currents of the Renaissance.³⁴

Indeed, some date the beginning of the Renaissance from Francis of Assisi³⁵ and consider later developments as logical extensions of his ideas. We need not go that far in order to understand that fourteenth and fifteenth century mysticism was an important part of Renaissance culture.³⁶ Some of the most zealous Humanists were men of great piety, even ascetics.

We cannot say often enough that the Renaissance reaction against the hierarchy of the Church did not extent to the best of its traditional mysticism. The Church in early Renaissance times was in a pitiable state. The power of the papacy had been emasculated. From 1378 and for forty-nine years, there were two Popes, one at Avignon and one at Rome. As we will see in the next chapter, there was a general trend toward hatred of the Church and the cruelty with which it suppressed any new ideas. Indeed, the Church worked overtime to hold down the surging Italian spirit. The Church showed unusual rigidity. Many evils existed in the Church. Franciscan monks roamed Italy, extorting money from the poor through faked miracles and fabricated relics. In spite of all this, the few genuine mystics were held in the highest regard.

In addition to the great mystics within the Church, the Renaissance applauded the rebellious spirit of small heretical sects that showed a genuine mystical spirit. In many cases, the true spirituality of Christianity had moved outside the official hierarchical structure and become a phenomenon of lay groups, such as the Brethren of the Common Life in Germany. The strong influence of these groups can be seen in the reformed rule of the monastery founded by Barbo at Padua in 1408. This institution incorporated many of the practices and conventions of the Brethren of the Common Life, a lay group, rather than adopting the conventions of the lax clerics of other monasteries.

What the Renaissance Magus saw was a sharp contrast between the decadent institutions of the Church and a vital mysticism which seemed to endure in spite of the Church. Table 7-1 shows the extent of this mystical tradition and helps put into perspective the 1400 year tradition inherited by the Renaissance. Note particularly that the list gets longer, not shorter, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

During the very period when the Tarot was being designed, the Renaissance had before its eyes a number of significant mystics. There was John Gerson (1363-1429) at the University of Paris. There was the visionary Frances (1384-1440) in Rome. And it is easy to forget that Joan of Arc (1412-1431) was working her wonders in France. Closer to home, Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) was still remembered and read widely. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) was to become a potent political and spiritual force.

Particular attention must be paid to Fra Girolamo Savonarola.³⁷ Although his story takes place slightly after the Tarot design, it does reflect the mood of the times and the respect held for individuals

of great piety. Savonarola was a Dominican friar with a unique charismatic preaching ability. He had tremendous popular appeal and caused an epidemic of repentance and spirituality. Even Pico della Mirandola fell under his influence. For a period he rejected his former Humanistic extremes. Unfortunately, Savonarola became too powerful for his own good. He was burned at the stake in Florence in 1498.

Another influential mystic was Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). Nicholas was born in Germany and became a Cardinal of the Church. From this position of authority and orthodoxy, he defended the doctrines of Eckhart, read Dionysius in the original Greek and became a Neoplatonic philosopher of considerable repute. In his writings he confirms some of the most basic themes of the Tarot. He speaks of moving into the darkness and admitting the coincidence of opposites which is beyond the grasp of reason.³⁸

Christian Mysticism and the Tarot

We have established that Christian mysticism pervaded the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere within which the Tarot was designed. The task before us now is to summarize the major tenets of this mystical tradition and show correlations with the symbolism of the Tarot. We must bear in mind that the elements of the tradition incorporated into the Trumps are not the doctrinal aspects but the psychological states and phenomena which the mystic experiences. The Tarot is a guide to the mystic, not a system of theology. The purpose is to inform the mystic that the states he experiences at various stages of his journey are well-known. The cards are guideposts showing the mystic that he is not lost and his current state, no matter how strange it may seem, is normal and to be expected.

The first point we must establish is that the Tarot is not simply reducible to any one symbolic system, Christian mysticism included. Although we will find the concepts of mysticism clearly symbolized in the cards, fully one third of the Trumps do not seem to fit at all (i.e., cards one-four, seven-eight, fourteen). Thus, although we will argue that some of the basic themes of the Tarot can be found in the mystical tradition of Christianity, it certainly does not explain everything. We will need all of the symbolic systems presented in our series of studies to approach anything like a complete understanding of the symbols.

Nevertheless, the contribution of Christian mysticism is clear. The fifth card of the deck is the Pope and the High Priestess of the earliest hand-painted decks is a nun. These are both orthodox Christian images. Actually this is strange in light of the ridicule to which the Church was subjected during this period. It implies to me that the designers clung to a fundamental loyalty to the Papacy, even though they place the Pope very low in the series of cards and seem

Table 8-1. A summary of the Major figures in the Christian mystical tradition from Jesus to the fifteenth century.

Century	Major Christian Mystics
0-100	Jesus of Nazareth (4 BC — 29 AD) Paul of Tarsus (died c64) Apostle John Ignatius of Antioch (died c117) Ireneus (c130-203)
100-200	Clement of Alexandria (c160-200) Origen (c185-c253)
200-300	Plotinus (c205-c270) Antony the Desert Hermit (251-356) Pachomius (c292-348)
300-400	Augustine of Hippo (354-430) John Cassian (c360-c435) Evagrius of Pontus (345-399) Patrick of Ireland (c374-493)
400-500	Dionysius (c475-c525) Benedict of Nursia (c480-c543)
500-600	Gregory the Great (540-604) John Climacus
600-700	Isaac of Ninevah Aiden (605-651) Bede (673-735)
700-1000	The Age of Monastic Mysticism* John Scotus Erigena (c800-c891)
1000-1100	Peter Damien (1007-1072) Anselm (1033-1109)
1100-1200	Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141) Richard of St. Victor (died 1173) Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)
1200-1300	Raymond Lull (c1235-1315) Bonaventura (1221-1274) Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) Eckhart (1260-1327)

*Most of the mystics of this period were cloistered in Monasteries and their names are not well known. For discussion of the numerous mystical movements within the monasticism of this period see Knowles, *Christian Monasticism* (McGraw-Hill, 1969) and Leclercq, Vandenbroucke and Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* (Seabury, 1968).

Century	Major Christian Mystics
	Richard Rolle (c1290-1349) Walter Hilton (died 1396)
1300-1400	John of Ruysbroeck (1292-1381) Henry Suso (c1300-1366) Johannes Tauler (1300-1361) Gerard Groot (1340-1384) Julian of Norwich (1347-1443) Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380)
1400-1500	Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471) Joan of Arc (1412-1431) John Gerson (1363-1429) Frances of Rome (1384-1440) Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)

to place little faith in the Church as a direct route to God-union.

As we have noted in earlier studies, Eros and the Lovers card carry the implication of human love as a symbol for the ecstasy of God-union. The card carries the same message as the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs by Origen and Bernard of Clairvaux. The lovers on the card could symbolize the Lover and the Divine Beloved, the mystic marriage and the initial approach to God through Christ's message of love. The most fundamental message of all Christian mysticism is love and this is the basic message of the Lovers card.

The true mystical journey begins with the Hermit (nine) and continues through the remainder of the cards. The journey is divided into three parts in the traditional Christian manner. Purgation (nine to sixteen), Illumination (sixteen to twenty), and Union (twenty-one). This three fold division of the mystical journey had become a basic paradigm for the spiritual life and is used in many medieval texts such as the *Theologica Germanica*, a product of the fourteenth century German mystical movement.

The period of purgation, by far the most difficult and darkest part of the journey, begins with the isolation symbolized in the Hermit card (nine). Many Tarot decks display a Franciscan monk on this card, the only type of hermit the Renaissance man was likely to be familiar with. The card symbolizes reevaluation of one's life, stepping back and taking stock, systematic meditation, isolation and detachment. In this card, the basic mystical themes of asceticism, self-knowledge and contemplation are suggested. At least these would have been the associations likely to come into the mind of the Renaissance Magus. The hermit would have called to mind the renunciation, penance and conversion experiences that initiates the

mystical journey and which he had heard preached by Franciscan friars.

The immediate response to this conversion experience is a realization of the inanity of earthly existence. The Wheel of Fortune indicates that worldly fame comes and goes and that no true victory can be achieved on the material plane, no satisfaction for the deeper yearnings of the soul. The mystic will be assailed by the conflict between spiritual strivings and the habits and instincts which hold him back. Fortitude (eleven) symbolizes the conflict and, in some decks, suggests the struggle needed for the spirit to overcome the body. Like Paul, the mystic feels that the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Particularly in light of the Gnostic tendencies of the Renaissance, the duality of spirit and matter would have seemed the appropriate symbol for the struggle needed to overcome the instincts.

The mystic has passed through the first stages of purgation and has recognized the need to struggle. Whatever initial success is achieved in this fight, the mystic now enters the depression of the first night of mysticism: the Dark Night of the Soul. The second night or Dark Night of the Spirit, will occur later. During this period of darkness, a deeper purgation occurs within the mystic which has little to do with his own actions and efforts. The stages of this dark journey are symbolized in the cards from the Hanged Man (twelve) to the Tower (sixteen).

The first thing that the mystic must learn is that his own efforts count for little. He must adopt the passive attitude recommended by Aquinas and almost all of the mystics. He must become the Hanged Man, allowing all former values to be reversed, becoming totally detached from material things. He must now *depend* only on God. He must surrender fully to the process taking place within him. He must hang totally passively and show calm like the expression on the face of the Hanged Man. The gentle process of transformation requires passivity, not effort. The process is essentially a dying to self, a giving up of the self totally to God. It is this attitude of surrender and passivity which is symbolized in the card.

As the dark night of the soul proceeds, the darkest part of the whole mystical journey is experienced. This is universally symbolized by mystical death and rebirth (thirteen to twenty). Thus, superimposed on the three-fold division of Purgation, Illumination and Union is the alternate symbolism of death and rebirth. This symbolism has always had particular appeal to the Christian mystic trying to imitate Jesus of Nazareth. Since Jesus spoke of the seed dying of rebirth in the Spirit and of following him into death, the mystics adopted this metaphor. With Paul, they saw themselves as following Christ into his death and resurrection experience. The experience involves death (thirteen), passage through Hell (fifteen) and total destruction of the ego in a traumatic catharsis (sixteen).

Following the "birth experience" of the Tower, the period of Purgation is ending and the period of Illumination begins. The sparks and lightening of the Tower (sixteen) turn into the light of the Star (seventeen) and the Moon (eighteen) and then into the full light of the Sun (nineteen). The mystics have always spoken of increasing light as a metaphor for their experience. If any reinforcement was needed for this traditional use of the symbol, it was provided by the Byzantine scholars in Italy. Fresh on their minds was the controversy over the use of light as a legitimate expression of mystical experience in Greek Orthodoxy.

Of course, the early stages of Illumination are still mixed with the final stages of Purgation. Thus, the Moon card (eighteen) shows an increase of light but also implies that a dark, dream-like, nightmarish purgation continues. In the following centuries, this second purgation was referred to as the "Dark Night of the Spirit" which occurs at a more advanced stage and involves the final psychological changes in the mystic.

All of the mystics who offer a systematic presentation of the journey agree that the final stage requires a specific call from God. One can meditate all one's life and never achieve the final union, unless a special summons comes. It is this summons which is symbolized in the Judgment card (twenty). This is the final stage of the Illumination and the rebirth or resurrection into the new life. As with Jesus, this power resides with the Father and must be an exercise of His Will, not the mystic's. The mystic is called, he does not earn the final stage.

The final card of the Tarot corresponds to the final stage of mystical experience. In Christian, Gnostic, Plotinian, Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu, and every other tradition, this is the stage of God-union, the experience of the unity underlying the multiplicity, the final resolution of duality. This is the transfiguration of the mystic, the goal of human life as understood by the Renaissance and as reinforced by all of their sources, both Christian and pagan. The fact that this symbol is given the highest place in the Tarot is one of the strongest arguments that the Tarot is a map of the mystical journey. The Tarot ends in the same place as the mystical journey: the deification of the mystic.

But, in fact, neither the Tarot nor the mystic's journey truly ends with the experience of God-union, for this is a transient experience. Rather than an end, this is a beginning. The experience transforms the mystic into the new man, the Fool for Christ. The image of the Fool can easily be identified with this new man. In Franciscan spirituality, Francis himself is shown as so naive that he was unable to organize the followers he attracted. One of the most endearing characters in the life of St. Francis is Brother Juniper, one of the original followers. Filled with devotion to Francis, Juniper does the most incredibly foolish acts out of love. And it is this foolishness, resulting from love and absorption into the unity deep beneath all

duality that is symbolized in the Fool card of the Tarot.

For the Fool, the world is transformed and material existence takes on a new perspective. Life is to be lived in a free and careless spirit that ignores the conventions and rigidity of dogma. The mystical journey is over, or rather the mystic transformation into a whole man. This "whole man" is so different from the ordinary man that he must be viewed as a Fool.

In closing, I must emphasize once again that not everything in the Tarot is explainable from Christian Mysticism. Other components are superimposed and intermeshed into the symbolism. Many converging lines of tradition reinforce and impose secondary meanings on each of the symbols. One thing becomes more and more clear. No single symbolic system is sufficient to explain everything about the Tarot. We must continue to explore additional threads in the complex web.

Notes and References

1. One of the avowed purposes of Ficino's Florentine Academy was the reconciliation of the spirit of antiquity with that of Christianity. See Burckhart, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Harper and Row, 1929) p 279.
2. Capps and Wright, *Silent Fire* (Harper and Row, 1978) p 11.
3. The relationship between early Christianity and the Mysteries has been hotly debated. See, for example, Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (Biblo and Tannen, 1971). Although the Mysteries seem quite different in content and origin, it is probable that many ritual elements were shared with Christianity.
4. Underhill, *The Mystic Way* (Norwood, 1978) p vii.
5. John 10:30.
6. John 8:58.
7. 1 John 4:16.
8. John 12:23-26.
9. Romans 6:3.
10. Underhill, *op. cit.*, p 279.
11. Bouyer (ed.) *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (Seabury, 1963) pp 276 ff.
12. Greer (trans.) *Origen* (Paulist Press, 1979). There is some doubt that Origen, the student of Saccas, was the same as the Christian writer. There is also some doubt about Saccas being Christian. Both of these come from rather doubtful passages in Eusebius according to Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (Duckworth, 1972) p 38.
13. Lawson (trans.) *Origen* (Newman Press, 1957).
14. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (Octagon, 1968) p 139.
15. Knowles, *Christian Monasticism* (McGraw-Hill, 1969) p 10.
16. Griffiths, *John Cassian* IN Walsh (ed.) *Spirituality through the Centuries* (Kenedy, 1964) p 28.
17. Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (University of Michigan Press, 1957) p 5.
18. Augustine, *Confessions* (Doubleday, 1960; Ryan, trans.) VII: 9. [hereafter, Augustine, C].
19. Augustine, *City of God* (Penguin, 1972; Knowles, trans.) Books 8-10.
20. Augustine, C IX:10 (p 221) and VIII:10 (p 170).
21. Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (Doubleday, 1975; Meisel and Mastro, trans.).
22. Deschanet, *John Scotus Erigena* IN Walsh, *op. cit.*, p 85.
23. *Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs* (Cistercian, 1976; Walsh, trans.).
24. Leclercq, Vandenbroucke and Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* (Seabury, 1968) pp 333 ff.
25. Katsaros and Kaplan, *The Western Mystical Tradition* (College and University Press, 1969) p 231.
26. Jeremy, *Scholars and Mystics* (Henry Regnery, 1962).
27. John of Ruysbroeck, *Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* (Christian Classics, 1974; Wynschenk, trans.).

28. Inge, *Studies of the English Mystics* (Books for Libraries, 1969) and Tuma, *The Fourteenth Century English Mystics* (Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Salzburg, 1977). See also Molinari, *Julian of Norwich* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1958).

29. Hilton, *Stairway of Perfection* (Doubleday, 1979; Mastro, trans.)

30. Johnston (ed.) *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Doubleday, 1973).

31. Stafford, *Angela of Foligno* IN Walsh, *op. cit.*

32. Knowles, *The Nature of Mysticism* (Hawthorn, 1966) p 114.

33. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (James Clark, 1973). Also see Kadloubovsky and Palmer (ed.) *Early Fathers from the Philakalia* (Faber and Faber, 1954) and Palladius, *Lausiac History* (Eastern Orthodox Books, no date) written about 420 A.D.

34. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought* (Houghton Mifflin, 1948).

35. Thode, *Francis of Assisi and the Beginning of the Art of the Renaissance in Italy* (Berlin, 1885) quoted in Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p 298.

36. Bolle, *Structure of Renaissance Mysticism* IN Kinsman (ed.) *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 1974).

37. Burckhart, *op. cit.*, pp 456 ff.

38. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God* (Ungar, 1960). Nicholas includes discussions of astrology, numerology and alchemy in his writings. In one of his works he describes himself as an Idiot who despises mere book-learning. See Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (Columbia University Press, 1934) Volume 14, pp 387 ff.

Chapter Eight

Heretical Sects and Their Influence on the Tarot

In the last study we considered the influence of orthodox Christian mysticism on the Renaissance and presumptively on the designers of the Tarot. However, we must avoid the temptation to limit ourselves to the orthodox tradition, accepted and acclaimed by the Roman Church. The mood of the Renaissance was anti-clerical. Mystical sects which were condemned by the hierarchy might seem more attractive by that very fact. It is necessary, therefore, to examine in some detail that mystical tradition which largely existed outside the aegis of the Church.

The first author to suggest that heretical sects played a role in the invention of the Tarot was A.E. Waite. Since there were so many ridiculous theories about the Tarot, he wondered why no one had offered the cards as a secret symbolic language of the Albigensians.¹ The Albigensians were a heretical sect of southern France in the centuries preceding the Renaissance. Waite introduced the idea as a satire on all the unjustified speculations about the deck. Yet one is never sure if he is really ridiculing the thesis. He might be playing the subtle game of revealing an occult truth in such a way that the uninitiated will dismiss it. If this were his intent, he was certainly successful. No serious researcher has followed up on the lead and investigated the potential role of the heretical sects in the origin of the cards.

Waite refers to another early twentieth century writer, Harold Bayley. Waite refers to an article entitled "A New Light on the Renaissance" in which Bayley argues that the Renaissance really began in Provence with the Albigensians. Still maintaining a satiric mood, Waite suggests that if Bayley had heard of the Tarot, he probably would have imagined Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and other primitive mystical elements in the pictures.² Now we must really wonder if Waite is serious or in jest, since we have established exactly these elements in previous studies.

Later, Bayley greatly expanded the scope of his research.³ He claimed that papermaking and printing guilds were infiltrated by families of Albigois and Vaudois in France and Cathari and Patarini in Italy. The watermarks used to identify their products formed a coherent chain of symbols from their first appearance in 1282 into the eighteenth century. Bayley analyzed these emblems and found in them traces of heretical doctrines. Further he provided evidence (some less convincing than others) that these heretical sects, nominally stamped out by the Papal forces, endured for many centuries. They simply went underground, hiding their beliefs behind the symbols of their craft. He argues that the Huguenots, identified by Pope

Clement XI as a continuance of the Albigensians, were frequently papermakers by trade. He also states that many English papermakers were originally Albigensians, escaping persecution in France.

We will return in the next chapter to examine some of the watermarks presented by Bayley. After that examination, we can question for ourselves whether these emblematic systems might have influenced the Tarot. The present study will focus on examining the heretical sects in Europe. We will explore whether it is feasible that these sects and their heterodox doctrines could have contributed to the Tarot. As usual, we will begin with an historical perspective.

German Mysticism

A good place to begin our survey is with the various lay mystical movements that developed in Germany during the Late Middle Ages. As early as 1180, pious men and women began to group together into "model villages" to promote a simple and contemplative life. They formed bodies of laity living essentially a monastic life, a form of community not immediately sanctioned by the Church. These groups were known as Beghards (male) and Beguines (female).

These lay communities were responding to a problem felt by many of the sects we consider in this study. As the power of the Church grew, the emphasis on administration and on consolidation of official doctrine tended to smother individualistic expressions of religious feelings. Many deeply religious people, responding to the mystical instinct within them, felt alienated from a Church which was preoccupied with its temporal power and wealth. The Church had lost the vitality and flexibility to accept those who practiced Gospel simplicity and lived like the Apostles.⁴

Being simple and unschooled people, these lay mystics often fell into subtle doctrinal errors. They were condemned on that basis, even though their lives were sterling examples of Christianity. This lamentable situation resulted in many influential mystical movements being discussed in this chapter on heretics, rather than the last on orthodox mystics. Since the individuals involved in these movements were obviously good and spiritual, they had widespread influence on the people. Most saw the Papal condemnation, not as a reason to persecute the heretics, but as an additional reason to hate the hierarchy.

The most eloquent spokesman of the mysticism of the German School was Meister Eckhart (1260-1327).⁵ A Dominican theologian and preacher, he was a radical Neoplatonist who followed closely the intuitions and doctrines of Dionysius. Although clearly one of the great mystics of the Church, Eckhart's doctrines were condemned posthumously because they so clearly and radically presented the possibility of God-union for all men in the present life. This doctrine was considered most dangerous and in conflict with the "safer" and more conservative scholastic theology adopted by

the Church.

Although a personal connection between Eckhart and the lay mystics is debatable, it is clear that they adopted his mystical doctrines. As described by the Council of Vienne (1311), the Beghards and Beguines believed that the goal of human life was God-union and that this was possible during the present life.⁶ Their movement was personal and individualistic, not doctrinal in character. They were more concerned with the psychological processes of mysticism than with theological implications. In many respects, they simply applied Dionysian concepts of the spiritual life. Academic theories were being transformed into practical dictums of life.

Originally, these German lay mystics were tolerated by the Church. But as they developed and expanded, they became more and more estranged from officialdom. The original Beguines and Beghards were transformed into the Brethren of the Free Spirit which showed the strong influence of Manichaeism.⁷ Another group, the Freeman of God, accepted the doctrines of Joachim of Flora, the heterodox prophet who affected many of these unorthodox sects. In some cases, it is very hard to delineate where the Beghards leave off and the Waldensians, a clearly heretical sect, take up. One of the difficulties in differentiating these groups is the constant intermingling of ideas as the Middle Ages proceeded. Although we can give them different names, it is clear that the dualistic, individualistic, Neoplatonic mystical groups were in constant communication throughout Europe and formed a strong popular movement. Obviously the groups sheltered and protected each other as their only allies in the fight against the Church. We will see later that vestiges of these groups still existed in the fifteenth century when the Tarot was being designed.

The Spiritual Franciscans and Joachim of Flora

The second group we will consider is the "observant" or "Spiritual" Franciscans. Like the German mystics, they began within the fold of the Church and partially wandered and partially were driven away. This second group of heretical mystics has an unlikely source. As the Brethren of the Free Spirit were associated with the greatest German mystic, Eckhart, the Spiritual Franciscans were the sons of the greatest Italian mystic, Francis of Assisi.

Even during the lifetime of Francis, there was a divergence of opinion about how stringently his followers should adhere to his rules of strict poverty. The majority of the order believed that the original rule was too austere for ordinary men and should be modified. But there were also faithful sons of Francis who believed that the rule must be maintained to the letter. These Spiritual Franciscans were originally just an extreme group within the order. One of their number, John of Parma, was even elected Minister General of the order (1247-1257). Eventually, John was forced from office and

the Spirituals were considered more and more as extremists. They were being forced inevitably toward schism.

It is a strange fact that the sons of Francis who followed his expressed will were eventually driven out of the order and from the Church. They produced a number of saintly mystics who were well loved by the people, such as Jacopone da Todi and Angelo Clareno (died 1337). They were responsible for deeply spiritual biographies of Francis such as the "Little Flowers". Eventually, they were trapped between the rigidity of the hierarchy and the resentment of the rest of the order. Like the German mystics, they were condemned for adhering too closely to the message of Christianity. Their emphasis on the dignity and nobility of the individual human spirit and their call for spiritual freedom must have deeply touched the sympathies of the Renaissance Magus.

The final break between the Church and the Spiritual Franciscans was occasioned by their discovery of the mystical vision of Joachim of Flora (1168-1202). Joachim himself was a strictly orthodox monk. He founded a strict Cistercian order centered about a monastery at Fiore in Calabria in 1192. Joachim's personal spirituality took the form of prophesy. He developed a grand and majestic view of the history of mankind and its relevance to the eternal plan of God. His vision of the three ages of man was to influence both orthodox and heterodox spirituality throughout the Renaissance. It was to have particular influence on most, if not all, of the heretical movements discussed in this chapter. Because his influence was so universal, we must interrupt our discussion of the Spiritual Franciscans to deal with his vision.

According to Joachim, the history of mankind can be divided into three periods: the Age of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Some of the metaphors which have been used to differentiate Joachim's three stages of history are given in Table 8-1. The Age of the Father was the age of the Old Testament. It was a period of law, justice and strictness. The Age of the Son began with the New Testament and extended into the Middle Ages. It was an age of imperfect love between God and man which required the intermediacy of Jesus. But its major purpose was a preparation for the third age, the Age of the Holy Spirit which was still to come. This was the age when the Paraclete, promised by Jesus, would come. This was to be an age of perfect love, of self-less charity, an age of direct communication between God and man through mystical union.

The great appeal of Joachim to the Renaissance lay in this promise of an Age of the Spirit. Its main characteristics would be freedom, love and contemplation. Communication between God and man would be direct and mystical. Therefore, there would be little need of church or hierarchy to interpret the revealed word of God. This aspect appealed greatly to the heterodox and heretical sects. They saw corruption in the Church and felt that it was ready to fall, as indeed it did in the Reformation. The message of Joachim gave

them a logical reason for the decay of the Church. The Age of the Son was at an end and the Age of the Spirit was imminent. Soon the corrupt church would disappear and man would be free to act according to his own conscience, guided only by direction from God Himself. Thus, the message of Joachim was a message of great hope to the discouraged Christian, who found his instinct for mysticism smothered by officialdom.

The writings of Joachim encouraged a spirit of apocalypse in which the world as we know it was about to end and a better and purer world was about to begin. We will find this spirit throughout the heretical sects and constantly used as justification of their resistance to the Church. They were continuously announcing that the Age of the Spirit had just begun and they were the official

Table 8-1. Some of the metaphors offered to differentiate among the three ages described by Joachim of Flora.

Age of the Father	Age of the Son	Age of the Spirit
Old Testament	New Testament	Future
Law	Imperfect Love	Perfect Love
Law	Revelation	Mysticism
Starlight	Dawn	Sunlight
Winter	Spring	Summer
Nettles	Roses	Lilies
Slaves	Sons	Lovers
Fear	Faith	Love

heralds. Indeed, if the Church opposed their teaching, it seemed to confirm that teaching as the beginning of the new Age. If the Church condemned it, the teaching was probably correct.

When the new Age of the Spirit would begin was a matter of constant speculation in the late Middle Ages. Uberto da Casale predicted it would begin in 1294. There was therefore, great rejoicing when, in that year, the pious hermit Pier da Morone was elected Pope Celestine V. Since he was widely acknowledged as a saint, it was believed that his reign would mark the change. There was great disappointment when he abdicated after five months and nine days, unable to handle the intrigues and temporal responsibilities of the office. The papacy was no place for a mystic. Despite the disappointment, speculation continued throughout the Renaissance, always fomenting a spirit of imminent change to a more personal spirituality free of hierarchies, clerics and Inquisitions.

The connection between the writings of Joachim and the Spiritual Franciscans begins in 1240 when an old abbot, afraid his monastery would be overrun and pillaged, took manuscripts of Joachim's work to the Friars at Pisa for safekeeping.⁸ The

manuscripts also contained a number of works attributed to Joachim but actually written by his more radical disciples. The friars read and were impressed by the manuscripts. They were particularly impressed since the prophecies seemed to confirm their own beliefs that *they* were to begin the new age. The resistance of the Pope and the remainder of the Franciscan order were clear evidence that the Age of the Spirit was at hand. The results of their speculations was the "Eternal Gospel" written in 1254 by Gerard de Borgo San Domino. This interpretation of Joachim's ideas was highly critical of Pope and clergy and prophesied the imminent fall of the Church.

After the publication of the Eternal Gospel, the Church became more actively opposed to the Spiritual Franciscans. Eventually, they were reduced to small bands of "Fratricelli". Their concepts became more actively aggressive against the Church and they turned into a truly heretical sect, in contact and in sympathy with the many other movements we will consider below. The Fraticelli were still active in the fifteenth century, even though they had been actively persecuted since Pope John XXII censured their errors in 1318. A group of Fraticelli were arrested and tried in Lucca in 1411. In 1466, an heretical bishop and priest were arrested at Poli. Apparently one half of the village was composed of Fraticelli.⁸ From the trial records we know that the Fraticelli often disguised themselves and remained in small groups, without a conspicuous organization or official records. We also know that they had their own Pope, named Gabriel, and that women preached and heard confessions. This is obviously relevant to our interpretation of the Pope and Papess cards in the Tarot.

In the case of the Fraticelli, and in many others, we will find it common for a small heretical sect to continue for a century or more after they leave the pages of history as a major movement. Thus, many of these groups were a very real (if minor) component of the spiritual milieu in which the Tarot was designed.

Dualist Heresies In The Early Middle Ages

One of the factors which led Waite to suggest an influence of heretical sects on the Tarot is the dominance of dualist symbols in the cards. The contrasts of male/female, Pope/Devil, light/dark, etc., indicate a great sensitivity to dualist concepts. In Table 8-2, I have summarized the dualist symbols in the four earliest printed decks. These uncut sheets represent our oldest examples of the printed decks which are our best indicators of the original Tarot designs (See Chapter Three). Only the fool (known from one half of a card) and the Papess seem free of dualistic symbols.

Waite's suggestion basically boils down to a hint of direct influence from the many dualist heresies which had strong roots in northern Italy and southern France. He questioned whether it was

merely coincidental that there are many symbols of duality on the cards. Especially since the cards originated in a region of the world in which dualism was an influential theology.

Table 8-2. Examples of dualistic symbols in the earliest printed Tarot decks. Reproductions of the cards can be found in Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of the Tarot* (U. S. Games, 1978) and Dummett, *The Game of Tarot* (Duckworth, 1980). Numbers in the table indicate the card on which a symbol appears, based on standard Tarot of Marseilles ordering.

Symbol	MM	Decks*		
		L/BA	B	R
Man-Woman	6	16	6,19	6,13,20
Sceptre-Orb	10,21	7,10,21	3,4	3,4,7,21
Androgyne	15,21	21	15	15,21
Trees	15,16,18,20	9		
Pillars	3,4,5		5	
Horses	7	7	7	7
Urns	14		14,17	14
Uprights	12	12	10,12	12
Spirit-Matter	11		11	
Scales	8			8
Crutches		9		9
Bags		12		12
Two Men		18		
Towers			18	
Wands				1

MM* = Metropolitan Museum, Kaplan p 125, Dummett fig 5

L/BA²Louvre/Beaux Arts, Kaplan p 128, Dummett fig 15

B⁵ Beinecke, Dummett fig 14

R⁶ Rosenwald, Kaplan p 130, Dummett fig 6

To understand the vitality of these dualist ideas, we must take a long Journey backwards in time, to the Middle East and the third century. As we developed in Chapter Five, many Gnostic religions competed with Christianity for the people's attention. The most enduring of these was Manichaeism. The story of its persistence into the fifteenth century is a fascinating one that is seldom told.

The story begins with Mani who began teaching at twenty-six in the year 242 A.D. Until he was executed at the age of sixty, he traveled widely in the Middle East and Asia Minor, preaching and making converts. Mani was a strong believer in astrology and this belief traveled with his basic doctrines wherever they went.

The eventual victory of Christianity led to the decline of the Gnostic and Mystery Religions. But this does not mean that they totally

disappeared. Manichaeism gradually developed into Paulicianism in Armenia and Asia Minor. Named after Paul of Samosata, this Gnostic sect attempted to reconcile Manichaeism and Christianity through an elaborate allegorical interpretation of the New Testament. There was a strange mixture of Christianity with gnostic myths of gods of Good and devils of Darkness. As with all gnostic sects, the Paulicians believed in Gnosis, a secret intuitive knowledge of God and the universe. They attempted to show that this was the message of Christ, hidden from the eyes of ordinary believers under the guise of allegory.

By the second half of the seventh century, the Paulicians were well organized and firmly established in Asia Minor. Their proximity was a source of constant irritation to the orthodox hierarchy situated at Constantinople, the center of the Eastern Roman Empire. The efforts of the Christian emperors ranged from attempts at conversion, to diplomacy, and finally to war when the fierce opposition of the Paulicians became increasingly apparent.⁹

Upon defeating the rebels, the emperor hoped to weaken the sect by exiling large numbers to areas north of Greece which eventually became Bulgaria. Rather than weakening the sect, this act served to preserve it. When the Islamic invasions overran the old centers in Asia Minor, the Paulicians, now called Bogomils, were firmly established in Bulgaria. There they flourished from the tenth to the fourteenth century. The thirteenth century saw their greatest expansion and the fourteenth their decline and virtual disappearance. But the sect and its ideas were still in existence in the fifteenth century.¹⁰

The doctrines of the Bogomils continued to include the basic dualist myth. The material world was the result of the capture and retention of the "Light" by the evil principle. The role of man was to liberate the light and the route to this liberation was celibacy and asceticism. This is the Pessimistic Gnosis at its extreme. The salvation of man involved the utter rejection of the material and evil side of his nature.

The community was divided into the "Perfects" who followed a life of rigorous asceticism, and the ordinary believers whose only obligation was a just life and the support of the Perfects. The ordinary believer was not expected to live up to the austerities. Instead, he was promised salvation as the result of a sacrament administered at the moment of death. Though they felt themselves to be Christians, the community completely rejected the official Church and its rituals.

For our purposes, we want to note particularly the essentially mystical nature of the Perfects and the strong humanistic spirit of the doctrines. It is also interesting that women could be preachers and religious leaders, possibly explaining the enigmatic Papess card of the Tarot. In addition, there may well have been a supreme heretical "Pope", regarded as the leader of the Bogomils and other

heresies such as the Cathars, Patarenes and Albigensians. This Pope was rumored to be situated somewhere in Bulgaria.

Two other points must be made before we pass from the Bogomils to their descendents. The first is the frequent and intimate relationships with Judaism in fourteenth century Bulgaria. This interaction was probably strengthened by the gnostic tendencies in both systems and may be another factor linking Kabbalah to the Tarot.

The second point we must emphasize is the tendency of the Bogomils and all of their descendents to hide their identity behind allegory. When questioned on the orthodoxy of their beliefs, the Bogomils would claim adherence to Christian doctrines. Under questioning, of course, they did not volunteer that they were applying peculiar allegorical interpretations to these doctrines. The use of allegory made it practically impossible to determine whether or not an individual was a heretic. It also may explain how small enclaves continued to exist into the fifteenth century, after long and consistent persecution by the Church.

The frequent use of allegory by these dualists should alert us to the possibility of heterodox interpretations of the Tarot. If, as we hope to establish in due course, the heresies influenced the designers, then we must be prepared to look for interpretations which reverse the meaning of essentially orthodox symbols. The details of the cards, or their ordering, might disguise an underlying dualist and heretical system. Take, for example, the position of the Judgment card in the deck. If this card is last in the series, as it is in Bolognese decks, the symbol represents the angel Gabriel calling the just to their reward. This establishes the orthodoxy of the deck, since the Pessimistic Gnostics did not believe in the Last Judgment and Resurrection. If the card lies next to last, it could represent the call to mystical union, the call out of the tomb of the body. This is the gnostic allegorical interpretation of the Last Judgment. This is the meaning they affirmed when asked if they believed in the Resurrection of the dead. Changing the position of the card in the deck completely changes its significance. The cards would seem innocent enough on the surface, but an allegorical interpretation, determined only by the position of the card, would reveal an entirely different meaning.

Dualist Heresies in Europe

It is problematic whether other dualist sects in western Europe were direct descendents of the Bogomils or parallel developments. The weight of the evidence seems to be in favor of a direct influence.¹¹ It seems most likely that dualism was carried back by knights returning from the Second Crusade, first to northern France and the Rhine and later to southern France and Italy. The first signs of dualism appear shortly after the year 1000. But the major flux

occurred with the returning knights. It was in southern France by 1165 and in Milan by 1176.

In general, the dualists believed in a Good and Evil principle operating in the material world. Their clergy consisted of Perfects who were ascetic, celibate troubadours who wandered, preached and maintained themselves by charity. As such, they were clear examples to the people of a clergy which could satisfy their spiritual needs. The Cathari preachers were beardless, let their hair grow long, and wore long black robes of mourning. Their emphasis on repentance and rejection of all things material led to many heterodox penitential groups such as the "Poor Apostles" and Flagellants.¹²

The Perfects were considered the special servants of the Holy Spirit in reference to the popular prophesies of Joachim. These ascetic vegetarians, living a simple Apostolic life, must have appeared to many as a fulfillment of Joachim's vision. Ultimately, their rejection of matter took the form of the "endura", a sacred suicide by starvation. They opposed oaths, wars, and capital punishment. They opposed organized religion, stating that a house of stone is not a church, only a company of good persons is a church.

Throughout their history, these groups appealed to the common people. The selfless and moral lives of the Perfects were very attractive to people disgusted with the immorality of the official clergy. The mystical preachers must have served as sterling examples of what Christianity could be. Even in the condemnation by the Church, there is no attempt to defame their good and pious lives. The basis of the problem with the Church was that they were lay preachers, outside the control of the hierarchy. In addition, there were doctrinal problems with many of the concepts in their teachings and sermons. There was never any criticism of the example they set. And surely that example had more influence than the dogma.

The dualists can be conveniently grouped into a number of different sects, though the interconnections and constant communication among these sects must never be forgotten. One group, the Waldensians, was formed in 1173 by Peter Waldo, a merchant and money-lender in Lyon. He sold everything and formed the "Poor Men of Lyon", a group undertaking the reform of the Church from within. He was expelled from the Church for preaching without being a cleric and eventually the Waldensians came to understand that the Church could not be reformed from within. Thus, while the Lateran Council in 1179 confirmed their orthodoxy, by 1184 the Council of Verona condemned them for insisting on preaching without official permission or proper education. Understandably, they became anti-clerical. They felt that salvation was an internal mystical operation that had no need for sacraments or hierarchy. By 1192 they were being actively persecuted.

The Waldensians' answer to persecution was to retire to the isolated valleys of Vaudois. They are known to have been very active,

still preaching publicly and maintaining active contact with other dualist sects in 1400.¹³ Bayley believed he discovered a coded reference to them in a bible published in 1535.¹⁴ And amazingly, remnants of their thought and preaching still existed in the twentieth century.¹⁵

Of far greater renown than the Waldensians were the Albigensians, a well-organized dualist religion of Languedoc, Provence and northern Italy. This is the specific heretical group on which Waite focused his attention. Because this religion was practiced openly under the protection of sympathetic rulers, the Church took open and direct action. Pope Alexander III organized an Inquisition to stop the heresy. This Inquisition did not use capital punishment but typically banished the heretics and confiscated their property. When the sect resisted this persecution, Pope Innocent III organized the Albigensian Crusade as an overt military action that turned into an interminable war that lasted throughout the thirteenth century. This "Holy War" eventually broke the back of the heresy, at least as a public organization. However, it is clear that many of the heretics fled southern France, primarily seeking refuge in northern Italy. They found haven particularly in Milan where they were protected by heretical bishops and royal families.¹⁶ French heretics still found refuge in Italy well into the fourteenth century.

A prime reason that refuge could be found in Italy was the prevalence of dualist heresy in this part of Europe. In northern Italy the movement dated back to Arnold of Brescia who also believed that salvation was an internal mystical process that had no need of sacraments or hierarchy. At first, Arnold, like Waldo, wanted only to reform the Church. But he also was condemned by the Second Lateran Council of 1138. He was burned at the stake by Pope Adrian IV in 1155. Before he died, he had formed the "Lombards" a mystical ascetic sect that lasted long after his death. Although these Arnoldists or Patarenes were probably long gone by the fifteenth century, they formed a substratum that left northern Italy open and receptive to later forms of dualism. Therefore, Waldensians, Cathari and Albigensians flocked to this sympathetic atmosphere.

Knights Templar

At the beginning of the last section, we noted that knights returning from the Second Crusade probably spread the dualist heresies in western Europe. If we are correct in implying some connection between the dualist heresies and the Tarot, then this observation is interesting for two reasons. First, it may help explain the theory that the Tarot cards originated in the Middle East. At least some of the basic concepts embodied in the symbols may have originated with the dualist heresies prevalent in the Middle East at the time of the Crusades.

But the connection with the returning crusaders is interesting for a second reason. This involves the theory that the Tarot was

designed by a Knight Templar, a member of one of the strangest religious orders in Christian history. It is hard to imagine that there existed in the Roman Church an order of monks whose sole purpose was to wage war and kill.

The order was formed by a French knight, Hugh of Payens in 1118 when he and a group of other knights took their vows in the court of the Temple in Jerusalem. No less a personage than Bernard of Clairvaux (see Chapter Seven) wrote a treatise, "In praise of the new militia", which praised their motives and established a rule for the new order. They were true monks, taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Originally, their purpose was to keep the roads in Palestine free of bandits and to assist Christian pilgrims. With the stimulus of the Crusades, the order grew rapidly and spread throughout Europe. They had major influence in France and the Iberian Peninsula where they were involved in fighting the Moors.

By 1187, the Templars and a related military order, the Hospitallars were the Church in the Holy Land. They were major landowners, ruled from strong fortifications and finally became major European bankers due to the need for pilgrims to change money.¹⁷ But in spite of their skill as fighters, Jerusalem fell to Islam in 1187 and by 1291 the military orders and all of Christendom had been totally expelled from the Holy Land.

After the expulsion, the problems began for the Templars. It is obvious that wealth and temporal power had corrupted their original religious zeal and they became quite arrogant and hard to control.¹⁸ They no longer had a specific mission or purpose and they dispersed, many returning to their native France. Phillip IV found their presence in his country problematic. Here was a group of trained veterans, armed and wealthy, floating freely through his realm. Because they were a religious order, they had no allegiance to him and paid little or no attention to his rule. At first Phillip tried to redirect them, encouraging them to undertake new tasks for the Church and Kingdom. But eventually, he despaired and undertook a policy of eliminating them.

His plan to eliminate the Templars was greatly assisted by a renegade monk who had been expelled from the order, Esquin de Florian. He accused the Templars of betraying the Holy Land to the Moslems and of worshipping the devil in the form of an idol, Baphomet. The credibility of these accusations was helped along by the extreme secrecy attending the rituals and initiation ceremonies of the order. Since so little was known about the rituals, Phillip and his informers were free to invent their own information.

Phillip began capturing the knights and extracting confessions by torture. The most telling testimony stated that the initiation ceremonies involved spitting three times on a crucifix, stripping naked and committing overt homosexual acts with the other monks. However, these confessions were always rescinded once the knights were freed. The similarities among the confessions also indicated

that they were prepared in advance by the torturers. Thus, the confessions were worthless and were never really believed in other European countries. Other rulers mostly refused to follow Phillip's lead in arresting the knights, or else permitted them fair trials at which they were acquitted.

But Phillip persisted, bullying the Pope, Clement V, into suppressing the order. The Council of Vienne, France, in 1311 refused to abolish the order because the testimony against them was worthless. Therefore, the Pope dissolved them unilaterally by papal act, and they were never permitted a public trial at which to defend themselves. Although extensive searches have been conducted, no blasphemous rule has ever been located. And perhaps the greatest mystery of all is why the Templars, armed and situated in an impenetrable fortress in Paris, submitted so meekly to Phillip.

After 1311, there were no Templars. Therefore, it is most unlikely that the Tarot cards were their direct invention. It would have been a very old and very remarkable knight indeed who survived to design the cards more than a century later. Moreover, there is little about the cards and their themes which is reflected in the beliefs of the Templars, at least in so far as we understand those beliefs. In the absence of any direct or indirect evidence linking the Templars to the cards, there seems little reason to postulate a direct influence. But we may be able to build something of an argument for an indirect influence, as another of the heretical (or at least heterodox) groups that influenced the mindset of the Italian Renaissance, and therefore the designers of the Tarot.

We know that the knights returning from the Holy Land carried back the dualist heresies. Being headquartered in the Middle East, the Templars were certainly subjected to these ideas. This is feasible even though there is no documentary evidence of dualist heresy that can be associated with the order. Since other knights were converted to dualism during their brief stay in the area, I see nothing to argue against the Templars being influenced by these same ideas during their much more extended stay in the area.

There is some limited and circumstantial evidence which links the Templars to the dualist heretics. The Templars were accused of homosexual acts which might suggest an association with the Bogomils who were often accused of the same thing. The vulgar expression for a homosexual was a "Bulgarian". The Templars were accused of worshipping a cat, and so were the Waldensians. They were accused of spitting and stamping on the cross and so were the Waldensians. So there is at least some circumstantial evidence for a connection. The evidence certainly isn't strong enough to compel one to believe that the Templars were dualists. But we cannot dismiss off-hand the possibility that they formed yet another of the dualist influences that helped form the Renaissance conscience.

Brethren of the Free Spirit

We will deal with the Brethren of the Free Spirit as a separate entity. In studying and tabulating their dogma, we can summarize the beliefs of direct interest to our study of the Tarot. This will be useful when we critically examine the possibility that the Tarot was influenced by such beliefs. Because of extensive intercommunication among the heretics, the doctrines of this sect can be taken to represent the beliefs of most, if not all, of the other groups.

Amaury of Bene was an instructor at the University of Paris. His lectures focused on Erigena and Dionysius, in other words, he was teaching Neoplatonism. It is known that he was lecturing on Erigena's "De Divisione Natural", a Neoplatonic classification of the sciences. Amaury was popular because his mystical doctrine suited the needs of the populace in the thirteenth century. However, his concepts of personal mysticism, taken straight from Dionysius, were considered dangerous by the Church. As a result, Amaury was condemned by the faculty at Paris in 1204 and by the Pope in 1205. He died soon afterward, but his influence continued after his death. "De Divisione Natural" was widely read and admired among the Abigensians, undoubtedly due to Amaury's influence.

In 1215, the Brethren of the Free Spirit were formed in Strasbourg by one of Amaury's disciples. The Brethren combined the Neoplatonism of Amaury with the dualist heresies prevalent at the time. This particular combination is of interest to us. It shows that two of the potential sources for Tarot symbolism, Neoplatonism and dualism, were considered to be compatible. Thus, our suggestion that both of these philosophies contributed to the designs is at least feasible in the context of the times. The Brethren had extensive interactions with other heretical sects and strongly influenced the later development of the Beghards and Beguines. Thus, the combination of Neoplatonism and dualism continued to be disseminated.

As with other sects, the adherents were divided into Perfects, or adepts and ordinary followers. After a period of trial and spiritual training, the adept reached the goal of God-union. Beyond this point, he had no need for law or external guidance. He was directed by intimate and continuous communication with God. This concept, obviously derived from Joachim, strikes us as strange, and struck the Church as dangerous. Yet it has firm biblical support:

... if you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence ... if you are led by the Spirit, no law can touch you.¹⁹

At this stage, the adept can reject all externals, following only the promptings of the Spirit within him.

But now we are rid of the Law ... free to serve in the new spiritual way and not in the old way of a written law.²⁰

The process of deification was an internal, mystical process, limited only by man's willingness to undertake the journey. Man had an enormous dignity, a concept which must have endeared this sect to the Renaissance. The mystical goal inspired the followers, especially the Perfects, to lives of great purity and simplicity. In fact, by a strange quirk, the Church considered that a person living a simple, exemplary Christian life had already shown the first signs of heresy.²¹

The mystical journey of life, death and resurrection occurred during the life of the adept. The Brethren interpreted the Biblical passages allegorically and denied the doctrine of resurrection after death. They denied the existence of hell and purgatory. These were merely mental states of trial experienced in this life. We have mentioned this viewpoint earlier as it applies to interpreting the Judgment card.

In addition to the Neoplatonic concepts of Erigena and Dionysius, Amaury also placed great weight on Alexander of Aphrodisias, a second century interpreter of Aristotle. Thus, the sect was thoroughly inundated with the syncretism of the second to fourth centuries. When the Italian Renaissance rediscovered this Hellenistic syncretism, two centuries later, they must have thought Amaury and his followers very enlightened indeed. In many respects, the Renaissance syncretism of Christianity and Gnosticism, Neoplatonism and mysticism was anticipated by the Brethren of the Free Spirit. Such sects were not the cause of the Renaissance revival, but they did anticipate much. But, given this anticipation, it is inconceivable to me that the Christian/Gnostic/Hellenistic/Neoplatonic mystic of the Italian Renaissance would ignore the Christian/Gnostic/Hellenistic/Neoplatonic mystics of the dualist sects.

In common with all gnostics, the Brethren believed that there was a spark of God in man that must be freed and reunited with God. They also believed in the transcendence of all plurality in the God-union. Everything is one because everything is God and God is one. After the resurrection (call to union with God) the two sexes are reunited as they were at the creation. There is no real distinction between the sexes.

The major doctrinal features of the Brethren of the Free Spirit are summarized in Table 8-3. Most of the other heretical groups we have considered held remarkably similar views. The similarity of dogma makes it irrelevant which of the sects influenced the Tarot symbols. If the designers were familiar with any of the sects, whether through a surviving enclave or only through their writings, then the designers would have been exposed to the full spectrum of dualist concepts.

Heretical Sects and the Tarot

In investigating the dualist heresies, we find a constellation of

doctrines that complement the concepts introduced in earlier chapters. The doctrines of the dualists converge nicely with many of the other intellectual and spiritual influences on the Renaissance. Many of these ideas might be reflected in the symbolism of the Tarot, as we have continued to suggest throughout this series of studies. But the evidence for the contribution of the heretical sects is purely circumstantial and there are several important questions to be answered before we can evaluate the suggestion of Waite that the Trump cards are a heretical textbook.

Table 8-3. Summary of the major doctrines of the Pre-Renaissance Heretical movements in western Europe.

1. Concepts which anticipated the spirit of the Renaissance

Salvation is an individualistic process. Once the adept achieved "perfection" he is free from any law, civil or ecclesiastical. He is in direct communication with God through mystical union and needs no other guidance.

Human Dignity and Freedom: Man raises himself through his own efforts. He can even raise himself to the level of the Divine. Because it is his own effort, there is no need for formal assistance from outside through clergy, sacraments or hierarchy.

2. Concepts derived from second to fourth century Syncretism

Mystical ascent requires asceticism, poverty, celibacy. All these ideas are derived from Gnosticism and the Desert Fathers.

Mysticism was fundamentally Dionysian in character: unknowing, personal and not doctrinal.

Neoplatonism predominated as the philosophy of the heretics: Existence is organized into hierarchies.

Gnosticism: dualism derived directly from Middle Eastern Manichaeism.

3. Fundamentally Mystical Character of the Heresies

Union with God was possible in the present life and represented the highest achievement of human existence.

The mystical prophesies of Joachim of Flora were held in high regard.

The mystical experience involved a direct realization of the union of opposites.

Man passed through the stages of mystical development in the present life. Hell, purgatory, last judgment and resurrection were a part of this life, not experienced after death.

The first question which arises is quickly disposed of. Why should these sects choose such an enigmatic method for spreading their doctrines? Clearly a simpler and more direct approach would have been more comprehensible to the people. An answer may be found in the intensive persecution faced by these sects. Table 8-4 is a very incomplete list of the heretics (pious people and mystics all) who were condemned or executed in the two centuries preceding the design of the Tarot. Any sect which was desirous of spreading the word would have been well advised to choose a secretive method. We have already seen that the Bogomils were past masters at the art of deceiving the authorities. They, and other heretical groups, seemed to confirm orthodox doctrine yet interpreted it allegorically to mean something quite different. In like manner, the cards could be easily defended as orthodox: here is the symbol of allegiance to the Pope, here the despicable Devil and here a sure sign of belief in the Last Judgment. Yet closer examination reveals that behind the seemingly orthodox system lies something quite different.

A more important impediment, one frequently used to dismiss the influence of the heretical sects on the Renaissance, concerns the time that must have elapsed between the official disappearance of the sects and the mid fifteenth century. The answer is again simple. The sects and their beliefs did not disappear because they were condemned and their leaders executed. They simply went underground. They were no longer conspicuous enough to warrant official attention. The Church was concerned with open and well-organized heresies. Their concern was to break the power of the heretics. Small enclaves offered little threat. And besides, the use of allegory by these heretics meant that it was virtually impossible to find the last heretics. Nor was there any great need for it once the open defiance and preaching were stopped. One must also realize the viewpoint of the Church. Being itself a powerful temporal structure, it believed that destroying the overt system and its hierarchy *meant* destroying the Church. But the individualistic mystic can exist quite nicely without that structure.

The fact of the matter is that most of these sects continued into the fifteenth century and some well into modern times. Many of the early reformers such as Swenkfeld (1490-1561) and Weigel (1533-1588) have been identified specifically as part of a continuation of ideals originating in the twelfth and thirteenth century mystical heretics.²² In fact, the problem is deciding exactly when the heretical sects ended and if they actually ever did. Though the leaders were burned and the external organizations disbanded, their ideas had become part of the culture and continued for centuries to influence Europeans. It must be remembered that the first two decades of sixteenth century were the beginnings of the Reformation. Though Luther,

Table 8-4. A partial list of heretics condemned or executed in the centuries preceding the design of the Tarot.

Arnold of Brescia	1155	Burned by Pope Adrian IV
Amaury of Bene	1205	Condemned, Paris
11 disciples of Amaury	1209	Burned, Paris
Gaudin, an Amaurian	1211	Burned
Spera, lady in waiting to Marchessa d'Este	1270	Burned
Thomas Aquinas	1277	Condemned, Paris (Later canonized, 1323)
Gerard Segarelli of Parma	1300	Burned
Dolcino of Novara	1307	Burned
Pierre Jean Olivi	1311	Condemned, Council of Vienne
Templars	1311	Disbanded by Papal act
Spiritual Franciscans	1318	Condemned, Pope John XXII
Nicholas of Balse	1397	Burned
Wycliffe	1415	Council of Constance had his body exhumed and thrown into the river
John Hus	1415	Burned, resulting in 15 year Hussite Wars
Jerome of Prague	1415	Burned
Joan of Arc	1431	Burned (later canonized)
Savonarola	1498	Burned, Florence

Zwigli and Calvin were not heretics in the same mold as those discussed in this study, a glance at Table 8-3 will show that they adopted many of the basic positions of the mystical heretics. So the Reformation can be viewed as a continuation of the rebellious spirit of the earlier heretics.

In some cases, the heretics survived only in isolated places and remote valleys. But the Cathari, Beghards, Beguines and Fraticelli were certainly still active in the fifteenth century. They were in many places and operating relatively openly. One of the primary reasons for their survival was the dichotomy between the official Church position and the attitude of the people. The Church saw dangerous heretics. The people saw simple, pure mystics. The individuals were condemned by the official Church but loved and respected by the people. Those who saw their daily lives were far more impressed with their harmlessness and with the fact that they were closer to living the life espoused by Christ than the clergy and official Church Hierarchy. Thus, the people were content to listen to, protect and

seek advice from these simple holy men and women, knowing that their preaching contained certain teachings considered slightly erroneous by a trained theologian. That seemed a matter for the theologian. And since the theologians seldom paid attention to the needs of the people, it is not surprising that the people paid little attention to the fine distinctions of the theologian. The teachings of the dualists seemed less important than the example they set by their lives.

The evidence that the dualist sects survived into the fifteenth century is considerable. It is known that the Fraticelli were still active in Italy. The Beghards and Beguines still maintained their communities.²³ We have mentioned earlier that the Monastery of Padua, founded in 1408 adopted a rule modeled after the Brethren of the Common Life. The Bogomils were still active in the fifteenth century²⁴ and still influencing the doctrine of the heretics in western Europe. The Thronaki, an Armenian dualist sect, still existed in the nineteenth century.²⁵ We have seen earlier, in the study on Gnosticism, that the Middle East still contains remnants of Gnostic sects in the Christians of St. John. Recall that there was a Waldensian bible published in 1535.¹⁴ In fact, the Waldensians still existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.²⁶ The Flagellants, an offshoot of the asceticism of Patarenes, still exist today in Calabria.²⁷ There may also be remnants of the Cathari still in existence.²⁸ Thus, there is considerable evidence that the dualist heretical sects were still alive and well during the period that the Tarot was being designed.

Yet another objection arises concerning place. If the heretics still existed at time of the Tarot, can they be associated with the place of origin of the cards? It is well enough to show that the heretics lived on in remote mountain valleys of Bulgaria and Armenia. What about the city-states of northern Italy? Further, it is well enough to show an interest in these heresies by the common people. But the evidence which is rapidly mounting up through our series of studies, indicates that the designers of the Tarot were educated and well attuned to the developing Renaissance intellectual life. The common people were consulting the heretics, but the intellectuals were translating Hellenistic manuscripts and reconstructing other elements of the Neoplatonic syncretism. Why should these educated scholars and Magi have been influenced by ideas heard mainly in the market place in distant places or among rare souls in hermitages?

The first question on place has already been answered implicitly or at least hinted at several times during this study. Northern Italy was a hotbed of heresy. Because of the independence of the city-states, the heretical movements retained power there longer than elsewhere. Given the lack of Papal power in this area during the fifteenth century, it is likely that the remnants of the heretical movements still found refuge here as they had in preceding centuries. If the heretics were seeking a place to avoid persecution, northern

Italy would have been the most likely place in Western Europe to seek refuge. This point can be argued simply on the basis of the freedom of thought encouraged in the city-states. Here they must have found a responsive ear to a combination of Christianity, Gnosticism and Neoplatonism.

It is also easy to establish that the doctrines of the heretics were not simply whispered on dark street corners but held a place in the courts of rulers. The ruling families of the city-states were very much involved in the heresies. In 1322, the synod of Valence condemned Matteo Visconti as a heretic.²⁸ Part of the reason for this condemnation was the active role he was playing in providing refuge for heretics. We also saw in Table 8-4 that Spera, lady-in-waiting to the Marchessa d'Este, was burned at the stake in 1270.

Moakley²⁹ suggests that the Papess represents Manfreda, an Humiliati nun and follower of the heretic Guglielmina. Manfreda was a distant relative of the ruling family and was indeed elected pope by the heretical sect. The leader of these heretics, Guglielmina, believed that she was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of the prophecies of Joachim. She was greatly admired by influential writers of the caliber of Bonaventura and Dante and her ideas were still influential in the fifteenth century.³⁰ While Moakley insinuated that Manfreda is included in the deck as a subtle joke (in rather poor taste it seems to me), her inclusion may also be a reminder of her connection with the ruling family and a statement of adherence to her mystical claims. Her inclusion in the hand-painted decks may hint at a continuing heretical influence in the ruling family. Her inclusion may not be a bad joke, but a suggestion of the heretical content of the deck.

Further evidence for the influence of dualism on the intellectual milieu of northern Italy is the inclusion of many heretical doctrines in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.³¹ Although generations of Catholic interpreters have defended the orthodoxy of Italy's greatest poet, it is undoubtable that there are many heretical sympathies present in the poem. Dante's Purgatory is not a place of punishment but an opportunity to ascend to Paradise, a place that tests the will of man to ascend, not fiery punishment for his sins. More remarkable is the specific inclusion of "Epicureans" (Undoubtedly Paterenes, Cathari and Waldensians) in the *Inferno*.³² Most interesting of all is the finding of Joachim of Flora among the doctors of the Church in Paradise.³³ Such a place of honor given to Joachim indicates something of Dante's own propensities and probably insinuated much to the Renaissance Magus.

Thus, we find considerable evidence for the direct influence of dualism on the intellectual milieu of the Italian Renaissance. Not only are the doctrinal aspects of the heresies in alignment with the symbolic system of the Tarot, but it appears that the place of origin of the cards was a hotbed of heresy. Many of the heretical sects still existed there, though no longer in open organizations. The

families associated with the early hand-painted decks are also descendents of heretics. Perhaps this is why the rulers were attracted to the cards and asked Bembo and other painters to produce decks for them. The Papess card and its possible identification with an heretical nun also indicates that heretical ideas were not lost and forgotten in the fifteenth century. The dualist sympathies in Dante would have reinforced whatever sympathies were held by the designers.

We have presented enough evidence to show that the Tarot designers probably were familiar with dualism and perhaps even in sympathy with the heretical concepts. The hypothesis offered by Waite is not so fantastic as it seemed at first. But if the hypothesis of a direct influence seems too outlandish, then there is a milder, and more probable version, that is easier to swallow. We have argued again and again that any attempt to reduce the Tarot symbolism to a single source is doomed to failure. The Tarot was designed during a period of syncretism. Any serious symbolic system of the Renaissance can be expected to be a synthesis of many different influences, felt by the designer to represent elements of the universal wisdom he was seeking. It is just as naive to assume that the Tarot is an heretical textbook as to assume any other single source.

On the other hand, the dualist heresies were present and available to the designers. There were likely mystics adhering to these sects living in the city-states. The Renaissance had accepted the mystical ideal of God-union from many of its other sources of wisdom. The designers surely would not have ignored the mystics living in their midst. Especially attractive must have been the syncretism of the dualists which was so close to the general syncretism of the Italian Renaissance. The mindset of the heretics was, in many respects, the mindset of the Italian intellectual. It would have been very much in the mood of the times for the designers of the Tarot to have included yet another source which reinforced their basic ideas. It is inconceivable to me that they would have ignored a set of concepts which fit in so nicely with the system. So the milder hypothesis would be that the heretical sects were known to the Tarot designers and incorporated into the symbolic system as yet another element of their syncretism.

Heretical Elements in the Tarot Trumps

We are now prepared to look at the cards themselves. But before we look for evidence of heterodox teachings in the individual symbols, let us look at the overall numerological structure of the Trumps. Forgetting the numberless Fool for the moment, there are twenty-one cards, that is, three sets of seven symbols. As we will develop in the chapter on numerology, the numbers three and seven were considered sacred. Three was associated with the

Trinity and seven with mysticism. Given the importance of numerology and numerical allegory in the Renaissance, it is unlikely that these numbers were chosen arbitrarily.

There are several reasons for choosing three and seven for the underlying structure of the symbolic system. The most obvious one is that the deck depicts the mystical (seven) journey to God (three). But in the light of the widespread influence of the prophetic writings of Joachim, there is a further interpretation which suggests itself. The deck is divided into the three ages of mankind. Each of the stages is divided into seven steps. Seven was a sacred number for the Paulicians who had seven "churches" or dioceses.³⁴ It is likely that all of the dualist sects held this number as sacred since its general association was with mysticism.

Another possible explanation for the number of steps in each age comes from Joachim himself. He prophesied that the new Age of the Spirit would begin in the Middle Ages. One of his disciples predicted the year 1260, since each of the ages would last forty-two generations (i.e., 7×6) of thirty years each. Since the Age of the Son began with the birth of Christ, the next age would begin in 1260. Thus, each age would last $7 \times 6 \times 30$ years. Numerologically, these numbers can be combined to $7^5 6^5 3^5 0^5 16^5 1^5 6^5 7$. Thus, each of the three ages in the Tarot is represented by seven cards. Joachim himself divided the first two ages of history into seven periods each and argued elsewhere that the periods would be composed of $21^5 21^5 21$ generations,³⁴ three sets of generations, each equal in number to the Tarot trumps. Such an analysis seems fantastic today, but in the Renaissance, the educated man was expected to find such numerical associations everywhere, even in the Bible (See Chapter Twelve).

If our hypothesis is correct, we would expect to find the three ages of Joachim (Table 8-1) represented in the cards. In the first seven cards we find the symbols of law and order, both temporal (Empress and Emperor) and spiritual (Papess and Pope). Here we find the written law in the lap of the Papess. From another perspective, the first seven cards contain the symbols of the pagan gods, the gods that ruled in the age of the Father, before the coming of Christ.

The second seven cards represent the Christian period, the age of the Son. Here we find the monk, the hanged man (crucifixion), death, and the virtues. Thus, the second set of cards seems to follow the orthodox dictates of the Church.

The third series of cards would then represent the age of the Spirit, the age of mysticism and direct communication with God. In the Tarot, this third series is involved with the mystical journey to the underworld (Devil) and the rebirth into increasing light (cards 16-19). Here is the symbol of the Divine call out of matter (Judgment) and the symbol of union with God (World or Anima Mundi).

Such a reconstruction may not seem compelling to the reader. It is certainly not so strong that one can conclude that the deck is *only* a representation of the three ages of Joachim. However, the general structure of the deck does seem to fall naturally into three stages, less and less material and more and more spiritual and

psychological. It does not seem preposterous to suggest that Joachim's prophesy and numerology were somewhere in the back of the designers' mind and influenced the overall structuring of the cards.

When we examine the individual symbols, the cards continue to suggest heretical influence. The Fool is the "Fool for Christ", wandering over the land like an adept, a Perfect. He has accepted his poverty and is free from the rules and problems of ordinary society. The symbolism of the perfected man and the "Fool for Christ" was common among both orthodox and heretical mystics. Throughout European literature, the Fool is portrayed, not as the idiot incapable of living according to the laws of man, but as the man wise enough to realize how foolish the society around him really is. The court jester was no idiot. He was often an astute politician.

Perhaps the Magician represents the ordinary believer in a dualist sect. This is particularly likely when this card shows the image of the Artisan. Here is the ordinary believer, plying his trade and trying to remain a pure and simple Christian.

The Papess card is a clear indication of heretical influence. Since females could be preachers and hold high office in the dualist sects, the concept of a papess is not absurd. The contrast of Papess and Pope, Empress and Emperor suggests again the contrast of female/male, passive/active. The hand-painted decks appear to show Manfreda, the heretical papess, and may hint at an affinity for her and her ideals.

The Pope card is one of the most orthodox symbols in the deck. To the overt examiner, this card represents the spiritual leader of mankind. Yet this is only the obvious interpretation. If we have established nothing in the first eight chapters, we have at least established that allegorical interpretations were a predilection of the Renaissance. Renaissance use of allegory had two major components. First, allegory dictated that any symbol had several layers of meaning. Second, the deeper, more significant meanings of a symbol could be expected to contradict the superficial meaning. Both of these uses of allegory were common throughout the Renaissance and were a distinguishing characteristic of the dualist heretics. In most ages, the Pope card would indicate an orthodox symbolic system. But in the Tarot and in the age when they were designed, one can expect that many orthodox symbols will be deliberately inserted into the system, just to deceive the casual observer. In the case of the Pope card, the symbol may actually represent the supreme heretical Pope, situated in Bulgaria. On the other hand, this card, the fifth in a series of twenty-one, may imply the lack of importance of the Pope or any other temporal ruler. The Pope is placed higher than the Emperor, but both Emperor and Pope are assigned quite low places in the scheme of reality. Symbols of mysticism and direct communication with God are placed far above the rule of both Church and State. So the meaning hidden beneath the obvious may

be the unimportance of the Pope and the Church in the overall scheme of things.

We noted in previous studies that the Lovers card has the allegorical meaning of physical love as a symbol of God-union through ecstasy. But the emphasis on celibacy among the Perfects suggests another interpretation. The card is often interpreted as "Choice" by the occultists. The choice between the two females shown on later decks may be between an earthly lover and celibacy leading to the mystical life. Its insertion at this point in the deck might suggest that this choice must be faced before progressing beyond the material states of human society. Similarly, the following card, the Chariot, might represent the worldly honors and prestige which must be rejected if one is to pursue the goal of God-union. This interpretation seems to be reinforced by the following seven cards which have virtues at the beginning, middle and end. Following the decision to reject the honors of the world comes the long period of trial marked by the continuous practice of the virtues such as Justice, Fortitude and Temperance.

The Hermit card suggests the asceticism which began early in the spiritual training of the Perfect. We know that all dualist sects maintained that this stage must be passed through. We also know that Joachim considered the desert fathers, the ancient hermits, as the epitome of the spiritual life.³⁵

The end of the period of spiritual training was marked by the complete sacrifice of self, suggested by the Hanged Man followed by the Death card. It is important to emphasize the presence of the Death card in the middle of the deck, not at the end, and not immediately followed by the Judgment card. The death signified here is not physical death of the body but spiritual death of the ego.

After spiritual death, one discovers the Gnosis, the dual nature of reality. In the deck, this is suggested by the Devil, the "other son" of God. The presence of the Devil card, the supreme Archon, the ruler of the dark pole of reality, strongly indicates the dualist theory underlying the symbolic system.

Having received the Gnosis, and realizing the dual nature of reality, the mystic completely rejects his former values and undertakes the path of Illumination, the Gnostic ascent through the heavenly spheres. The Illumination is symbolized by increasing light from the lightning of the Tower card to the full light of the Sun. We pointed out earlier in this study that the dualist heresies were direct descendants of Manichaeism and that Mani was a firm believer in astrology.

After the period of illumination comes the final call from God (Judgment) and the initiation into God-union (World). We must recall again to the reader the difference in interpretation of the Judgment card depending on its placement in the series. When it is placed next to last, preceding the card of God-union, it is heretical in implication. Since the original decks were probably unnumbered, it

would have been a simple matter to "Christianize" the cards by placing the Judgment card last. The ambiguity left by the unnumbered cards in their original design permitted both interpretations.

Conclusions

As a result of our investigations, it seems reasonable that the dualist sects had an influence on the design of the Tarot. Certainly the evidence is not so compelling that we are forced to agree with Waite that the Tarot is an heretical textbook. Nevertheless, we find a number of interesting and suggestive correlations between the Tarot symbols and the heretical doctrines. Certainly these doctrines were available to the designers and would have been very appealing to the Renaissance intellectual.

It is really a moot point whether concepts we have identified with dualism actually came from other sources available to the Renaissance. The wisdom of the Renaissance was to combine and interweave their sources. They sought the central truths which underlay all of their sources. The argument is not whether this source or that was primary. It is far more likely that the Renaissance Magus accepted all of these sources.

If we choose to be radical, we could claim the Tarot as an heretical system with other concepts (e.g., pagan gods, astrology, etc.) superimposed. This position would be difficult to maintain in the light of what we know of Renaissance syncretism. A more conservative position seems warranted. This position accepts dualism as yet another ingredient in the synthesis of wisdom attempted in the Tarot. To the Renaissance scholar, dualism was another expression of the Gnostic, Neoplatonic quest for God-union. To his mind, it would have been another independent source which confirmed his beliefs. He had no way of knowing that all of his sources came from common roots in the Hellenistic world. No wonder he thought he had discovered the wisdom of the universe when so many different sources yielded the same core of knowledge and insight.

Notes and References

1. Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (Steinerbooks, 1971) p 8. This work was originally published in 1910.
2. *Ibid.*, p 10.
3. Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1968). This was originally published in 1912.
4. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (Russell and Russell, 1979) p 147.
5. Blakney, (trans.) *Meister Eckhart* (Harper and Row, 1941).
6. Jones, *op. cit.*, p 205.
7. Colledge, *John Ruysbroeck* IN Walsh (ed.), *Spirituality Through the Centuries* (Kenedy, 1964) p 201.
8. The influence of Joachim on the Spiritual Franciscans is discussed in detail by Douie, *The Nature and Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli* (AMS, 1978) [originally published, 1932] pp 22 ff. The Franciscans were particularly attracted to Joachim because he predicted that the age of the Spirit would be heralded by "barefoot monks" which they identified with themselves.
9. Most of the material on the Paulicians and Bogomils is taken from Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees* (AMS, 1978) and Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (AMS, 1978).
10. Obolensky, *op. cit.*, p 168.
11. *Ibid.*, pp 286 ff. Also see Christiani, *Heresies and Heretics* Hawthorn, 1959) p 61.
12. Nigg, *The Heretics* (Knopf, 1962) p 181.
13. Jones, *op. cit.*, p 144.
14. Bayley, *op. cit.*, p 2.
15. Salvio, *Dante and Heresy* (Books for Libraries, 1976) p 34.
16. *Ibid.*, p 25.
17. Runcimann, *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, 1952) p 318.
18. Martin, *The Trial of the Templars* (AMS, 1978).
19. Galatians 5:16-19.
20. Romans 7:6.
21. Jones, *op. cit.*, p 143.
22. Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality* (Seabury, 1969) pp 96 f.
23. Jones, *op. cit.*, p 210.
24. Obolensky, *op. cit.*, p 168.
25. *Ibid.*, p 53.
26. Cavendish, *The Tarot* (Harper and Row, 1975) p 37. See also, Salvio, *op. cit.*, p 34.
27. Cole, *Massaccio and the Art of Early Renaissance Florence* (Indiana University Press, 1980) p 25.
28. Salvio, *op. cit.*, p 28.

29. Moakley, *The Tarot Cards* (New York Public Library, 1966) pp 72 f.

30. Leclercq, Vandenbroucke and Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages* (Seabury, 1968) p 267. Guglielmina should not be dismissed as a minor figure. For years after her death crowds came to her grave at Claical, near Milan, awaiting her resurrection. Eventually, the Church put a stop to it by exhuming the body. See Douie, *op. cit.*, p 32.

31. Dinsmore, *The Teachings of Dante* (Books for Libraries, 1970).

32. Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Inferno X:13-15.

33. *Ibid.*, Paradiso XII:140-141. The influence of Joachim on Dante is discussed by Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (Columbia University Press, 1938) pp 184 ff. and by Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford, 1972) pp 317 ff.

34. Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, *op. cit.*, pp 5 ff.

35. Spenser, *Mysticism in World Religions* (Peter Smith, 1971) p 262.

Renaissance Art and Sources for the Tarot Images

Renaissance Sources of the Tarot Images

As in preceding chapters, I will again address two audiences. For the occultist reader, I will continue to argue that the Tarot originated in fifteenth century Italy, even though many of its concepts first appeared in the ancient Mediterranean world. For the modern skeptic, I will continue to accumulate evidence that the Tarot is a serious effort to capture the wisdom of the universe in a coherent symbolic system.

To the occultist, this study will demonstrate that the Tarot images originated in the Italian Renaissance. The designers constructed their symbolic system from elements found in their own artistic tradition. The images are not "dressed up" or modernized from some earlier version of the Tarot. The symbols themselves are products of the Renaissance.

To the skeptic, this study will demonstrate that the Tarot is not an isolated instance of a symbolic system. Throughout the Renaissance, artists applied symbolism to their works and constructed systems of images which reflected the scope of their wisdom. The Tarot is simply another example of the symbolic systems common in fifteenth century Italy.

The images on the cards are taken from the art of the period. But this does not imply that the designers intended to symbolize precisely the same thing as the original artists. For example, the similarities between the Tarot images and the religious art of the period seem to confirm the religious and mystical influences which we hypothesized in the last two chapters. However, these similarities do not necessarily imply acquiescence to the dogma behind the original pictures. The imagery is borrowed, not the symbolic system. We have said enough about allegory in previous chapters to establish that the obvious meaning of a symbol is unlikely to reflect the true intent of the designers. Therefore, once we locate the source of an image, we must avoid the temptation to apply an overly simplistic interpretation.

By grouping several sources of imagery into this single chapter, I will be able to argue more convincingly that all of the images are Renaissance in origin. This grouping will also allow the reader to see the same image in different versions. This will reinforce the argument that the Tarot designers, like other artists, drew upon a common pool of traditional concepts and images. After trying

several approaches, I decided simply to string the sources out, one after another. First, I will consider other symbolic systems which, like the Tarot, attempted to capture all of reality in a set of images. Second, I will suggest correspondences between the Tarot and the religious and secular art of the Renaissance. Third, I will look specifically at the influence of Petrarch's "I Trionfi" and the relationship between this artistic tradition and the Tarot. Fourth, I will consider the watermarks which Bayley associates with the heretical sects discussed in the last chapter.

Symbolic Systems In Renaissance Art

Let us begin by looking at some of the integral symbolic systems that contain Tarot-like images. An excellent starting point is the ceiling painting by Moretti.² Like the Tarot, this ceiling contains images drawn from a common heritage and intended to represent a coherent system. An important feature of the Moretti ceiling is that it shares a number of symbols with the Tarot: Mars (Chariot), Temperance, Force, Hope (Star ?), Triumph of Love, Justice, and Saturn (Hermit ?). Even more importantly, it shows another set of images, assembled from religious and classical sources and forming a complete symbolic system. It also shows, by its inclusion of the Triumph of Love, that the presence of one of Petrarch's Triumphs does not imply that the total system of symbols reduces to that source.

The Moretti ceiling is only one of many examples of early Renaissance art which utilized complex symbolic imagery. Another example is in a chapel of San Francesco di Rimini.³ Produced about the same time as the earliest hand-painted Tarot, the chapel mural also incorporates symbols of the pagan gods. The images of Mars in his chariot and Saturn with his sickle immediately call to mind the Chariot and Death cards of the Tarot.

The so-called "Tarocchi of Mantegna" represents another symbolic system, so closely related to the Tarot that there must be a direct influence between them.⁴ Both systems originated in the fifteenth century and it is not clear whether one copied from the other, or whether both drew on a common ancestor of which we have no knowledge.

We will return to a detailed analysis of the fifty Mantegna prints in Chapter Fourteen. For the present, it is sufficient to recognize that the prints represent another symbolic system which shares many details with the Tarot. Both begin with the lowest condition of man (Fool or Beggar) and proceed through the Emperor and Pope, to the Virtues, the Celestial Spheres, and end with God (World or Prime Cause). Thus, both outline the stages in the hierarchy between man and God: the Neoplatonic intermediaries. It is clear that the systems share the same underlying worldview. The similarities with the Mantegna prints argue strongly that the Tarot is not a set of

arbitrary images and that it originated in the same intellectual milieu as the prints: fifteenth century Italy.

We must also take note of the resemblances between the Mantegna images and yet other Renaissance works of art.⁵ It is important to emphasize these similarities since we wish to argue that the Renaissance artists drew upon a common tradition of symbols. Therefore, it is important that some of the Mantegna images appear on the bas-reliefs of the tomb of Pope Sixtus IV (died 1484). Some of the images, such as *Arithmetica*, are so similar to the Mantegna prints that they must be direct copies.

Other examples of symbolic systems can be found among the numerous Renaissance Cosmographies. A cosmography is a single illustration which encapsulates all of reality in a set of related symbols. Heninger⁶ has collected 117 examples which combine symbols taken from astrology, mythology, religion and the occult. A typical illustration would show man at the center of the image surrounded by concentric circles with symbols representing the four elements, the planetary gods, the choirs of angels and God. Individual symbols were obviously drawn from the same tradition used by the Tarot designers. The frequency of these symbolic representations of the Cosmos demonstrates the interest of the Renaissance intellectual in representing reality as a coherent system of symbols.

From our present perspective, the most interesting cosmographies represent reality as a hierarchy of beings stretching from man to God. Such clearly Neoplatonic systems were produced by Bouelles, by Ramon Lull and by Bettini.⁷ These symbolic systems are clearly efforts to achieve the same objectives which the Tarot designers had in mind. It is obvious that the Renaissance was fascinated by this symbolic mode of expression.

Although produced in 1538, well after the design of the Tarot, the *Dance of Death* by Holbein⁸ shows the same interest in the "conditions of man" as the *Tarocchi* of Mantegna and the Tarot. Holbein's set of engravings emphasize that no matter how high one's status in life, death will win in the end. The engravings show Death (card thirteen) conquering the Empress (card three), the Emperor (card four), the Pope (card five) and the Old Man (possibly the Hermit of card nine). Apparently, these conditions of man were the common property of the Renaissance artist.

Another symbolic system which shows a remarkable resemblance to the Tarot is the nativity horoscope of Leonard Reymann.⁹ The outermost circle of the horoscope depicts the twelve astrological houses. The second house shows a miser sitting at his table and counting money. The figure resembles many early Magician cards. The fourth house shows a hunchbacked monk with a cane, resembling the Hermit card. The fifth shows two children at play like the Sun. The seventh shows a man standing between two women as we find on the Lovers card. The eighth is Death, a skeleton with scythe. The ninth is the Pope with his two attendants. The tenth is

the Emperor with scepter and orb. The eleventh is the Wheel of Fortune. This horoscope makes it abundantly clear that these symbols were known in the Renaissance. They are used as symbols and cannot be reduced to arbitrary images, drawn at random.

The existence of this astrological symbolic system demonstrates three important points. First, the images of the Tarot were held in common by the artists of the day and used in many different contexts. Second, it shows a close connection between the Tarot images and the astrology of the times. We will return to this association in a later chapter. Third, the use of these images in a horoscope argues against the symbols being simply reducible to a representation of a festival triumphal procession. All of the evidence indicates that the Tarot is a symbolic system.

Individual Tarot Images and Renaissance Art

Now we will begin a rapid march through the Tarot cards, pointing out resemblances to Renaissance works of art. In some cases, we will find that the source of the imagery suggests new layers of interpretation for the symbols.

O. Fool

In some decks, the Tarot fool is a man in tattered clothes, a destitute beggar. This concept is identical in intent to the Tarocchi of Mantegna image of Miserio, the lowest condition of man. The beggar image has been retained in the modern Sicilian Tarot under the title of Miseria. The Fool as beggar also resembles the astrological decade of March,¹⁰ also represented as a man in tattered rags.

In other decks, the beggar becomes the court jester. The image of the jester is so common in Medieval and Renaissance art that there seems little need to argue that it was part of the artistic tradition available to the Tarot designers. The Fool was commonly shown with ass' ears and motley robes.¹¹ The old fool with crutch and staff, foolscap and pants falling off can also be found.¹² The specific imagery of the Tarot, complete with foolscap and biting dog is seen in a sixteenth century tapestry.¹³

1. Magician

The roadside trickster, tempting the by-passer to play the old shell game, must have been a common sight at Renaissance festivals. This same trickster appears in one astrological work as a man standing behind a table, wand uplifted in his right hand, with cups, coins, etc. on the table before him.¹⁴ In this representation, the Magician's legs are crossed just as they are in the Emperor and Hanged Man cards.

An alternative image of the Magician is the artisan, the skilled workman. The craftsman, seated behind a table and working with his hands, is the image on the Mantegna print of the Artisan. In

another example from 1449, we find the artisan as goldsmith making a gold ring for two lovers.¹⁵ The position of the goldsmith and the objects on the table recall the image on the Tarot card. It is interesting that the artisan is a goldsmith, implying a possible connection between the Magician image and the Alchemist (See Chapter Eleven).

2. Papess

It is quite possible that the Tarot image of the Papess is meant to represent Isis. Isis was well known in the Renaissance because her Mystery Religion was a favorite of late Latin writers. This identification is also suggested in Swiss decks which substitute Juno for the Papess. As we pointed out in Chapter Five, the Greek goddesses were often identified with Isis, both by the originators of the Egyptian Mystery Religion and by later Latin commentators.

The strongest evidence that the Papess is meant to represent Isis comes from a mural in the Appartamento Borgia in the Vatican.¹⁶ In the painting, Isis is seated on a throne with two pillars and a veil stretched between. She is also holding a book in her lap.

Modern versions of the Tarot which emphasize the identification with Isis seem to follow the Renaissance concept of the goddess. One can find Renaissance images of Isis with the orb and horn crown.¹⁷ There are also clear symbolic associations drawn from Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*¹⁸ such as the crescent moon and water.

Actually, the resemblance of the Papess to Isis may be incidental since both may simply be examples of pagan "Sibyls". The image of the Sibyl is common from the thirteenth century onward.¹⁹ The Sibyl was a pagan prophetess believed by pious tradition to have foretold the Virgin Birth of Jesus. Both the Papess card and Renaissance images of Isis may be examples of this general class of symbol. The Sibyl is frequently pictured on a throne, wearing elaborate clothes and holding a book or scroll in her lap.

3. Empress

Representations of the Empress are definitely not a feature of Renaissance art. However, the Empress image appears to draw on representations of Mary, the mother of God. Certainly, modern cards, which show an imperial woman with a crescent moon under her feet and a crown of stars, are drawn from this source.²⁰ But even early Tarot decks show the Empress seated on a throne with towerlike uprights that are draped or veiled. Such thrones form the traditional background for paintings of the Madonna.²¹

An interesting sidelight on both the Empress and Emperor involves the eagle commonly shown on a shield on these cards. This was the symbol of the Holy Roman Emperor and identifies the person on the card. But, as always, we must be careful not to accept the overt meaning of the symbol too readily. The Renaissance artist was concerned with geometric patterns underlying his images.

These patterns guaranteed that the figure would have the proper aesthetic proportionality (see Chapter Twelve). In the case of the eagle, the underlying pattern is a pentacle.²² The pentacle is, of course, a magical device in all of European magic. Thus, the eagle may be an encoded reference to a magical significance for these cards and for the Tarot symbols as a whole.

4. Emperor

The image of the Emperor is quite common in the Renaissance. The Mantegna prints show a seated ruler in profile with legs crossed and holding an orb. Other representations show the throned emperor with orb and scepter, crown and beard, very much like the image on the Visconti-Sforza cards.²³ The images of the Emperor and Pope are frequently shown together and seem to indicate the need to unite spiritual and temporal rule.²⁴ The seeker must discipline both body and spirit if he is to progress.

5. Pope

The image of the Pope was, of course, common in the Renaissance. The Mantegna print shows the Pope seated on a throne and holding the keys of Peter. The image of Pope Innocent VIII on his tomb²⁵ shows the characteristic posture of the Tarot card, complete with hand raised in blessing. Another image shows a bishop, rather than the Pope, with crozier blessing the viewer.²⁶ An early woodcut²⁷ shows the Pope with raised hand, alb crossed on his chest, and with a cardinal on either side of him. Clearly, all of the elements of the Tarot image were available to the designers.

As with the Papess-Isis-Juno association pointed out above, the transposition of the image of Jupiter for the Pope on some decks can be justified from Renaissance imagery. Jupiter is often depicted in ecclesiastical garb and holding a crozier.²⁸

6. Lovers

We have already discussed in Chapter Four the significance of the god Eros in Renaissance art and thought. The hoodwinked cupid with bow and arrow is a common image found, for example, in Boticelli's *Prima Vera*.²⁹ In Titian's *Blinding of Amor*³⁰ we see one chaste woman and another passionate and partially nude. This shows the same contrast indicated on many versions of the Lovers card. The contrast between the martial Diana and the passionate Venus can be seen in many Renaissance figures.³¹ Based on these models, the card suggests a choice between chaste, intellectual love and passion. The contrast is between dry dogma and the passionate ecstasy of the mystic seeking union with God. The image of the *Chastening of Love*³² suggests the same symbolism. The painting shows a man being beaten by Eros while a chaste and a bare-chested woman stand off to the side and watch. The image contains all of the essential features of the Lovers card.

Some decks show Eros with a single man and woman. Here the symbol may indicate the need to unite the masculine and feminine sides of the personality. This is suggested in representations of Mars and Venus by Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo.³³ These paintings may symbolize the reconciliation of the aggressive with the receptive; the union of opposites. The juxtaposition of the Lovers (six) and the Chariot (seven) suggests the same theme.

What is important for us to recognize is that the theme of duality and the union of opposites was not fabricated by modern Tarot interpreters. This theme is also found in Renaissance paintings. The cosmographies mentioned above⁶ contain many contrasts of male/female, sun/moon, old/young. It is difficult to maintain that the occultists "invented" this theme when art critics arrive at the same interpretation of Renaissance art.

The Dream of Scipio by Raphael³⁴ suggests choice and shows a geometric configuration similar to the Lovers card. The painting shows a sleeping warrior being approached from the left by a stern woman with sword and book and from the right by a gentle woman offering a flower. The warrior is to choose between philosophy and mysticism. This theme has classic roots, being presented by Xenophon in the story of Hercules at the crossroads. Hercules is approached by two women: Virtue and Happiness. The story became a favorite theme of Renaissance iconographers and poets.³⁵ The interpretation of the Lovers card as symbolizing "choice" is also well founded in Renaissance artistic tradition.

7. Chariot

The typical image on the Chariot card strongly suggests the planetary god, Mars, on his war chariot.³⁶ The Mantegna print is quite similar to the Tarot, right down to the pillared canopy over the rider. Illustrations of the pagan gods are so common in Renaissance art that Mars seems the obvious interpretation for this card.

On the other hand, the chariot itself suggests a Triumph car as pointed out by Moakley. The hand-painted Visconti-Sforza deck shows the woman of the Lovers card riding in the chariot. This suggests Petrarch's Triumph of Chastity. One of the early printed sheets seems to have Eros on the card atop a pedestal. This suggests the Triumph of Love. Thus, the influence of the festival processions seems more strongly justified for this card than for any other in the Tarot deck.

8. Justice

The image of Justice was a classic theme of Medieval and Renaissance art. The imagery is certainly much older, probably tracing back to representations of the goddess Themis. The figure of Justice was certainly part of the artistic and symbolic tradition available to the Tarot designers. The Mantegna print shows a similar figure with scales in the left hand and upright sword in the right.

A common Christian adaption shows the Archangel Michael with scales and sword, treading a devil underfoot.³⁷ Similar imagery can be found in dozens of Renaissance representations.³⁸ One need not posit Egyptian origins to explain the source of this imagery.

9. Hermit

As might be expected, the hermit or monk appears frequently in religious art of the Renaissance. For example, in the *Madonna and Child with Two Saints* by Pesanello³⁹ one of the saints appears with monk's habit and walking stick, though with a bell instead of a lantern.

The specific image on the Hermit card seems to be directly borrowed from traditional representations of St. Christopher carrying the Christ child. In the background is a hermit with walking stick and lantern. This same hermit can be found in three different paintings of Christopher, by three different artists.⁴⁰ The presence of the symbol on three separate paintings confirms, once again, the strength of the artistic traditions in the Renaissance. The artist painting Christopher was expected to include certain symbols. The details and the style of presentation differ, but the specific elements are constant.

We must remember that early Renaissance artists were more craftsmen than creative artists.⁴¹ Like the modern commercial artist, the painter was commissioned to decorate the walls of palaces and churches. He was ordinarily told which pictures were required and he was expected to follow tradition in executing the designs. It is the hypothesis of the current study that the designers of the Tarot were well attuned to this artistic tradition and applied many of the traditional elements in constructing their symbolic system. The similarity of the Hermit card to the image in the background of the traditional St. Christopher adds considerable credence to our hypothesis.

There is an alternative representation of the Hermit found in some of the oldest decks. This shows Kronos, the god of time. The image depicts an old man, hunchbacked and with crutches. There is usually an hourglass in the background and perhaps a stag or pillars. These are the elements of the traditional representation of Kronos or Saturn, his Roman equivalent. The image is common wherever the pagan gods or planetary archons are represented.⁴²

10. Wheel of Fortune

The Wheel of Fortune is a common symbol in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. It symbolizes the inanity of material existence and the foolishness of pursuing power or wealth. It is a particularly good example of allegorical and moralizing images (i.e., emblemata) popular in European art. It can be found among the etchings of Durer and in dozens of other representations.⁴³

Some versions of this card suggest the wheel of Ezechial's

vision.⁴⁴ This biblical account is the basis for the Merkabah, the mysticism of the Chariot. This is the oldest version of Jewish mysticism, later known as Kabbalah. We will return to Kabbalah in Chapter Ten. At this point I wish only to remind the reader that mystical meanings, hidden beneath the surface of common imagery, was a symbolic device used throughout Renaissance art.⁴⁵ We cannot afford to dismiss secondary interpretations simply because they seem absurd in the twentieth century.

11. Fortitude

The image of Fortitude or strength is yet another example of Renaissance emblemata. The Mantegna print shows an armored woman breaking a column, with a lion at her feet. Very similar images are found in fifteenth century hand-painted decks and in later Minchiate decks. This imagery follows the traditional representation of the virtue of Fortitude.

An alternative image, shown on the Visconti-Sforza deck, has a man fighting with a lion. This imagery comes from Renaissance representations of Hercules defeating the Nubian lion.⁴⁶ There is a sketch by Bellini (c1400-c1470) which is so similar in design and intent to the Marseilles Tarot, that we might even suggest it as the model from which the card was designed.⁴⁷ The image shows Hercules standing astride the lion. Long hair hides his face and might easily have led a viewer to mistake the figure for a woman. Hercules is shown forcing open the mouth of the lion, with one hand on the upper jaw and one hand on the lower.

In mythology, Hercules must undergo twelve impossible trials before he earns his right to "divinity". Like many Greek myths, this is a thinly veiled allegory of the mystical quest. A man must overcome impossible obstacles before he reaches god-union, i.e., before he becomes a god.

The symbolism of the Fortitude card suggests both the moral virtue and the labors of Hercules on his way to divine status. This double meaning is uniquely suited for the second series of seven cards in the deck, which represent the time of trial and self-discipline between the realization of the inanity of material existence (card ten) and the mystical death (cards twelve and thirteen).

12. Hanged Man

In some older Tarots and Minchiate decks, this card is represented as one man striking another sleeping man. This same theme is depicted in a fourteenth century altar painting.⁴⁸ This image would suggest the need to remain alert and continue the struggle for self-perfection. On the other hand, the symbol might suggest the need for friends and companions on the path who would remind the aspirant of his goal and awaken him violently when he becomes complacent.

The traditional Hanged Man shows an apparently willing victim

hung upside down. Both the image and the theme of willing sacrifice suggest St. Sebastian. Whenever the Renaissance painter wished to portray sacrifice or martyrdom, he used St. Sebastian. The Tarot figure matches the traditional martyr in many details. Although Sebastian is depicted right-side-up, he is usually tied to a tree, with his hands tied behind his back or over his head. His legs are often crossed as in the Tarot card. The arrows shot into his arms may even form a triangle behind the figure similar to that shown in some modern decks.⁴⁹ In all of these images, the position of hands, feet, head and the expression of submission are identical to the Tarot.

Moakley suggests a different origin for the picture. She points out that miscreant knights were often punished by hanging in this upside-down position and painted in this manner if they escaped.⁵⁰ Such "shame-paintings" were commonly used for traitors. Though she offers no explanation of how this interpretation fits her thesis of the cards as a depiction of the festival Triumph, she does add an interesting new element to the interpretation of the card. The figure is both martyr and traitor: traitor to his old material values and martyr to the mystical death in the next card.

Some decks, for example the one reconstructed by de Gebelin, have turned the image right-side-up and show the Hanged Man standing on one foot. In this position he may be interpreted as Prudence, the fourth of the moral virtues. The figure is seen as cautiously deciding where to place his upraised foot, thus displaying prudence. This interpretation is unlikely since the typical symbol of Prudence in Renaissance art is quite different.⁵¹

13. Death

The skeleton as a symbol of death is common throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The "Dance of Death" is represented on many tombs and the "Grim Reaper" is a symbol immediately recognized even today. The skeleton reaping lives with his scythe is often used as an illustration in the Renaissance. The mounted image of death, found in many decks, also recalls "Death on a Pale Horse" from the Book of Revelations. There should be little argument that the symbolism of the death card originated in the milieu of the European Renaissance.⁵²

A particularly interesting image is "Humanism overcomes Death"⁵³ which shows the skeleton overcome by a winged woman on a sphere. Humanism resembles the figure on many versions of the World card. This suggests that the death experience in the thirteenth card will ultimately lead to the victory of the twenty-first card. While I would not suggest that the twenty-first card should be interpreted only in this way, the identification of the state of God-union with the ultimate triumph of Humanism is an interesting concept.

14. Temperance

Temperance, the third of the moral virtues depicted in the Tarot,

is the same image as the corresponding Mantegna print: a figure pouring water from one ewer to another. This was a common allegorical image for the virtue in the Renaissance and can be found in a fourteenth century book illustration.⁵⁴ The figure on the Temperance card may also be related to Isis. One also finds Isis with one foot on the land and one on the water and carrying a water receptacle.⁵⁵

15. Devil

The Devil as a shaggy beast with horns, tail and wings is a common image throughout Christian art. The trident, which accompanies the Devil in many Tarots, relates the Devil to the Greek gods of the underworld in a direct and simple Christianization of a pagan theme. The image of the Devil is so obviously a part of the artistic tradition that it seems facetious to review individual images. Certainly no demonstration is needed that this symbol is thoroughly European and needs no "long ago and far away" theory to explain its presence in the Tarot.

16. Tower

The lightning struck tower is not a common image of the Renaissance. Nonetheless, one finds images of the Tower of Babel⁵⁶ that show marked resemblances to the Tarot. There are figures falling upside-down from the tower along with bits of debris that resemble the sparks on the Tarot card. The image may also derive from the "Golden Legend", a Medieval story of the life of Christ embellished with considerable fiction. Such popular accounts were common during the Middle Ages when the laity were discouraged from reading the Bible. The Legend relates that as the Holy Family fled to Egypt, pagan towers and temples crumbled in each town they passed through.⁵⁷

An alternative image for the Tower card shows the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. The figure is an exact copy of a mural by Masaccio.⁵⁸ In some decks a similar image is used on the Sun card.⁵⁹ The male and female figures on the card, together with the angel overhead, remind one of the Lovers card. The implied relationship between these three cards can be seen in composite paintings of the story of Adam and Eve.⁶⁰ At one point, the couple is within the Garden like the Lovers. At a second point in the painting, the expulsion is depicted. At a third point, the naked pair is shown outside, like the children of the Sun card.

17. Star

The Star card has a number of different representations. The Visconti-Sforza deck and the Mantegna prints show a woman looking up at a star in the corner of the image. Other decks show Magi following the Star of Bethlehem. Both of these representations are symbols of Hope. It is my hypothesis that both of these images are

modifications of the original, intended to Christianize the symbolism. The two parallel virtues, Faith and Charity, are missing from the Tarot. In addition, one fifteenth century hand-painted Tarot and the later Minchiate decks both depict all three theological virtues as separate cards.

What is likely to be the original image shows a naked woman, kneeling and pouring water from ewers.⁶¹ The origins of this image are obscure and it cannot be called a common image in the Renaissance artistic tradition. We pointed out in Chapter Six that a similar image of the goddess of the Nile is found in an Egyptian temple⁶² but was probably unknown in the Renaissance. The closest Renaissance imagery I have been able to locate is "Fortuna" by Bellini.⁶³ This shows a hoodwinked figure, half woman and half bird, standing at the edge of water and pouring water out of two urns. This image shows a real resemblance to the Tarot symbol and carries the surprising implication of a relationship between the Star card and the Wheel of Fortune.

18. Moon

Older versions of the Moon card show astrologers holding astrolabes and compasses. A similar image is found on a woodcut illustrating a text by Savonarola.⁶⁴ Thus, both the Star and the Death images⁵² appear as illustrations in Savonarola's sermons and point to the connection between the Tarot and the popular mystical movements of the day.

I am unable to locate any Renaissance imagery which resembles the Moon card with crayfish, dogs and tower. The imagery is very old, being found on the fifteenth century Beinecke sheets,⁶¹ but is not common in the art of the times. Because of the dream-like quality of the symbol, it might well have been created *de novo* by the Tarot designers. This is the only Tarot image for which I am unable to locate a Renaissance precedent.

19. Sun

Children playing happily and securely in a garden is a common Renaissance symbol for the reward of a good and moral life. The children appear in Raphael's "Madonna with the Goldfinch", da Vinci's "Virgin of the Rocks", and Durer's "Madonna of the Siskin".⁶⁵ The garden itself, and the embracing lovers shown in some Tarots, obviously references the numerous symbols of the idyllic life in nature⁶⁶ and the long tradition of art concerning Adam and Eve.

20. Judgment

The Judgment or Angel card shows the Angel Gabriel, winging over the landscape, blowing on his trumpet, and raising the dead from their graves.⁶⁷ Many of these images show Christ between two angels just as we find on the Visconti-Sforza deck.⁶⁸ The surface imagery is obviously Christian, European and Renaissance.

An interesting aspect of the Angel card regards its position in the series of Trumps. We have pointed out elsewhere that it is often placed last in attempts to Christianize the symbolism of the Tarot. We have argued that its penultimate position may carry an heretical implication (see Chapter Eight). Further justification for its position as the twentieth card comes from the cosmographies mentioned earlier in this chapter. The most frequent arrangement of "spheres" in these images shows the celestial spheres (Star, Moon, Sun), followed by the nine choirs of angels (Judgment), and surmounted by the symbol of God (World or Anima Mundi).

21. World

Modern Tarot decks show the World as the initiate, the person united with the Anima Mundi. The figure is an androgyne surrounded by a mandorla or wreath of victory. The image resembles paintings of the resurrected Christ which also share the four evangelists in the corners of the image.⁶⁹ The androgyne also suggests the union of opposites implied in the experience of God-union. Similar imagery shows the synthesis of the opposites of day/night within the mandorla.⁷⁰

The Visconti-Sforza deck has two putti holding up a globe. A similar globe is being held aloft in the Octava Sphera and Prima Mobile prints of the Mantegna series. The putti of the Visconti-Sforza deck seem to combine the angelic figures of the Iliaca and Cosimo prints. By reversing the figures and combining them, one finds the exact representation of the Tarot card.⁷¹

The most common imagery of the early printed decks shows the Anima Mundi, the Neoplatonic principle of creation, as an angelic figure standing behind and above the world. The "Spirit of the World" is the creative aspect of God and the highest point which can be reached by man in the experience of God-union.

Renaissance Triumphal Imagery

In Chapter Three we examined Moakley's theory that the Tarot is a depiction of a Triumphal procession. We have had occasion to criticize this theory, especially the implication that Petrarch's poem could explain all there was to explain about the symbolism of the cards. Part of the problem is undoubtedly due to the fact that Moakley restricted her examination to the Visconti-Sforza cards which may be an expurgated version of the Tarot. It should be clear from earlier chapters that the Renaissance was a time of syncretism and it is unlikely that any one source can explain its symbolic systems.

On the other hand, it is clear that "Triumph" imagery was common in the Renaissance. It formed part of the artistic tradition which we have emphasized throughout this study. The Tarot designers could not have been ignorant of this part of the tradition and some elements are incorporated into the Tarot designs. However, the

Triumphs form but one element of the complex syncretism found in the cards.

Triumph of Death

As we pointed out in Chapter Three, the Death car was a late addition to the festival triumphs. The Tarot designers never saw such a car and the incorporation of this card in the trumps cannot be due to the designers representing the processions of their day. Nevertheless, the image of the skeleton and scythe on a triumphal chariot⁷² was certainly available in other illustrations and works of art.

Triumph of Mars

Although it plays no role in the Petrarch poem and is ignored by Moakley, the Triumphal car or Chariot of Mars is certainly a common image of the Renaissance.⁷³ The Chariot card is certainly influenced by the many images of Mars.

Triumph of Fame

Included among the six triumphs of Petrarch, though omitted by Moakley, the Triumph of Fame is probably related to the Judgment card. In many minchiate decks, the Angel is shown with "Fama Volat" (Fame is fleeting) across the bottom of the card. A popular depiction of this triumph shows a car with books on it, no human figures.⁷⁴

Triumph of Time

Another of Petrarch's Triumphs which is not included in Moakley's system is the Triumph of Time. It is depicted with an old man on crutches.⁷⁵ His car is drawn by stags. The imagery obvious relates to the Hermit card which shows Kronos (i.e., Time) on early Tarots.

Triumph of Chastity

The imagery for this triumph, also omitted by Moakley, shows a chaste woman carrying a broken bow and arrow.⁷⁶ The figure on the car resembles the one on the Moon card of the Visconti-Sforza deck who is holding something that could be a broken bow. The Chariot card of the Visconti-Sforza deck looks like other representations of the Triumph of Chastity which should be victorious over Eros, the image on the preceding card.⁷⁷ On the other hand, Chastity's car is usually drawn by unicorns rather than horses.

Triumph of Love

This is the first of Petrarch's Triumphs and is often shown as Leda having intercourse with a swan.⁷⁸ It is also shown as Venus, pierced by the arrows of Eros, on a car drawn by swans,⁷⁹ implying an association with the Lovers card rather than the Chariot card as suggested by Moakley. Among the captives surrounding the triumphal car we often find an emperor and a pope. Thus, the

suggestion of Moakley that these cards are meant to represent captives of Love seems reasonable. Of course, we also find Blind Eros as captive, not the main symbol of the card. We also find Mars as a captive.⁸⁰ It is also common to find Eros on the card atop a pedestal⁸¹ just as he is depicted in the Beinecke sheets.

Summary

It is clear from the resemblances we have pointed out that the Tarot was influenced by the artistic tradition relating to Petrarch's poem. There is justification for asserting influence on the Lovers, Chariot, Hermit and Death cards. Evidence on the remaining cards is sketchier or non-existent.

Additional imagery from the festival processions may have been deliberately introduced into the Visconti-Sforza deck. Moakley makes an excellent case for the Fool in this deck being associated with the figure of "Lent". The Visconti-Sforza Fool has a number of feathers stuck in his hair and Moakley points out that the allegorical figure of Lent⁸² usually had seven feathers in his hair. One feather was pulled out for each week of Lent. She also points to the image of Folly by Giotto which shows a figure with widely spaced feather headdress, ragged tunic and barelegged.

However, the theory that the Tarot is *only* or even primarily a depiction of the festival triumphs does not hold up under close scrutiny. The ordering of the cards is wrong and the imagery of the Hanged Man and Tower just do not fit the theme. The Death image did not appear in the processions until long after the Tarot was designed. When one associates Fame with the Angel, Time with the Hermit, Love with the Lovers and Chastity with the Visconti-Sforza Chariot, the orderly triumphal procession begins to fall apart.

Watermarks as a Source for Tarot Symbolism

As we mentioned in Chapter Eight, Bayley¹ maintained that papermaking guilds were hotbeds of heresy. The guilds used the symbols of their religious beliefs in the watermarks which identified their products. Although the Tarot did not enter into the thinking of Bayley, similarities between the Tarot symbols and watermarks might be taken as further evidence for the influence of the dualist heresies on the designers.

In the previous chapter we tried to establish that the heresies could have had an influence on the Tarot. I feel that the evidence presented there is more sound than the similarities to watermarks. So while similarities might be considered as weak confirmatory evidence, we certainly do not wish to base the argument for heretical influence on the weight of Bayley's evidence.

In actual fact, Bayley's theory has never been widely accepted

or influential. His case is overdrawn. The observation that some papermakers were heretics does not demonstrate that papermaking and heresy are coextensive concepts. However, we need not accept that all watermarks are heretical symbols to recognize that they drew upon the common symbolism of the age.

Thus, our immediate interest in the watermarks is as another tradition of symbols that were available in the Renaissance. The first watermarks are on Italian paper from Bologna and Fabriano at the turn of the thirteenth century.⁸³ We do not wish to give unusual weight to the significance of the watermarks which were certainly not a widely influential symbolic system. However, it seems reasonable to maintain that watermarks reflect the symbols which were common during the centuries preceding the design of the Tarot. Resemblances should reinforce our hypothesis that the Tarot is a product of the Renaissance, not a modernized edition of much older symbols. Since the watermarks are clearly symbolic, resemblances should also support our contention that the Tarot is not a set of arbitrary pictures. Correlations should substantiate our theory that the Tarot is a symbolic system, representing a syncretistic worldview, but constructed out of the fabric of the artistic and symbolic traditions of the Renaissance.

Since all of the references in this section are to Bayley¹ it will be convenient to break our pattern of numbered footnotes. Instead, we will simply insert in parentheses the page numbers on which the watermarks can be found. Page numbers in the second volume of Bayley's work will be preceded by a Roman two, e.g., (II 324).

O. Fool

Our earlier contention that the Fool was a common symbol of the Renaissance is confirmed by the significant number of watermarks showing the jester and his foolscap (II 320-327).

Pairs of Pillars

Our argument that pairs of columns on the Tarot cards are symbols of duality and not just decoration is confirmed by the use of pairs of columns as watermarks (162-163, II 32).

2. Papess

We find several images (285) of a naked woman, seated and with a crescent moon on her forehead. These images resemble the Papess, particularly when she is taken to represent Isis.

3. Empress

We find an image of a throned woman with scepter and what might be a shield set beside the throne (II 247). Relevant to later versions of the Tarot, we also find ears of wheat (356) suggesting fertility, and Demeter as the goddess of fertility.

4. Emperor

The watermarks include the exact image of the Emperor. He is a regal, crowned figure with crossed orb in the left hand and scepter in the right (58). We also find the eagle from the Emperor's shield in a number of cases (115, 321, II 291).

5. Pope

Although we do not find the full figure of the Pope, we can locate the crossed keys of Peter (68, 263, 268) as well as single keys (262, 264, 294). We also find the right hand, raised in blessing (II 336-338).

6. Lovers

The only commonality with this Tarot symbol seems to be the bow and arrow (II 52-53) or the arrow alone (II 55).

7. Chariot

We do not find the chariot itself, but there are yoked horses (II 49) and a horse with reins (II 62).

8. Justice

As we pointed out earlier, the figure of Justice was a common moral emblem of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. We can find the entire image with scales in the left hand and an upright sword in the right (58). A second watermark, unusual in its complexity, shows Justice with scales and sword in a chariot with a pair of horses (II 49). We also find the scales of Justice as an isolated symbol (45-46, 269).

10. Wheel

Wheel, particularly a toothed wheel, is a common watermark (136, 260-261, 308, II 23, 121, 199, 203, 217). This same toothed wheel can be seen on some fifteenth century hand-painted cards.

11. Fortitude

There is a printer's mark showing a sleeping man with his head on a pedestal. An angel flies overhead and is about to awaken him (185). This emblem resembles the Tarot cards which show a sleeping man in a similar position about to be awakened by a blow.

12. Hanged Man

This symbol does not occur among the watermarks illustrated by Bayley. However, there are trees resembling crosses (II 268) and what might be an upright with hewn branches (361).

13. Death

There are no explicit death symbols such as a skeleton, but there are sickles (II 264).

14. Temperance

The angelic waterbearer of the Tarot symbol does not appear. However, there are cups (246), ewers (247, 271), and numerous vases (284-254, II 217).

15. Devil

The head of the Devil, horned and deliberately ugly can be found (364).

16. Tower

The image of a single tower, although without any connotation of destruction, is common (159, II 142-146).

17. Star

A star, unadorned with any human figures, can be found (110).

18. Moon

The individual elements of the Moon symbol are easily located. The moon is seen as a crescent with a face (108). The pair of towers can be found (II 147) and even a pair of towers with a crescent moon between them (II 148). The crayfish is also evident (II 312). Relevant to the early astrological representations of the Moon, one can find both compass (74) and astrolabe (75).

19. Sun

The sun depicted with straight and curved rays is common (I 135, 142-144, 326). The sunflower of the modern Tarot deck is also present (II 204, 233-240).

20. Judgment

The trumpet of Gabriel is quite common as an isolated image (120-121, 124, 147).

21. World

The symbol of the World or Anima Mundi is clearly displayed in a form resembling the early printed decks. It shows a woman standing on a globe (67).

Summary

In evaluating the resemblances between the Tarot and the watermarks, two points need to be made. First, we are using only a small fraction of the symbols found in the watermarks. Common images such as bears and bulls and even camels show no correlations with the cards. Second, with some notable exceptions, what we find are bits and pieces of the Tarot symbols. Symbols as complex as those on the Tarot cards are rare. It is not at all clear that these isolated

bits of symbols bear any direct relationship to the Tarot figures. For example, the sickle might represent the need to slice cleanly through problems. There is no compelling reason to assume association with the Death card.

For both of these reasons, there is little force to the argument that the Tarot and the watermarks are one and the same symbolic system. The evidence argues the contrary. Many of the resemblances we have pointed out are clearly forced. If the watermarks form a coherent symbolic system, as Bayley maintains, the Tarot is not derived from that system. On the other hand, it is clear that both symbolic systems drew from a common pool of images.

Conclusions

Our purpose, as stated in the introduction to this chapter, was to group all of the Renaissance sources of Tarot imagery into one place. I hope I have convinced the reader that the imagery of the Tarot had its source in the artistic and symbolic tradition of the Renaissance. There is no reason to maintain that the Tarot is a modernized version of much older symbols. The symbols of the Renaissance are the symbols of the Tarot. No other sources are needed to explain the imagery. This is the simplest hypothesis that explains the data. Thus, according to the principles outlined in Chapter Two, this is the theory that we must accept until some evidence is offered which cannot be explained. There is no compelling reason to accept a more complex "long ago and far away" theory.

Because I have argued that the Tarot designers drew upon a traditional pool of symbols, it is not necessary to maintain that the designers actually saw the specific examples of art referred to in this study. My argument is not that I have located the specific example of art that was copied in the Tarot. I have simply presented examples of the artistic tradition within which the Tarot was designed. This is my excuse for presenting art which was produced after the design of the original Tarot decks. The artists of these later works drew upon the same traditional symbols as the designers. The Tarot is clearly a child of the Renaissance, like all of the other examples presented.

Notes and References

1. Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1968).
2. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (Princeton University Press, 1953) p 130.
3. *Ibid.*, p 132. The mural was painted about 1450 by Agostino di Duccio, Matteo di Pasti and Francesco Laurana.
4. The images of the Tarocchi of Mantegna can be found in Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of the Tarot* (US Games, 1978) pp 37ff. The images are known from a set of prints. There is no direct evidence that they were ever a set of cards (i.e., "Tarocchi") or that they were designed by Mantegna. To simplify references, I will not cite individual page numbers in Kaplan for each of the images referred to during the chapter. The existing Mantegna prints date from about 1470 while the earliest surviving Tarot is dated about 1450. Since the two systems originated so close in time and since both dates are subject to argument, it is not clear which borrowed from which.
5. Levenson, Oberhuber, and Sheehan, *Early Italian Engravings from the National Gallery of Art* (National Gallery of Art, 1973) pp 90 ff. This source gives excellent reproductions of the Mantegna prints and a number of cross-references to related imagery. Particularly useful are the literary references which the engraver appears to have used in formulating his images. The images on the tomb of Pope Sixtus IV can be found in Chastel, *The Flowering of the Italian Renaissance* (Odysset, 1965) pp 103 and 130. The tomb was designed by Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo, see Murray, *The Art of the Renaissance* (Praeger, 1963) p 211
6. Heninger, *The Cosmological Glass* (Huntington Library, 1977).
7. The chain of being according to Bouelles (1512) can be found in Heninger, *op. cit.*, p 85. The system of Ramon Lull is shown in Heninger, p 161. The Monte Sancto di Dio by Bettini is in Levenson et al., *op. cit.*, p 15.
8. Holbein, *The Dance of Death* (Dover, 1971). This is a facimile of the 1538 edition.
9. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (Princeton University Press, 1953) p 207. Hereafter we will refer to this work as Jung, *PAA*. The horoscope is a woodcut by Erhard Schoen and was produced after 1512. Since the woodcut was produced later than the Tarot, it is quite possible that Schoen used the Tarot as a model for some of the astrological houses. However, this would not alter the argument that the Tarot images were seen as symbols, not arbitrary images.
10. Chastel, *op. cit.*, p 152, fig 142.
11. *Ibid.*, p 1.
12. Hind, *An Introduction to the History of Woodcut* (Dover, 1963) [orig. published 1935] p 331. Hind suggests the artist is Durer in 1494.
13. From the Tarot deck designed by J. Breyer, 1979. The deck is published by Editiones Ergonia, Paris. The sixteenth century date of the tapestry shown in this deck indicates that the image might have been borrowed from the Tarot.
14. Innes, *The Tarot* (Arco, 1978) p 54. The image is from *Die Werkungen der Planten*, 1470.
15. Murray, *op. cit.*, plate 67. The image is from *Petrus Christus*, 1449.
16. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1964) p 115, plate 5.
17. Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 1972) p 247. The image is from Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1672).
18. King, *The Gnostics and their Remains* (Wizards, 1973).
19. Illustrations of a number of Sibyls are given by Levenson et al., *op.cit.*, pp 22 ff.
20. Murray, *op. cit.*, p 183, plate 154. The image is from Durer.

21. Examples of this type of throne, painted in the period immediately preceding the design of the Tarot, are Masaccio's Virgin and Child enthroned (1426) and the same theme by Fra Angelico (1437 and 1438). Fra Angelico was particularly fond of this form of throne and used it again in the San Marco Altarpiece (c. 1440) and the Annalena Altarpiece (c. 1445).

22. Wittkower, *Idea and Image: Studies of the Italian Renaissance* (Thomas and Hudson, 1958) p 108.

23. Burckhart, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Harper and Row, 1958) p 288.

24. Lehner, *Symbols, Signs and Signets* (Dover, 1950) p 176. The image is from Hartman, *Liber Cronicarum* (1493).

25. Murray, *op. cit.*, p 211.

26. Chastel, *op. cit.*, p 1, fig 73.

27. Hind, *op. cit.*, p 509.

28. Moakley, *The Tarot Cards* (New York Public Library, 1966) p 211. Also see Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Norton, 1958) p. 110.

29. Wind, *op. cit.*, plate 27.

30. *Ibid.*, plate 15.

31. *Ibid.*, plate 75.

32. *Ibid.*, plate 43.

33. *Ibid.*, plates 74 and 75.

34. *Ibid.*, plate 60.

35. Heninger, *Touchees of Sweet Harmony* (Huntington Library, 1974) p 271. [hereafter Heninger, TSH].

36. The prevalence of pagan gods in Renaissance art is clearly demonstrated by Wind, *op. cit.* and Seznec, *op. cit.* For an example of the classic representation of Mars, see Levenson et al., *op. cit.*, p 18, from Baldini's engravings of the planets.

37. Chastel, *op. cit.*, p 138, fig 128.

38. For example, see Cavendish, *The Tarot* (Harper and Row, 1975) p 104; Lehner, *op. cit.*, p 199; Watts, *The Two Hands of God* (Collier, 1963) plate 13.

39. Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance* (Oxford, 1953) frontispiece. Also see Murray, *op. cit.*, plate 222.

40. Edinger, *Ego and Archetype* (Penguin, 1973) p 99; Murray, *op. cit.*, p 183, plate 152. Strauss (ed.), *The Complete Engravings, Etchings and Drypoint of Albrecht Durer* (Dover, 1972) pp 200 ff.

41. Cole, *Masaccio and the Art of Early Renaissance Florence* (Indiana University Press, 1980). Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy* (Oxford, 1940) pp 48 ff. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance* (University of South Carolina Press, 1971).

42. Seznec, *op. cit.*, p 132.

43. Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter* (Northwestern University Press, 1969) pp 209 f.

44. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (Princeton University Press, 1956) plate LVI. [Hereafter Jung SOT].

45. Wind, *op. cit.*, contains a number of excellent and scholarly discussions on the common use of allegory in Renaissance art. Without seeking the hidden, secondary meanings of the symbols in the paintings, much of Renaissance art is unintelligible.

46. Jung, *PAA* p 90, fig 35; Jung *SOT* p 172, fig 17; Seznec, *op. cit.*, p 186.

47. Joost-Gaugier, *Jacop Bellini: Selected Drawings* (Dover, 1980) frontispiece.

48. Cavendish, *op. cit.*, p 109.

49. There are a large number of Renaissance paintings of St. Sebastian. One of the earliest known woodcuts (1437) is of the martyr. Images of Sebastian which share a number of iconographic features with the Hanged Man card can be found in Berenson, *op. cit.*, plates 67 and 305 and p 328; Chastel, *op. cit.*, p 235, fig 222 and p 312, fig 309; Levensen et al., *op. cit.*, p xx, fig 4. Very similar postures can be found in images of the Flagellation of Christ, see Hind, *op. cit.*, p 391.

50. Moakley, *op. cit.*, p 95.

51. The typical image of Prudence is shown on the "Etteilla" Tarot. It is a figure with a mirror in the right hand and a snake in the left hand or on the floor. See Cole, *op. cit.*, p 76. Although we are not considering the Etteilla images in detail in this book, I would like to report a significant finding which I have not seen noted elsewhere. The early cards of the Etteilla deck: Chaos, The Sky, The Stars and The Birds and Fish are exact copies of the first five days of creation as illustrated in Hartmann Schidel's *Liber Chronicarum* (Nuremberg, 1493). The modern reader can find the images in Heninger, *CG*, pp 17 ff. The copying is exact, down to the finest detail.

52. Clark, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Jackson, 1950). Moakley points out that Clark lists more than twenty instances of the dance of death between 1424 and 1635. Burckhart, *op. cit.*, p. 405, fig 222. This illustration accompanies a sermon by Savonarola.

53. Chastel, *op. cit.*, p 3.

54. Formaggio and Basso (eds.) *A Book of Miniatures* (Tudor, 1962) p 51, fig 45.

55. Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p 247.

56. Cavendish, *op. cit.*, p 123. The image is from the Bedford Book of Hours.

57. Innes, *op. cit.*, p 50.

58. Berenson, *op. cit.*, plate 140. Also see Murray, *op. cit.*, p 205. A very similar image can be found in the upper left hand corner of the Annunciation by Fra Angelico at Cortova.

59. Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p 118 and 157.

60. Edinger, *op. cit.*, p 144.

61. This is the image shown on the Beinecke deck (Dummett, *The Game of Tarot*, Duckworth, 1980, plate 14) which is one of the oldest surviving printed sheets of cards.

62. Mackenzie, *The Migration of Symbols* (Knopf, 1926) p 98.

63. Burckhart, *op. cit.*, p 201.

64. *Ibid*, p 491.

65. The three paintings can be found in Murray, *op. cit.*, pp 270, 233 and 197.

66. *Ibid.*, p 27. This is but one of the hundreds of examples of the theme of love of nature which formed a basic theme of Renaissance Humanism (see Chapter 3).

67. Lehner, *op. cit.*, p 203.

68. Hind, *op. cit.*, pp 146 and 541. The same image can be found in the "Last Judgment" by Fra Angelico in the Museo di San Marco.

69. Jung, *SOT*, plate LX.

70. Jung, *PAA*, p 302.

71. Decker, *Early Tarots: Copies and Counterparts*. *Journal of the International Playing Card Society*, Vol IX, Issue 1, pp 24-31. Other related images show Christ atop the world with the four elements in the four corners (Heninger, *CG*, p 100) and God enthroned in a circle with four beasts in the corners (*Ibid.*, p 165).

72. Burckhart, *op. cit.*, p 405.
73. Formaggio, *op.cit.*, p 67.
74. *Ibid.*, pp 100 f from fifteenth century codex of Triumphs.
75. *Ibid.*, p 101.
76. *Ibid.*, p 102.
77. Burckhart, *op. cit.*, p 423; Formaggio, *op. cit.*, p 72; Hind, *op. cit.*, p 488.
78. Chastel, *op. cit.*, p 44.
79. Sez nec, *op. cit.*, p 239.
80. Formaggio, *op. cit.*, pp 71 and 99; Wind, *op. cit.*, plate 77.
81. Hind, *op. cit.*, p 489.
82. Moakley, *op. cit.*, p 114. She cites Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London, 1951) part III, pp 244 f.
83. Lehner, *op. cit.*, p 187.

Chapter Ten

Kabbalah and the Tarot

In the first nine chapters, we have proceeded from the general to the specific. In Chapter Three we set out the broad cultural and intellectual world-view of the Renaissance. In Chapters Four to Six we became more specific and examined philosophical and spiritual influences drawn from the ancient Hellenistic world. In Chapters Seven and Eight we focused on the traditions of mysticism which were prevalent in the Renaissance. In Chapter Nine we focused yet further by emphasizing a single source of inspiration, the artistic and symbolic tradition of the times.

In the remaining chapters of the book, we will continue the pattern of becoming more specific. Each study will focus on a single occult science. Each will be considered in some detail so that we can evaluate its potential influence on the Tarot designs. The groundwork laid in the earlier chapters should have prepared the reader to appreciate the influence of these occult sciences. They seem patently absurd today. But these sciences were not considered absurd in the Renaissance, they were the height of intellectual development.

In many respects, it is appropriate that we begin our investigations with Kabbalah. Tarot interpreters since de Gebelin have continuously referenced Kabbalah as a primary paradigm for the interpretation of the cards. This alone is ample reason for considering it first. But the concepts of Kabbalah also follow naturally from the themes developed in earlier chapters. Kabbalah is heavily imbued with Gnosticism and stands in relation to Judaism much as the dualist heresies stand to Christianity. It embodies the esoteric and mystical wisdom of Judaism and, in its claims to secret wisdom, it is closely akin to the spirit of Gnosticism.¹ Thus, by considering Kabbalah at this point, we will be able to draw directly on our previous studies of Gnosticism, mysticism and the union of the opposites in the dualist heresies.

It is unlikely that the Kabbalists were the actual designers of the Tarot. All of the evidence we have accumulated to this point indicates that the designers were Christian, albeit somewhat dualist in sympathy. However, this is not the real point at issue. We wish to consider Kabbalah as yet another of the myriad inputs of "occult" wisdom which converged in Renaissance Syncretism.

Our arguments for the influence of Kabbalah on the Tarot are based on two grounds. First, Jewish mysticism dates back to the second century A.D. Kabbalah is simply another expression of the ubiquitous Hellenistic syncretism which was rediscovered in the Renaissance. It is another form of the Neoplatonic and Gnostic

synthesis. Thus, it was no great feat to synthesize this new source into the worldview presented in the Tarot. Second, we will find that Kabbalah was readily available to the Renaissance scholar in fifteenth century Italy and fit easily into his philosophic and spiritual system. It is difficult to imagine that the Tarot designers would have ignored Kabbalah when it so nicely reinforced all of the rest of their concepts.

To understand the influence of Kabbalah on the Renaissance, we must begin with an historical survey. We will show that Kabbalah stems from the same syncretistic atmosphere of late antiquity which spawned the other "roots" of the Tarot. We will follow this historical path to show that Kabbalah was a continuous mystical influence in Europe. Then we must show how Kabbalah came to be "discovered" in Renaissance Italy.

The Early Period: Kabbalah to the Tenth Century

Kabbalah is basically Jewish mysticism. The word comes from the Hebrew root, KBL, which means to receive,² referencing the fact that the wisdom of Kabbalah was transmitted orally from generation to generation. It is the poetry of Judaism. By some traditions, it was taught by God to the angels³ who transmitted the knowledge to Adam after his fall. By other traditions, it was given to Moses on Mount Sinai.⁴

The Old Testament

Although the earliest evidence of Jewish mysticism can be traced to the writings of the first century B.C., we must acknowledge that its roots lie much further back in history. No one can read the first five books of the Bible without some realization that the mystical, the magical, and the esoteric played a role in Judaism from its beginnings. The real source of Jewish mysticism is the Bible.

Genesis begins with the Spirit of God (i.e., the Anima Mundi) moving upon the waters.⁵ Adam was originally an androgyne, only subsequently divided into the male/female polarity. Creation occupied seven days, the mystical number. The serpent reveals that "... you will be like gods, knowing good and evil . . ."⁶ That is, Adam and Eve will become like archons, realizing the basic duality of the universe. Surely this reference to eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is Gnostic or at least dualistic in spirit.

After Adam and Eve ate the fruit, "... the eyes of both of them were opened . . ."⁷ They received the Gnosis. Indeed, they had been warned, "... on the day you eat of it, you shall most surely die . . ."⁸ But they did eat, and they did not die. "God" had lied to them, thus revealing that he was not really "God" but the evil Archon, the Demiurge trying to keep them entrapped in matter. The messenger of the true God, the principle of Good, was the serpent who revealed

the Gnosis to them. A further hint that the "God" of Genesis is not the true Godhead is the statement that he went walking in the Garden in the cool of the evening. The Infinite One, the Unknowable God does not have a body that goes walking, does not experience heat or cold, and is beyond time distinctions such as "evening". The "God" of Genesis was not All-Knowing, he did not know that the first parents had eaten the fruit, he guessed it from their behavior.

When "God" discovered that they had eaten of the fruit, he banished Adam and Eve from the Garden. He says: "See, the man has become like one of us, with his knowledge of good and evil."⁹ And who exactly is this "us" supposed to be, if not the other archons? God then decides to banish the pair so that they will not "... pick from the Tree of Life also and eat some and live forever."⁹ This "Tree of Life" became the esoteric wisdom of Kabbalah, the very heart of its mystical system. Kabbalah attempted to reconstruct this Tree of Life from the esoteric knowledge revealed to Adam by an angel.³ By constructing the Tree of Life, Kabbalah could taste of its fruits, overcome the banishment of the evil Archon, and live forever, that is, become "divine" through the experience of God-union.

But the way to the Tree of Life is a difficult journey and involves considerable danger for the traveler. Fearful that man would escape his imprisonment in matter, the Archon "... posted the angel and the flame of a flashing sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life ..."¹⁰ This story of Adam and Eve recalls the basic themes of Gnosticism and the spiritual journey to God-union. These are the same themes and the same journey presented in the Tarot.

The esoteric references in the Bible do not stop with the first chapters of Genesis. Recall that Saul consulted the witch of Endor who summoned up the spirit of Samuel. God appeared in a burning bush to Moses. Moses challenged the magicians of the Pharaoh to a show of magical powers. The Old Testament has angels aplenty serving as intermediary spirits between God and man. The Devil and God have a lively conversation in the opening chapters of Job. Wisdom (Sophia) is personified and almost (but not quite) raised to divine status in Proverbs.

Probably the most influential esoteric reference in the Bible was the first chapter of Ezekial. Here the prophet describes his vision of the "Chariot" or Throne of God. The potential influence on the Chariot card of the Tarot is almost too obvious to warrant mention. The vision of Ezekial was to form the basis of Ma'aseh Merkabah, the mysticism of the Chariot. This was the beginning of Jewish mysticism along with the Ma'asek Bereshith, the mysticism of Genesis.

Much of the esoteric wisdom of the Bible can be traced to the long exile of the Jews in Egypt where they assimilated the magical and pre-Gnostic wisdom of the times. We must also recognize that much of the Old Testament was still in the process of formation as Ezra led the exiles back from Babylonian Captivity. In Babylon they

had been subjected to Persian dualism and angelology. Much of this dualism is reflected in the Bible.¹¹

Early Jewish Mysticism and the Apocrypha

Much of Jewish mysticism was formulated with commentaries on the Bible written during the first two centuries AD. During this period, Judaism, like all thought systems of the period, was influenced by the powerful syncretistic movement. Like the Greek and Coptic magical papyri written in Egypt during the Roman Empire, the early Jewish commentaries show a synthesis of religious fervor, mystical ecstasy and magical practices. Early developments in Kabbalah took place in Egypt alongside the development of Christian Neoplatonic mysticism, the desert hermits, and Gnosticism. We must once again reluctantly admit the wisdom of de Gebelin and the occultists in tracing the wisdom of the Tarot all the way back to Egypt.

To understand the early development of Kabbalah, we must recall that the Roman legions put an end to the Jewish rebellion by the destruction of the second Temple at Jerusalem in 70 AD. From this point onward, Judaism became a religion of exile. The salvation of the religion and the racial consciousness of the Jews was the result of the codification of rabbinical Judaism in the decades following this cataclysm. This code was the Talmud, the religious law of the Jews. A Jew could now be defined by adherence to this law, and the law had no geographic reference. The religion of Israel became a religion of the world.

The solidification of the Jewish law was essential for the survival of the Jews, now scattered among hostile nations. But this very codification also tended to embarrass any attempt at creativity. Revelation and its interpretation were severely limited. Any original insights must now be relegated to the Kabbalah, the oral tradition. The foundations of the written tradition were already set in concrete.

And yet it is evident that the Jewish soul, reflected in the Bible, was a mystical soul. Judaism was saturated with mystical symbolism and Kabbalah developed as an attempt to decipher and apply this symbolism. Such a mystical soul is full of inspiration and cannot be reduced to a written code and continued to express itself in the form of an elaborate oral tradition.

This mystical tradition did not remain totally oral. It began to be expressed in a series of apocryphal writings that date from the first few centuries of the Christian era.¹² These writings deal with mystical visions of God, of angels, and of the Throne or Chariot of Ezechial. And, as we might expect, this literature is strongly influenced by the mystical wisdom of the times.

The only real difference between the Jewish and Gnostic writings is in emphasis. The Jewish mystics were less interested in speculation and more concerned with practical techniques. They

were less absorbed in contemplation of God's nature and more concerned with achieving the mystical vision of the Throne. Thus, they were more overtly mystical and psychic in their writings.

The themes of the Apocrypha are reflected in other Jewish literature of the same period. We find these same dualist and mystical themes in the Dead Sea Scrolls¹³ and in the writings of Philo the Jew.

In Philo we find a number of Neoplatonic concepts such as the Logos as an intermediary between God and man. There is little to indicate that Philo directly influenced the later development of Kabbalah. But his allegorical interpretations of the Bible are similar in spirit to the early Jewish mystics. Like the Apocryphal literature, he sought to reconcile Jewish wisdom with the Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, and other forms of wisdom he found about him.

Hellenistic influence on the Apocrypha is clear from the use of Greek words for the names of God, from the use of number and alphabetical mysticism and from the Neoplatonic hierarchies of angels.¹⁴ Indeed, conversations with the angels, who try to prevent the ascent of the soul, are often conducted in Greek.¹⁵ The use of Greek is much like the use of Hebrew in other mystical literature of the times. The foreign is always mysterious and magical.

We should not conclude that Gnosticism totally overwhelmed Kabbalah in its early development. There is a unique Jewish character to Kabbalah. But it is clear that the Apocrypha are children of their times. There are obvious references to Neoplatonic concepts including an utterly transcendent God, angels as intermediates, and matter as darkness that must be overcome by mystical techniques.¹⁶

Ma'aseh Merkabah

A detailed survey of the rich Apocryphal literature is far beyond the scope of the present inquiry. However, we must pause long enough to take a brief look at the mysticism in this literature and its possible correlations with the Tarot.

This mysticism is concerned with the ascent to the Throne: the actual vision of the Throne as a manifestation of God's essence. This is a Jewish version of the Gnostic ascent through the planetary spheres. The soul passes by the hostile angels and returns to its original home in God's Light. The basic themes are 1) the Light and its emanations, 2) the seven palaces (later to become the seven lower sephiroth), and 3) the use of psychological and magical techniques to accomplish the journey.

The ascent of the mystic is preceded by twelve days of ascetical preparation. After this period, the mystic makes use of secret techniques to induce a trance.¹⁷ Under the influence of the trance, the mystic experiences a series of archetypal visions, described as the passage through the seven heavens. The place of the archons is taken by angelic guardians which the soul must pass. This ascent is, of course, a projection of the journey within, the mystic

journey into the unconscious. This descent involves the realization of some spiritual quality which mirrors the divine attribute which rules each celestial palace.¹⁸ This recalls the human qualities which are shed as the Gnostic ascends through the planetary spheres. This mystical voyage strikes a familiar note as the descent into hell of the sun-hero in quest of the treasure hard to obtain.

The qualities which must be realized at each level of the ascent are symbolized by the magical devices which the mystic must possess. The angels must be shown "the seals" which are the secret names of God or pictures imbued with magical power. The seals are obviously some sort of magical object or image. We have already seen in Chapter Four that the Renaissance Neoplatonists considered magical images as important tools in manipulating the astral influences.

The reward for the mystic who possessed all of the necessary magical paraphenalia was the vision of the Throne of God, as described in the first chapter of Ezechial. The two primary elements of the vision are the Ophanim, which is some sort of wheel or revolving form, hence the reference to Chariot, and the Chayoth or holy beings about the Wheel. The beasts are in the form of lion, ox, eagle and man. Both of these elements can be seen in the World card, which we have continuously suggested as representing the culmination of the mystical journey. In addition, there are many references to the "veil" which separates God from the other parts of the Chariot. This veil reminds one of the veils on the Tarot cards such as the Papess, Empress and Justice.

As the mystic ascends, he experiences the dangers of drowning (Temperance, Star, Moon), fire (Devil and Tower) and lightning (Tower). Thus the series of Tarot cards from fourteen to eighteen can be directly related to the mystical dangers of the ascent to the Throne. The real psychological dangers of the Jewish mysticism are the same dangers warned about in the Tarot. Perhaps the simplest way to relate the Tarot to the Ma'aseh Merkabah literature is to state that both express the stages and dangers of the psychological journey of the mystic.

Sefer Yetzirah

Among the mystical literature of this period, there is one work of primary importance. The Sefer Yetzirah was written in Palestine between the third and sixth century AD.¹⁹ This work was very influential among later occult interpreters of the Tarot. Papus translated it into French and Westcott (a founder of the Golden Dawn) translated it into English.

This is obviously a Jewish Gnostic text. Of particular interest are the many dualities mentioned in the text. Many of these same dualities are represented in the Tarot: soft/hard, strong/weak, life/death, wisdom/folly, domination/slavery, above/below. This

dualism is reflected in the Tarot both in contrasting pairs of cards like the Papess and Pope, Empress and Emperor, and in symbols on individual cards.

But the most important aspect of this work is the number and letter mysticism it outlines. There are thirty-two secret paths of wisdom: the ten numbers (called sephiroth) and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Everything in existence is the result of combinations of the letters. In a kind of implicit Nominalism, the "name" of a thing is its essence. Thus, by combining letters one forms the essence of things, just as molecules are built up from chemical elements. In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the letters are built into incredible complexes of symbolism such as wheels and magic walls. This concern with number and letter mysticism in the early Kabbalist literature shows that the occultist concern with assigning Hebrew letters to the cards has a real basis in Judaic mysticism. The importance of this form of mysticism in Kabbalah means that the number of cards in the Tarot, twenty-two, may actually correspond to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The cards may actually represent the "elements" or fundamental ingredients of the Neoplatonic world-view.

The numerology of the *Sefer Yetzirah* should also be noted. The alphabet is divided into the Three Mothers (Aleph, Mem and Shin), the seven double letters and the twelve simple letters. Note once again the mystical numbers three and seven whose product is twenty-one, the number of Tarot cards. The "three" letters are related to three elements (air, fire and water), the "seven" to the planetary spheres and the "twelve" to the zodiacal constellations. So the numerology is closely related to cosmological and astrological concepts. We will see in Chapter Twelve how the number mysticism of the *Sefer Yetzirah* may be reflected in the numerological structure of the Tarot. At this point we will close by saying that this Gnostic-Jewish text is probably the basis for viewing the Tarot both as symbols for the Hebrew alphabet and as "paths" on the Tree of Life.

Gematria

Before we leave the number mysticism of the early Kabbalistic writings, we must consider the application of numerology to Biblical interpretation. During the later Geonic period (seventh to tenth centuries), mystical interpretation of the Torah often used a system called Gematria. According to the system, each Hebrew letter was given a numerical value. Remembering the Nominalist concept that the essence of a thing is somehow expressed in the "name" given to that thing, analysis of the "name" could reveal its true nature. This, of course is the basis for the secrecy and power associated with the Name of God.

To ascertain the true nature of a thing, the "name" was analyzed numerically. The numerical value of each letter was added up. This sum then related the object to other "names" or things which

contained the same total value. Thus, two apparently unrelated words could be freely substituted, as long as their numerical sums were equal. The sum of the letter values could also be reduced to a value between zero and nine. For example, if the sum of the letters was 365, these three integers could be summed to fourteen and these two integers summed to five. Since the numbers between zero and nine are directly related to the ten sephiroth, the ten attributes of God, every word could be reduced to its archetypal reference to God and his attributes.

Because of the potential influence of Kabbalah on the Tarot, it is quite possible that the names assigned to the Tarot cards were deliberately constructed according to the principles of Gematria. There may also be a clue here to the interpretation of combinations of cards since their numerical value can be manipulated to a number between zero and nine and therefore related to a specific Sephiroth. We will return to explore these possibilities in the chapter on Numerology.

Gematria was developed as a method for interpreting hidden meanings, particularly otherwise senseless names and geneologies in the Torah. It probably originated in Babylon during the early period of intense development of Talmudic interpretation. However, it may also have arisen in Italy²⁰ where the Merkabah and associated literature spread not later than the ninth century. Thus, in Gematria we find our first reference to Jewish mysticism in Italy. Jewish communities and their Gnostic mysticism were present in Italy for a number of centuries preceding the design of the Tarot. This is the first of a number of pieces of evidence that Kabbalah was readily available to the designers of the Tarot.

Medieval Jewish Mysticism

After the tenth century, the centers of Jewish mysticism shifted from the Middle East to Europe. The word Kabbalah first appears in the eleventh century and is in general use by the fourteenth. Of the several different lines of development, we will consider the Hasidism of twelfth century Provence.²¹ This movement focuses on the person of Isaac the Blind (died about 1235) and the *Sefer ha'Bahir*, written between 1150 and 1200.

The first point of interest is that the Sephiroth, simply the number zero-nine in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, develop into a system of divine emanations. We will develop this theme in more detail in a later section. It will suffice for now to mention that the system is drawn out into four sets of ten emanations forming four worlds that span the distance between God and man. The Sephiroth have different significance, depending upon the level at which they are being interpreted. Thus, once again we are met with the concept of a single symbol having multiple meanings, some more esoteric than others.

In Hasidism, the Sephiroth have become the Neoplatonic emanations or intermediaries. In both Provence and Spain, Neoplatonism entered Kabbalah and transformed its character from the early Gnostic system. The mixture of Neoplatonism with the Gnostic Merkabah had the result of changing the earlier "practical" mysticism into a speculative, philosophical system. This trend can be viewed in two ways. The actual psychological experience of the ascent emphasized in the early literature is lost and replaced by philosophy. On the other hand, it is quite likely that the practical mysticism was retained in an oral tradition, with the written literature more and more emphasizing the intellectual background and structure of the system. We are reasonably sure that the practical methods were retained since they reappear in the literature centuries later. The practical mysticism was well established but since it was the more esoteric part of the system it appears less frequently in writing.

Neoplatonic ideas concerning God, His emanations and man's place in the world were extremely influential. Historically, Kabbalah can be defined as the product of the inter-penetration of Jewish Gnosticism and Neoplatonism. This incorporation of Neoplatonism into Kabbalah is of interest to us for two reasons. First, it meant a development of Jewish mystical thought in a direction that fit nicely into the Neoplatonic synthesis of the Renaissance. Thus, the acceptability of Kabbalah to the Renaissance Magus, immersed in Neoplatonism, was enhanced. Second, we are interested in exactly where these Neoplatonic concepts came from.

It is hardly circumstantial that Kabbalah flourished in France at the same time as the Provencal mysticism of the Albigensians. The Neoplatonism in Hasidism comes from the dualist heresies. Thus, once more the threads of evidence are drawn tight. Whatever the influence of the Cathari, Albigensians or other dualist heretics might have had on the designers of the Tarot, their influence was supported and enhanced by Kabbalah which had already incorporated much of their philosophical system.

All of the lines of evidence are forcing themselves upon us. The Gnostic/Neoplatonic mindset which the Renaissance acquired through ancient art and mythology (Chapter Three) and the Hermetic writings (Chapter Six) was already reinforced by the Latin writings on the Mystery Religions (Chapter Five) and both orthodox (Chapter Seven) and heterodox (Chapter Eight) mysticism. And now the identical set of concepts is coming from an apparently independent source, the Jewish scholars and mystics. It is easy to see, in the synthesizing milieu of the Renaissance, how Kabbalah ⁵ Dualist Heresies ⁵ Mysticism ⁵ Hermetism ⁵ Gnosticism ⁵ Neoplatonism ⁵ Truth. And, to my mind, it becomes inconceivable that all of these lines of convergence could be ignored by the Tarot designers.

We are also interested in Provencal Hasidism because of its development of mystical prayer, a mysticism of the Sephiroth. Hasidism introduced contemplation of the Sephiroth as a means

of concentration in prayer. We will try to demonstrate in a later study how this meditation on the Sephiroth became meditation on the images of the Tarot. Basically, both involve the intense absorption of the mystic into the archetypal symbolism of the system. This is particularly emphasized by Isaac the Blind. His contemplative mysticism involves communion with God through meditation on the Sephiroth as the Divine Attributes. While the symbolic system used for meditation differs significantly from the Tarot images, both systems involve intermediate emanations between God and man. Meditation on the symbols became a method for actually experiencing the ascent. By intense concentration, the mystic actually "climbed" from one symbol to the next, finally arriving at God.

It is because of the Neoplatonism introduced by Hasidism that we are able to argue this connection. Both the Sephiroth and the Tarot were symbols of the Neoplatonic emanations. Isaac the Blind introduced meditation on such symbols as a mystical technique. When this meditation combines with the magical and astrological meditation which the Renaissance adopted from Hermetism, we are led to meditation on the Tarot as a mystical technique. We will return to this theme in Chapter Fourteen on the Art of Memory.

Probably the earliest connection between Kabbalah and Christianity was Petrus Alphonsi, a converted Jew and Kabbalist, who wrote *Disciplina clericalis* sometime after 1106. This early Christian Kabbalist influenced Joachim of Flora.²² Another early connection was made by Raymund Lull (1235-1315.). Lull combined the letter and number mysticism of Kabbalah with the meditation on symbols introduced by Isaac the Blind. It is important, therefore, to realize that the assimilation of Jewish mystical concepts into Christianity had a long history before the design of the Tarot. Lull had established their compatibility and suggested a synthesis.

Thus, from Hasidism we can trace several influences on the Tarot. It introduced Neoplatonic concepts that had their origin in the same dualist heresies that were present in northern Italy of the fifteenth century. Thus, the dualists had several indirect influences on the Tarot. Hasidism also introduced the technique of concentrative meditation on Neoplatonic symbols which we will associate with the Tarot in Chapter Fourteen.

The Kabbalah in Spain

Early in its history, the Islamic invasions shifted the centers of Kabbalistic development from the Middle East to Europe. Now the Albigensian Crusade shifted them from Provence to Spain where Moslem rule has introduced a degree of stability. The story of Kabbalah in Spain is actually two stories, corresponding to two dominant schools of thought. We will deal with the first school in this section and reserve discussion of the second to the following section.

The first chapter of the story centers in Gerona, located in Catalonia in northern Spain. In the thirteenth century, Gerona became the refuge of the Albigensians, the Provencal Kabbalists, Beguins, Spiritual Franciscans and Joachimists²³ all fleeing the Inquisition in southern France. Once again we see the close association of all these groups.

In Gerona, Abraham Abulafia (1240- post 1291) developed an elaborate system of contemplation based on number and letter mysticism. He had a direct influence on Lull and other Christian Kabbalists. His techniques were a continuing influence on Kabbalah from the fourteenth century onward, first in Italy and later in other countries.

Abulafia traveled extensively. In 1274 he left Spain and spent considerable time wandering. We know that he went to the Holy Land and that he made contact at that time with Sufi or Moslem mystics.²⁴ The Sufi were the Islamic mystics who retained the Gnostic/Neoplatonic tradition in the Middle East. Abulafia must have found considerable similarity between his concepts and those of the Sufis. The travels of Abulafia serve to remind us that almost all of the pious Kabbalists made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land at some time during their lives. It is likely that many of them, like Abulafia, made contact with the Sufi. If the Kabbalists did indeed make a contribution to the Tarot, they may help explain the frequent suggestion that the Tarot originated with the Sufi (See Chapter Two). As with many of the theories we have examined, it is unlikely that the Sufi made a direct contribution to the Tarot. However, it is possible that the Sufi mystics influenced the pilgrim Kabbalists and thus very indirectly made a contribution.

Even more interesting for our story are the travels of Abulafia in Italy. The purpose of his visit was nothing less than the conversion of the Pope! Needless to say, this created quite a stir! One of the major effects of his visit was to raise the awareness of the Italians to the existence of Jewish mysticism, setting the stage for the later incorporation of Kabbalah into the Renaissance synthesis.

The letter mysticism of Abulafia is directly linked to the practical mysticism of the Merkabah. His writings are less speculative and more oriented to techniques of transcendence. The reemergence of these techniques in his writings lends credence to the theory that the practical aspects of Kabbalah had never really disappeared. They were merely submerged in an oral tradition.

Abulafia connected his system directly to the Hasidism of Provence since his meditation is preceded by Sephiroth meditation. This preliminary work is followed by intense concentration on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in elaborate combinations, particularly the letters of the name of God. An abstract object was used for meditation since it was considered that any concrete object, with an intrinsic attractiveness of its own, would distract the mystic and cause him to focus too strongly on the object itself. The meditation

involves freely "jumping" from one combination, i.e., one word, to another. The method is not quite Freudian free association, but certainly a close cousin. One word leads to another and then another. The result is the emergence of unconscious contents and this has a cathartic effect on the meditator. The technique was viewed as a sort of "mystical logic" which corresponded to an inner harmony. If the thoughts were allowed to wander freely, according to their own intrinsic harmony, they would lead inevitably to God. The approach resembles numerous other techniques of absorptive or concentrative meditation.²⁵ Such methods are common in many mystical traditions, both Western and Eastern, and are known to alter the state of consciousness. This alteration was identified by Abulafia with Gnosis, Illumination, and the attainment of prophetic visions. The material barriers surrounding the soul are broken down and the Divine Power pours in: a powerful and dangerous practice.

One of the most detailed accounts of the method is given by a disciple of Abulafia. He concentrated on combining the names of God for three straight nights. On the third night, he became drowsy and nodded. When he once again became aware of his environment, he noticed that the candle was going out. He rose to fix it and became aware of a strange and powerful source of light, that did not come from the candle. He discovered that the light was emanating from himself.²⁶

Clearly this letter mysticism caused an altered state of consciousness and this alteration was accompanied by an experience of light. We have already seen this association of mystic experience and light in Chapter Seven. Use of Abulafia's techniques led to psychic experiences and quickly became associated with magical powers. Mystical meditation had become magic. We must remember this association in later studies when we examine Tarot meditation and magic.

In many respects, the system of Abulafia represents a return to the mysticism of the *Sefer Yetzirah*. But the practical mysticism was now embedded in a matrix of Neoplatonic theory, making it more acceptable to the intellectual of the Renaissance. In Abulafia there is particular emphasis on the twenty-two Hebrew letters, i.e., the paths between the Sephiroth. Unlike the speculative Kabbalah, which emphasized the ten Sephiroth, the attributes of God, the practical Kabbalah was concerned with the twenty-two paths. The speculative was concerned with the nature of God, the practical was concerned with how to reach him. Given the influence of Kabbalah on the Renaissance intellectual, I find it no great feat to see that the twenty-two symbols of the Tarot also represent twenty-two "paths" leading from matter to God, the *Anima Mundi*.

The Zohar

Parallel to the practical mysticism of Abulafia was a second

development of Spanish Kabbalah, tending in the direction of speculation. This centered in Castile, northeast of Madrid, and is associated with Moses de Leon of Guadalajara. Moses de Leon was the author and editor of the Zohar, the Book of Splendor,²⁷ the most influential product of Medieval Kabbalah. This text became a third scripture of Judaism, along with the Bible and the Talmud. The Zohar may be safely regarded as the definitive statement of Kabbalah as it was known to the Renaissance scholar. If the theories of Kabbalah influenced the Tarot, it would have been through the Zohar.

Our primary interest in the Zohar concerns its speculations on the Sephiroth. The Sephiroth are the ten emanations of God. They are the intermediaries between the unknowable God and the phenomenal world.²⁸ The Gnostic tendencies inherited from early Jewish mysticism are evident throughout the theory of Sephiroth. This Gnosticism is particularly evident in the first emanation: Kether, Logosa Sophia, Elohim, Metatron. This is the first divine revelation, the world-creating power and the highest angelic being. This is the Anima Mundi, the highest level, short of the unknowable Godhead, which can be reached by mystical knowledge.

We would also like to make it clear that the speculations of the Zohar focus on the Sephiroth, and not on the twenty-two paths between them. The Zohar belongs to the philosophical tradition of Kabbalah rather than the practical. None of the modern interpreters of the Zohar betray the slightest interest in the paths.²⁹ The emphasis on the paths can only be explained by a juxtaposition of the doctrine of the Zohar with the Sefer Yetzirah and the letter mysticism of Abulafia.³⁰

To introduce some order into our presentation, we will divide the discussion into four parts: the theory of the Sephiroth, the four worlds, Gnostic and magical elements in the doctrine, and, finally, the role of man.

1. The Theory of the Sephiroth

The Sephiroth make up the elements of the Tree of Life. From the fourteenth century onward,³¹ this tree is depicted by a diagram shown in Table 10-1. The name, the Tree of Life, is taken from the second tree in the Garden of Eden. The Jewish mystics identified this tree with the secret wisdom of Kabbalah. Through Kabbalah, the mystic could taste of the fruit and become "divinized". The Kabbalah was precisely what the "God" of Genesis was afraid man would learn about.

The Sephiroth are aspects of God's essence, as revealed in His creation. The Sephiroth are the curtain or veil referred to in the Gnostic Merkabah literature. In the esoteric language of the Zohar, the Sephiroth are referred to as garments. These garments allow the mystic to look at the blinding light of God. By looking at one garment at a time, the mystic proceeds toward perceiving God like moving up the rungs of a ladder. In other words, by concentrative

meditation one moves up the paths (i.e., the Tarot Trumps) connecting the Sephiroth and arrives finally at the mystic experience.

The first three Sephiroth stand as a triangle at the top of the Tree. Actually these represent the roots of the Tree which is depicted upside down, since its roots are in heaven. The first emanation is called Kether, the Crown. From Kether, comes the first of the Sephirah lying on the right column, or masculine side of the Tree: Chokmah or Wisdom. There is an obvious reference in both of these two Sephiroth in the Sophia of Gnostic literature and the personified Wisdom of Proverbs.

From Kether and Chokmah proceeds the first of the Sephirah on the left or female side: Binah, Understanding. These upper three Sephiroth form a sort of Kabbalistic Trinity which was often emphasized by the Christian Kabbalists. These three are the supernatural attributes of God which together make up the highest level of understanding possible to man. Even this level cannot be reached by intellectual endeavor, but is closely associated with intuitive or mystical experience. From the thirteenth century onward, there is a fourth Sephirah, Da'ath, lying between Binah and Chokmah. This strange completion of the Trinity by a fourth element is considered by Jung³² to be a psychological necessity in any religious structure.

Below these three (or four) uppermost Sephiroth lie seven more, corresponding to the seven palaces of the Merkabah mystics and the seven planetary spheres of the Gnostics. It is by passing through these lower seven that one reaches the mystical experience of God. They are: Chesed (Mercy or Love), Geburah (Judgment or Severity) and Tiphareth (Beauty), completing the next triangle. Then, Netzach (Victory), Hod (Glory), and Yesod (Foundation), forming the lower triangle. Finally, Malkuth (Kingdom) forms the lowest Sephirah and the direct connection to material existence. Malkuth is associated with the Shekinah, the female personification of the presence of God in the Jewish community. The Shekinah has often been associated with the Papess card of the Tarot by occultist interpreters.

The lines drawn on the figure, connecting the Sephiroth, represent the twenty-two paths of the Hebrew alphabet. They are numbered, according to the *Sefer Yetzirah*, as paths 11-32, the first ten paths being the Sephiroth themselves. It is this set of twenty-two paths which have been associated with the twenty-two Tarot trumps by interpreters of the Tarot, from de Gebelin onward.

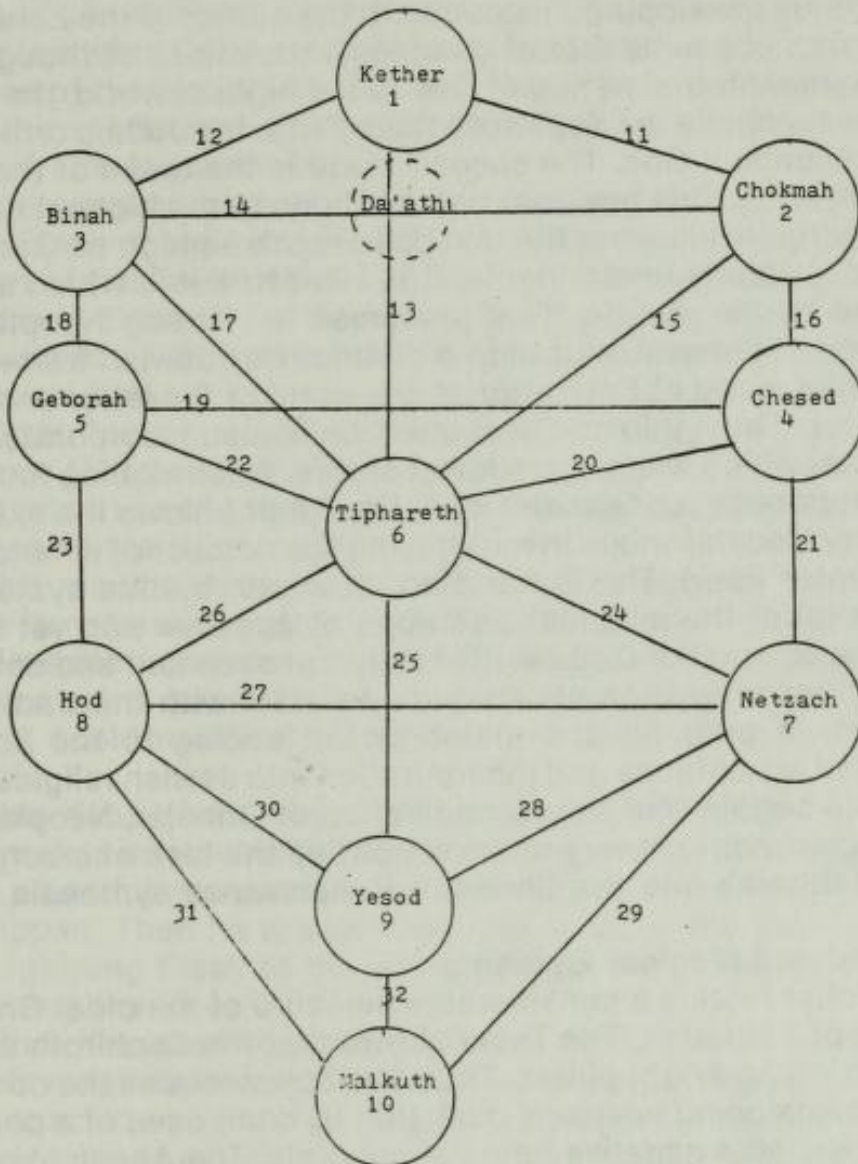
2. The Four Worlds

The system of the Sephiroth is complicated by the doctrine of the four worlds. In this schema, Malkuth of one world forms the Kether of the next lower world. The first world is Azilut, the world of emanations. This is composed of the Sephiroth as internal processes of God. Below this is Beriah, the world of creation, described in the first three chapters of Genesis. This world forms the Sephiroth

Table 10-1. The Sephiroth of Kabbalah arranged according to the fourteenth century diagram of the Tree of Life.

Left Pillar
(Female)

Right Pillar
(Male)



of the Merkabah mystics. The third world is Yetzirah, the world of formation, the world of angels surrounding Metatron. This is the world described in the *Sefer Yetzirah* and is the means by which form, measure and number are introduced into creation. Finally, there is *Asiyah*, the world of action, the terrestrial world in which man plays a creative part.

The development of the four worlds or four spheres of influence was already implied in the *Sefer ha'Bahir*, the mystical text of Hasidism. By developing this concept, the author of the *Zohar* was able to reconcile a number of complementary lines of thought. By reserving the internal nature of God to the highest world, the *Zohar* sought to reconcile the Sephiroth theory with the Judaic orthodoxy of a transcendent God. The second world is the realm of the early Jewish mystics. This assigns their methods to the highest dignity, without actually allowing the mystic to reach as high as God Himself. God is totally unattainable. It is His attributes which are experienced by the mystic. This preserves the strong Neoplatonic foundation of the system, but in a distinctively Jewish framework.

The third world of Formation is the world of the letter and number mystics. Thus, this mystical tradition is also incorporated, but in a manner which assigns it a lower status. By stretching four sets of Sephiroth between God and man, the *Zohar* follows the example of the later Neoplatonists in multiplying the number of emanations (See Chapter Four). The *Zohar* also attempts, by this system, to reconcile all of the mystical traditions of Judaism and yet retain sacred the concept of God as ultimately transcendent and unknowable. This reconciliation of orthodox Judaism with the traditional mysticism, is probably the major factor leading to the *Zohar's* widespread acceptance and incorporation into Jewish religious tradition. It is certain that the reconciliation of Gnostic, Neoplatonic and Biblical traditions very much simplified the task of incorporating the Kabbalah into the Christian Renaissance synthesis.

3. Gnostic and Magical Elements

The *Zohar* retains a considerable measure of the older Gnostic elements of Kabbalah. The Table shows that the Sephiroth are divided into left and right pillars. Thus, the *Zohar* retains the concept of the cosmos being basically dual, that is, composed of a positive (masculine) and a negative (female) principle. The Angelology and Demonology of the Gnostics is retained in the third world. The angels still serve as secondary or intermediary entities lying between the two upper worlds of God and the lower world of man. The second Sephirah, Chokmah, preserves the Gnostic Sophia or Wisdom.

The male and female pillars also suggest the symbol of sexual union for the mystical experience. Sexual union is union of the opposites, the transcending of the polarity of the cosmos. The mystical experience is symbolized by the union of man and wife and the reproductive act is elevated to the level of a sacrament.

In fact, the whole symbolism of the Tree of Life is archetypal. The Axis Mundi as a mythical axis of the world, as the central tree of the universe is a very primitive element shared with Gnosticism and primitive art. The Axis Mundi is the great tree which holds the universe together and from which hangs all of the components. It is the center of reality. It is the Tree of Life which rises out of the unconscious and connects the conscious Ego with the common roots of all mankind. The symbol occurs also among the Siberian Shamans who climb a ritual tree by means of notches (i.e., another version of the Sephiroth). The Shaman climbs the tree to converse with the spirits just as the Kabbalist climbs the Sephiroth of the Tree of Life to reach God.³³

The primary magical doctrine associated with the Tree of Life is the Flash of Lightning meditation. Note the similarity to the symbolism of the Tower card. The flash of lightning refers to a zigzag line drawn through the Sephiroth in such a way that it makes contact with each of them in turn. By using this Flash of Lightning, the magician draws down the powers of heaven to achieve some result on earth. For this magical operation, the Kabbalist uses symbols, seals or talismans, perhaps represented by the Tarot images. He also makes use of colors, and secret names to draw down the power of each of the Sephiroth in turn.

This magical operation immediately recalls the "astral" magic of the Renaissance (see Chapter Four). The Renaissance Magus also used meditation and magical symbols to ascend and make contact with the astral forces before they reached the earth. In this way, the magus could redirect the forces and affect the future course of events.

This Kabbalistic magic is also based on meditation. The magician makes contact with the mystic sphere he is working with and uses powerful visualization to form images of the things he wishes to happen. Then he draws down the force of the Sephiroth along the Lightning Flash to the world of man, the process being called "earthing the force".

Thus, like most mystical traditions, the Kabbalah maintains that certain magical powers, or psychic phenomena, are associated with their practices. These magical practices, the Practical Kabbalah, were looked at askance by the religious mystic (at least in public). As a result these techniques are not explicitly dealt with in the Zohar. But they are certainly associated with the Kabbalistic mystics throughout the Middle Ages. The religious mystics proclaim the existence of the powers and then immediately say that they are unimportant and dangerous. In the case of Tree magic, the ability to "earth the force" after evoking it is critical. Once evoked the force will kill or drive the magician insane if he does not succeed in being a passive conduit like a lightning rod.

4. The Dignity and Role of Man

We pointed out in Chapter four that the Renaissance can be

characterized by its rediscovery of the innate Dignity of Man. It became apparent in Chapter Five that this dignity was rediscovered along with Hellenistic Gnosticism. Man had a vital role in God's play. Kabbalah acquired the concept of man's dignity from the same source and this shared realization of Man's Dignity helped assimilate Kabbalah into Renaissance syncretism.

Man is the perfecting agent in material existence. Through his own moral life he gathers together the sparks and returns them to God on his death. The source of the disharmony in the cosmos was the sin of Adam and Eve. This emphasis on original sin does not necessarily reflect an influence of Christianity, since the concept probably came to both Judaism and Christianity from some early Gnostic source. Adam is the primal man, originally an androgyne. He is split into the basic duality of male and female by the Archon of Genesis. The original harmonic system of God is turned into an opposition of extremes: the fierce polarization of good and evil.

But whatever the original source of the disharmony, it is man's role to act as integrator. God energizes the world, but man acts like a prism, focusing and returning the energy to God. Man is the agent of God in the world. This perception of the role of man was an indispensable ingredient in the survival of Judaism in exile. In the midst of persecution, the Jew retained a supernatural dignity. Worldly honor was not relevant to his mission. This was a mystical task, not a political or social accomplishment.

The primary means of integration was prayer which had a mystical function, uniting individual man with God. Prayer also served a magical cosmic function. Through prayer, man ascends to the upper worlds and helps integrate the whole hierarchical structure.

Thus, man helped preserve and integrate the cosmos. The dignity of this role of man anticipated the Humanism of the Renaissance. This attitude endeared the Kabbalah to the Renaissance scholar and helped assimilate Kabbalah into his world-view.

Kabbalah in the Italian Renaissance

There are many points of similarity between the spirit of Kabbalah and the mindset reflected in the Tarot cards. But pointing out the resemblances is vacuous unless we can establish contact between Kabbalah and the designers. Because both systems are Gnostic and Neoplatonic, the resemblances could be superficial, indicating parallel developments instead of cause and effect.³⁴

However, one can make a convincing case for the influence of Kabbalah on the Italian Renaissance. We have already seen that Kabbalah was present in Italian Jewish communities since the ninth century, though primarily in Sicily. We have seen that Abulafia created quite a stir by wanting to convert the Pope. His activities aroused the curiosity of many about the Kabbalah. We have also seen (Chapter Three) that Spanish Jewish scholars were frequently employed

in translation of manuscripts. In addition, many of the Renaissance scholars were interested in Hebrew and hired Jewish tutors. We must bear in mind that Hebrew was accorded great importance in the Renaissance. It was considered the oldest human language and the Old Testament the oldest human writings.³⁵ The Renaissance respect for ancient wisdom caused an openness toward Hebrew wisdom. Kabbalah was presented by the Hebrew tutors as the most ancient and most secret of oral traditions, at least as old as the Old Testament, and possibly as old as Adam and Eve. The eagerness for secret mystical wisdom in the Renaissance must have made the Renaissance scholar very susceptible to Kabbalah.

A specific stimulus for the spread of Kabbalah to Italy was the persecution and hatred of the Jews in Spain which eventually led to their total expulsion in 1492. The atmosphere of increasing hostility prior to this event caused a migration of Jews, including many Kabbalists. Through these migrants, the Kabbalah acquired many adherents in Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth century.³⁶

An eloquent spokesman for the influence of Kabbalah on Renaissance intellectual life was Pico della Mirandola. Although Pico was active after the Tarot designs were completed, we have already argued in Chapter Four that Pico was an accurate spokesman for intellectual trends which preceded him by decades. Pico was a student of Hebrew and the Kabbalah. He included a number of Kabbalistic tenets among his nine hundred theses. He is believed to have been in possession of a copy of the Zohar,³⁷ and to have studied it along with other Kabbalistic writings. Pico stimulated a number of other writers, particularly Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), who related Kabbalah and Pythagoreanism. Since the Hebrew Bible was believed to be the oldest of writings, Reuchlin attempted to demonstrate that all aspects of ancient wisdom: Plato, Pythagoras and Zoroaster, all derived from the Bible and Kabbalah.

The motives of the Christian Kabbalists can be summarized in three points. First, they hoped to use the similarities of Kabbalah and the Neoplatonic versions of Christianity prevalent in the Renaissance to convert the Jews. Second, the Kabbalah contains a number of tenets which fit in nicely with the world-view they were constructing. Especially attractive were the Gnostic and Humanist elements. The Renaissance Magus was also attracted to the esoteric and magical elements of the system. The third motivation involved the antiquity of Kabbalah. This tradition dated back to the same ancient world and the some sources (Egypt, Neoplatonism) as the rest of their system. This antiquity appealed to their overall goal to discover in the ancient mystical traditions the source of all wisdom.

Thus, we can establish motive and opportunity. The Kabbalah was available and there was ample reason to incorporate this system into the general syncretism of the period. If the Tarot designers wished to incorporate all wisdom into their symbols, if they

wished these symbols to be useful for mystical meditation as well as a magical device (a contention yet to be proven in a later study), if they wished to develop a symbolic system which encapsulated all of the cosmos, they could not well afford to omit the Kabbalah which claimed to contribute to each and every one of these elements.

The evidence is circumstantial, but not insignificant. As with all of our explorations, we do not have a statement by the designers attesting to their sources. However, I would argue, as before, that it is difficult to conceive of the designers ignoring a system widely known and available to them which seemed to fit so nicely into the rest of their system.

Kabbalah and the Tarot

In our effort to establish the feasibility of an influence of Jewish mysticism on the Tarot designers, we have largely ignored the details of a Kabbalistic interpretation of the cards. Of course, if we ignored this aspect there would be little loss since virtually every Tarot interpreter for the past two hundred years has commented extensively on the topic. However, their efforts have not focused as we have, on the speculative tenets of Kabbalah with its Gnostic and Neoplatonic elements. Their emphasis has been on the magical and meditative aspects of the cards as paths on the Tree of Life.

Because of this emphasis, occultist interpreters have been concerned to establish the proper assignment of the cards to the paths. Each in turn claimed that they had access to some secret wisdom that revealed "THE" correct attributions. But their arguments are not very convincing. Table 10-2 shows just a few of the assignments which have been offered. The first two differ only in a single pair of paths (fifteen and twenty-eight). But the second two are totally different, showing almost no agreement whatsoever. It is obvious that considerable variation is possible. Apparently there is no system which forces itself upon the interpreter as the only logical way to arrange the cards. What is more, none of the assignments is compelling in the sense that the symbolism of the cards admits of no other possibility. Some of the occultists have changed the design of the cards in order to make them fit new arrangements.

Similarly, the occultists have followed the Sefer Yetzirah in maintaining that the twenty-two paths of the Tree of Life should correspond to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This has encouraged many to find the correct correspondences between the cards and the letters. If such a correspondence were exact, we would expect that the interpreters would be able to locate it by study of the symbols. Once again we find considerable disagreement (Table 10-3). There appears to be little in the symbols themselves which compels one to accept any one approach as correct.

What is clear from the differences of opinion in Tables 10-2 and

10-3 is that there is no one simple way to reduce the symbolism of the Tarot trumps to a Kabbalistic system. The simple fact of the matter is that the Tarot is a complex system which attempts to synthesize a number of different sources into a single set of symbols. The correspondences are inconsistent because the influence of Kabbalah was not so direct as to force any single interpretation on us. The Kabbalah is not THE key to the Tarot, because there is no single key.

The influence of the Jewish mystics is more likely to be found in the numerology of the deck and in the symbolism of individual cards. There are correspondences, but nothing so simple as reducing the whole symbolism to the Tree of Life.³⁸

Therefore, although we will explore the possibilities in an appendix to this chapter, there is little which forces us to accept any single assignment of letters or paths. There is sufficient evidence to

Table 10-2. Variations in the assignment of the paths on the Tree of Life to individual Tarot cards.

	Case ¹	Crowley ²	Gray ³	Achad ⁴
Fool	11	11	31	32
Magus	12	12	30	31
Papess	13	13	28	30
Empress	14	14	21	29
Emperor	15	28	15	22
Pope	16	16	11	27
Lovers	17	17	24	26
Chariot	18	18	25	28
Justice	22	22	19	21
Hermit	20	20	12	23
Wheel	21	21	27	11
Force	19	19	20	24
Hanged Man	23	23	18	25
Death	24	24	17	19
Temperance	25	25	16	16
Devil	26	26	23	17
Tower	27	27	22	18
Star	28	15	13	14
Moon	29	29	32	20
Sun	30	30	26	15
Judgment	31	31	14	13
World	32	32	29	12

1. Case, *The Tarot* (Macoy, 1947).

2. Crowley, *The Book of Thoth* (Weiser, 1969) p 268.

3. Gray, *The Talking Tree* (Weiser, 1977).

4. Knight, *A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism* (Weiser, 1978) Volume II, p 230.

postulate that Kabbalah had an influence on the designers. There is not sufficient evidence to indicate that it is the sole source of the symbolism. The Tarot is a mystical symbolic system expressing the nature of the cosmos and defining a path to mystical experience. The evidence in this study tends to confirm this view. What seemed wildly absurd in Chapter Two has become increasingly plausible at this stage in our explorations.

Table 10-3. Variations in the assignment of the Hebrew letters to the Tarot cards.

	Levi ¹	Case ²	Stenring ³
Fool	shin	aleph	ayin
Magus	aleph	beth	aleph
Papess	beth	gimel	zain
Empress	gimel	daleth	he
Emperor	daleth	he	vav
Pope	he	vav	pe
Lovers	vav	zain	yod
Chariot	zain	cheth	daleth
Justice	cheth	lamed	lamed
Hermit	teth	yod	tzaddi
Wheel	yod	kaph	nun
Force	kaph	teth	cheth
Hanged Man	lamed	mem	tav
Death	mem	nun	kaph
Temperance	nun	samekh	teth
Devil	samekh	ayin	shin
Tower	ayin	pe	samekh
Star	Pe	tzaddi	resh
Moon	tzadda	qoph	gimel
Sun	qoph	resh	beth
Judgment	resh	shin	qoph
World	tav	tav	mem

1. Levi, *Transcendental Magic* (Weiser, 1980) p 100.

2. Case, *The Tarot* (Macoy, 1947).

3. Knight, *A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism* (Weiser, 1978) Volume II, p 229.

Notes and References

1. Much of the material in this chapter is taken from two works of outstanding scholarship by Gershom Scholem: *Kabbalah* (New American Library, 1974) [hereafter Scholem, K] and *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken, 1941) [hereafter Scholem, M].
2. Gonzalez-Wippler, *A Kabbalah for the Modern World* (Bantam, 1977) p 1.
3. Ginsberg, *The Kabbalah, Its Doctrine, Development and Literature* (1863). Cited in Kaplan, *Tarot Classic* (US Games, 1972) p 52.
4. Muller, *History of Jewish Mysticism* (Yesod, no date).
5. Suarez, *Cipher of Genesis* (Shambala, 1977).
6. Genesis 3:5.
7. *Ibid.*, 3:7.
8. *Ibid.*, 2:17.
9. *Ibid.*, 3:22.
10. *Ibid.*, 3:24.
11. We must not forget that Judaism was long exposed to dualism in Babylon. Zoroaster preached and exerted his primary influence between 549 and 524 B.C. The first exiles returned from Babylon between 536 and 530 B.C. The second return was about seventy years later under Ezra. So the Jews were present in Babylon during the period of the greatest vitality of the new dualist religion. There was probably direct communication between the early Jewish mystics writing the Apocrypha and the contemporary Gnostics in Egypt and Syria. The Apocrypha and the secret Talmudic teachings originated in the same place and during the same time as the Gnostic religions were flourishing. (see Muller, *op. cit.*, pp 64 f.) It is unlikely that these mystics, so similar in spirit, never communicated with each other. The early Jewish mystical writings are virtually identical to the Gnostic writings of the "Pistis Sophia" type. (see Scholem, K, p 15.)
12. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1978).
13. Gaster (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Doubleday, 1956).
14. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism* (Ktav, 1978) p 93.
15. Scholem, K, pp 19 f.
16. Franck, *The Kabbalah* (Arno, 1973) p 63.
17. Many of the Kabbalistic manuals which describe these secret techniques are still available only in untranslated manuscripts since this was considered the most esoteric part of the entire mystical system (see Scholem, K, p 64). Notice the correspondence between the twelve days of preparation and the twelve cards which precede the mystical death in card thirteen of the Tarot.
18. Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah* (Penguin, 1971) p 125.
19. Scholem, K, pp 27 ff.
20. *Ibid.*, p 33.
21. Meltzer, *The Secret Garden* (Seabury, 1976).
22. Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford, 1972) p 41.
23. *Ibid.*, p 42.
24. Scholem, K, p 48.
25. Naranjo and Ornstein, *The Psychology of Meditation* (Penguin, 1977).

26. Abulafia, *The Path of Names* (Meltzer, ed., Tree, 1976) pp 20 ff.

27. The Zohar actually contains a number of pieces, combined with a primary dialogue written by de Leon, between 1280 and 1286. Modern scholarship has clearly associated the Zohar with de Leon (see Scholem, *Zohar, The Book of Splendor*, Schocken, 1963) even though tradition assigns the authorship to Simon ben Jochai (70-110 AD). He was supposed to have written the book while sealed in a cave for twelve years (notice the mystical number once again), hiding from the Romans following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

28. Muller, *op. cit.*, p 81. There is a subtle difference between the Sephiroth and the Neoplatonic emanations. The emanations are separate "gods", separate intelligences outside of God and lower than God. Orthodox Judaism does not admit of such "gods". Therefore, the highest emanations cannot be separate from God. Instead, they are divine attributes or aspects of the Godhead knowable from creation. It is the lower sephiroth that appear as separate from God and take on the character of angels. The point is a subtle one, probably of greatest interest to modern Jewish interpreters intent on demonstrating the orthodoxy of the Zohar. For our purposes, the distinction is of little interest. The fact remains that within the Neoplatonic environment of the Renaissance, the sephiroth were interpreted as intermediate emanations. This would have been the interpretation that influenced the Tarot designers.

29. See, for example, Ashlag, *Kabbalah* (Weiser, 1977), Berg, *Entrance to the Tree of Life* (Research Center of Kabbalah, no date), and *Entrance to the Zohar* (Research Center of Kabbalah, no date).

30. Gray, *The Talking Tree* (Weiser, 1977).

31. Scholem, *K*, p 106.

32. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1969).

33. Huson, *The Devil's Picturebook* (Abacus, 1972) p 106.

34. Major developments occurred after the center of activity moved to Safed in northern Israel. This movement occurred at the end of the fifteenth century, after the Tarot was designed. The major contributors, Jacob Cordovero (1522-1570) and Isaac Luria (1534-1572) were both too late and too far away to have influenced the Tarot. We must be cautious, therefore, of Kabbalistic interpretations. We must be sure that they utilize only concepts developed and disseminated by the middle of the fifteenth century. This fact alone invalidates many occult interpretations which draw freely on the work of Luria.

35. Allen, *Mysteriously Meant* (John Hopkins Press, 1970).

36. Scholem, *K*, p 67.

37. Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah* (Citadel, no date) p 445. The reader should note, however, that Waite is an occultist and not always to be relied upon for accurate historical information.

38. Particularly devastating is the variation in numbering of the cards which has occurred since the fifteenth century (see Dummett, *The Game of Tarot*, Duckworth, 1980). The occultists *assumed* that the numbering on their cards was original. Their assignment of paths and letters largely follows the numbering of their decks. We will explore in our study on Numerology to what extent the original numbering of the cards can be reconstructed.

APPENDIX

Kabbalistic Interpretation of the Tarot

We ended this study with some critical remarks about the simplistic application of Kabbalistic letter mysticism to the Tarot. But we certainly did not mean to imply that it is not interesting to explore the possibilities. However, any such exploration must be relegated to the sphere of pure speculation. Since we are not compelled by logic or by the symbols themselves to accept any of the traditional assignments, we should feel free to explore new possibilities. I propose, therefore, to attempt a new system of interpretation based on the iconography of the cards themselves.

Throughout these studies, I have restricted myself to reasonable conclusions which can be drawn from the historical facts. But in the next few chapters on occult sciences, I will have to diverge from this approach. In many cases, understanding the relationship of the occult sciences to the Tarot requires that one make use of the imagination. Only in this way can I communicate to the reader the intuitional messages contained in the cards. It is at this level that the cards have their greatest appeal. However, to maintain at least a vestige of order, I will relegate these speculations to Appendices. This should serve to differentiate between the factual story being argued in these chapters and the underlying intuitive appeal of the symbols.

I propose to examine the symbols themselves to see how they might be assigned to the Tree of Life. This provides an opportunity to explore Kabbalistic interpretations and allow the reader to judge for himself to what extent such interpretations are justified by the cards themselves.

Since I have maintained that the fifteenth century hand-painted decks have been "watered down", the luxury decks will not serve our purposes well. Instead, we will rely on the four earliest printed decks. Illustrations of these cards can be found in Kaplan, *Encyclopedia of the Tarot* (U.S. Games, 1978) and Dummett, *The Game of Tarot* (Duckworth, 1980). The four decks are:

M⁵ Metropolitan Museum, Kaplan p 125, Dummett fig 5:

L⁵ Louvre/Beaux Arts, Kaplan p 128, Dummett fig 15:

B⁵ Beinecke, Dummett fig 14; and

R⁵ Rosenwald, Kaplan p 130, Dummett fig 6.

I will use these initials to indicate which deck is being referred to whenever there is need to verify the symbolism.

The Tarot and the Tree of Life

The central path which leads directly from Malkuth to Kether through Yesod and Tiphareth (see Table 10-1) contains only three

elements (paths thirty-two, twenty-five, thirteen). There is no shorter way to proceed from the base to the crown. This central path is the hard vertical route of Gnosis, of esoteric wisdom. This is the route of knowledge, not action, and all three cards on this route show figures that are seated. This path is central, between the pillars. Therefore, these cards show the figure seated between two pillars (M) with the view between the pillars veiled (M) or obscured by the throne itself (B). The veil suggests the esoteric, occult wisdom and the veil which protects the mystic from being blinded by the direct vision of God. The thrones suggest Merkabah mysticism involved in this route. Each of the figures is surmounted by a crown, suggesting the route to Kether, the Crown.

Path thirty-two: Justice

Justice is the lowest of the three symbols, in the sense of being readily available to men. Its position on the central route is also suggested by the scales as symbols of balance. The sword in Justice's hand, shown vertically rising and piercing a crown on the Ace of Swords card, is a symbol of the vertical route which pierces through the Sephiroth to Kether. Justice indicates that the first steps on the vertical route involve balance, the natural law of the Golden Mean.

Path twenty-five: Pope

The Pope represents the second step in the vertical route: revealed religion. This is a powerful thrust upward which comes from studying what has been revealed. But this does not take the mystic all the way to Kether. The card suggests that above the simple natural law of the Golden Mean, there is a higher wisdom revealed to all men through religion.

Path thirteen: Papess

The Papess symbolizes the esoteric or hidden meanings beneath the surface of the revealed religions. Exoteric religion can carry the aspirant only so far, then the deeper mystical message must be ferreted out. The Pope is the Torah and the Papess is the Kabbalah. She also symbolizes the direct inspirations and enlightenments that come directly to the meditator, without the medium of the revealed word. This is the most enigmatic of the three cards and therefore the highest. This is the path of mysticism, meditation and the esoteric. Notice that this path crosses the Abyss (Da'ath)). This is the path in which the mystic loses himself in the meditative ascent.

Having established the three cards which represent the direct central route from Malkuth to Kether, we seek next for the three symbols which link the pillars (twenty-seven, nineteen, fourteen). We know that the pillars represent the male and female properties of the cosmos and only three cards have both a male and female figure: The Lovers (B, R, M), Judgment (R) and the Sun (B). Two of the cards (Judgment and the Lovers) have the figure of an androgynous

angel centered between the sexes. The Sun shows children (i.e., pre-sexual) figures. These cards symbolize the union of the opposites, the linkage between the poles.

Path twenty-seven: Lovers

The lowest linkage is the symbol of sexual love. It links Netzach (Victory) and Hod (Glory). This implies jealousy, the conflict between the sexes. But the symbol says that male and female are linked by love in spite of the conflict. Love permits the duality to be surmounted. Love shows that each element of the duality is incomplete without the other. If the first step in the aspirant's ascent has been to one column or the other, love forces on the consciousness that the opposite route exists and has something to offer.

Path nineteen: The Sun

The path offered by the Lovers is physical and passionate. The route offered by the Sun is more subtle. It involves becoming as little children, surmounting sexual differences through rebirth in the Spirit. The male or female mystic is turned into a child, unconcerned with passion and more interested in playing naked in the bright sunlight of God.

Path fourteen: Judgment

The androgynous angel appears in a final call to reconcile the opposites. We have proceeded from physical love, to childlike acceptance, to a final mature relationship between the sexes. Realizing that the real linkage is that both have a common goal, all figures look upward to Kether. Even if one proceeds up one of the side pillars, there is still a need to mix in the best of the opposite before the final step to Kether can be taken. Like the Papess, this path crosses the Abyss, the mysterious sephirah, Da'ath, and indicates a deep mystical experience.

Having identified the cards which link the pillars, we will search for the four cards which represent paths up the female pillare (thirty-one, twenty-three, eighteen, twelve). We expect to find female symbols, symbols of receptivity and passivity. Notice that this path to Kether involves four steps instead of three because it is unbalanced on the female side. In fact, the route would have to be longer than four steps since, at some point, a crossing must occur to incorporate the masculine side of the personality. We will choose four cards with a single, central female figure: Empress, Fortitude, Star and World.

Path thirty-one: Empress

The Empress is the obvious symbol of this first step just as the Emperor is the obvious first step on the male pillar. The child is faced with the basic choice of following the example of the mother toward receptivity, or the father toward exertion and discipline. The third

choice offered is the balanced approach of the central route.

Path twenty-three: Fortitude

The next higher path shows the gown of the Empress turned into a simple tunic. Having chosen the path to the left, one finds the power that comes from yielding, a control of nature symbolized by the lion (B).

Path eighteen: The Star

At the next stage, the figure is naked, barefooted, and bare-headed (B). The symbols of social status have been shed, one is down to the basics, to the bare facts. The receptivity of the Fortitude symbol is completed in the total pouring out. The mastery over self implied in the lower card has turned into a total giving, an ignoring of the self in giving.

Path twelve: World

This is the final step in the ascent of the left pillar. The figure is less feminine than in the preceding symbol. In fact, the figure becomes the androgynous angel showing that the masculine side has been incorporated. The duality of the male and female has been surmounted and the figure is "on top of the world" (R,M). The aspirant has ascended to the Throne itself.

Our next logical step is to locate the four masculine symbols which form the parallel steps up the right pillar. These cards can be located by identifying the "consorts" of the four symbols on the left pillar.

Path twenty-nine: Emperor

It is clear that the Emperor is the consort of the Empress and symbolizes the Father as the exemplar leading the aspirant along the path of masculinity, discipline and action. The paired symbolism of the Empress and Emperor is clear in the objects they hold in their hands. Each has an orb (symbol of earth or Malkuth) and a single staff symbolizing either one or the other of the pillars. In the Beinecke deck, the Empress holds the staff in her left hand and the Emperor in his right hand.

We must pause at this point to take note of the total system which is being developed. Beginning from Malkuth, the aspirant is offered the left and right pillars by the father and mother, the exemplars of Empress and Emperor. Once the aspirant begins the ascent along one of these paths, he is immediately offered the reconciliation between the extremes of physical love. The balancing principles which attempt to prevent the extremes from becoming overwhelming are Justice and revealed religion (Pope). Thus, at the lowest portions of the mystical journey, the symbols are all physical, earthy and readily available to all men. The triangular paths formed by Malkuth, Hod and Netzach are the paths open to all men

initially as a simple result of their family relations and their experiences of society.

Path twenty-one: Chariot

The consort of the Force card is the Chariot, representing the strength of the sword. It is also significant that this path rises from Netzach, Victory, since the card obviously symbolizes the result of the victory over self through discipline and action. The Chariot is the initial victory over self through self-mastery, not through passivity. The aspirant has followed the example of the Father and at this point the fastest route to Kether appears to be straight up. It is true on both the left and right routes that once the initial steps are taken, the aspirant will tend to follow the same imbalanced route upward.

Path sixteen: Magician

The consort of the Star is the Magician, the symbol of realized manhood, the symbol of transmission of power. The card shows the Trickster, the Magician. This is the symbol of the Practical Kabbalist, the magician, drawing down the power of the Sephiroth through the zigzag path of the Flash of Lightning. The Magus, like the Star, shows an outpouring. But this outpouring is now the transmittal of power from above to below. Instead of total receptivity, a total mastery; a channeling of power instead of an outpouring.

Path eleven: Fool

The obvious consort of the World card is the Fool. But not exactly a consort since both of these symbolize the union of opposites, the androgyne. The figure of the Fool is almost always less masculine than the Chariot or Magus figure. The aspirant at this point has assimilated the female. He is calm and receptive but still active and moving as appropriate for the right pillar.

We are now left with the eight paths which move from side to side through Yesod and Tiphareth. These symbols lead from an unbalanced position to a central sephirah, or conversely represent movement away from balance toward one of the extremes.

Path fifteen: Death

The active route to ascent from Tiphareth is mystical death, the violent transformation that leads to Chokmah (Wisdom). Because of its austerity, it leads to the right pillar. This is the way of utter asceticism, death to the world and death to self.

Path seventeen: Moon

Instead of the violence of Death, this card represents deep introspection of a passive, dreamlike quality. This represents an advance, as the path leads upward, but it is an imbalance toward the female side of the Tree.

Path twenty: Hermit

This is a lower path in parallel with Death. Instead of austerities and mystical death, the aspirant chooses milder forms of asceticism. He moves upward from revealed religion to the monastic lifestyle. Notice that this asceticism leads to the magical powers of the Magus (path sixteen).

Path twenty-two: Hanged Man

The Hanged Man parallels the Moon, i.e., introspection and passivity. The Hanged Man represents the initial sacrifice which leads to the total outpouring of the self in the Star card (path eighteen).

Path twenty-two: Wheel of Fortune

The next two paths link the side pillars to the center, to Tiphareth. They represent events or setbacks that force one out of one's complacency and enforce a reappraisal and a rebalancing. The Wheel of Fortune represents the daily ups and downs that show the aspirant that it is impossible to maintain a totally passive attitude. The emphasis on one extreme may temporarily lead upward, but ultimately a balance must be struck. Total quietism isn't "practical" in the long run.

Path twenty-four: Tower

The complement of the Wheel is more violent. One is shaken from one's complacency on the right pillar by a violent trauma. The card represents defeat, tragedy, events that shake the masculine master into a position of rebalance.

The final two paths link Yesod (Foundation) with the side pillars. They represent alternatives to the central path of the Pope (path twenty-five), the path of revealed religion. They are side-tracks that will be followed if one is not prepared to follow revealed religion.

Path twenty-eight: Temperance

If one is unable to make the direct ascent through revealed religion, the alternative is to try to take things into one's own hands. This, therefore, is a lower and less violent aspect of the Death (Path fifteen) and Hermit (Path twenty) cards. Instead of austerities or asceticism, a simpler form of active virtue and self-discipline is adopted. This is a training of the senses that will lead to victory (Netzach) and the Chariot.

Path thirty: Devil

But instead of the path of active self-discipline, one may choose the more passive route of meditation and introspection. At a lower level than the Moon (Path seventeen) and Hanged Man (Path twenty-two) is the Devil card, the symbol of the journey within, the night sea journey to the underworld of the unconscious. This is a path of meditation instead of struggle. It is clearly passive and thus leads

to the left pillar.

Thus, by examining the symbolism of the cards themselves, we can see something of the innuendoes that follow from assigning the cards to the paths on the Tree of Life. The sexual symbolism I have followed is closely related to the symbolism of the Zohar. The concepts of balance and imbalance are the result of combining the western mystical tradition with Hermetism and the Merkabah mysticism.

Our purpose in this exercise was to immerse the reader into the Kabbalistic interpretation of the cards as paths on the Tree of Life. There is certainly nothing absolute about my designations. They were used simply as a heuristic device. If the reader will attempt to study the symbols on the cards and find his own set of assignments, I believe he will be led even deeper into the Kabbalistic aspects of the cards. The real point is that only by trying can one get the feeling of the allegorical interpretations possible for the Tarot. Only by such explorations does one acquire an understanding of the intuitive level of interpretation and the multiplicity of layers of meaning in the archetypal symbols of the cards.

Alchemy and the Tarot

Alchemy, Alchemical Symbols and the Tarot

The next of the occult sciences we will survey is alchemy. Alchemy fits nicely into the Renaissance synthesis since it preserved a number of Gnostic elements and was, to some extent, a continuation of the Mystery Religions.¹ Very early in its development, in the fourth and fifth centuries, alchemy was affected by the same Hellenistic syncretism we have seen throughout our studies. Alchemy contained elements of Egyptian magic, Greek philosophy, Neoplatonism, Astrology, Gnosticism, Christianity and Paganism.² Virtually a table of contents for this book.

To the modern reader, alchemy was a superstitious system interested in the enrichment of the practitioner through the production of gold from base metals. This picture of alchemy is the result of historical interest in alchemy as a predecessor of modern chemistry. To historians of science, the recipes of the alchemists are taken at face value and considered for their factual contribution to our understanding of the chemical composition of matter.

But this is largely a distortion of the history of alchemy. We will have to trace its history through three major phases: 1) trade secrets of metallurgists, or perhaps better, jewelers; 2) a transition, largely due to a misunderstanding, to the search for gold; 3) a further transition into a meditative and mystical system. Let us begin, as usual, with an historical survey.

History of Alchemy

In its beginnings, alchemy was the art of the Egyptian craftsman or jeweler. The earliest manuscripts on alchemy are the Leyden-Stockholm papyruses³ which are actually treatises on metallurgy. The first author appears to be Bolos of Mende, writing about 200 BC. The next writer of importance is Zosimus, writing some time before 390 AD. Zosimus cites Maria and Agathodaimon as authorities. They were probably Syrian alchemists of a somewhat older but related school of thought.

These early Alexandrian texts never mention the search for the philosopher's stone. They are texts on metallurgy. They are recipes for producing attractive imitation metals for jewelry. For example, they contain recipes for combining gold and other metals into alloys that still appear to be gold. There are methods for bronzing of metals, that is, producing a surface sheen and change of color into silver, gold, red or even purple. The surface color is then preserved

with a thin coat of lacquer or wax. They also contain methods for making artificial pearls, fake purple dyes, etc.

However, an important transition occurs when these arts are incorporated into the Hellenistic syncretism. There was now an effort to explain alchemy, like all other sources of knowledge, in terms of Greek philosophy.⁴ At this point alchemy ceased to be metallurgy and became a philosophic system applying the theories of Plato and Aristotle.

Both Plato and Aristotle held that the elements (fire, earth, air and water) were mutable. Thus water could be changed into steam (air) and into a solid (earth). All of the minerals were classed by Aristotle into the same "genus" or category of nature. Within a genus, the individual species could be changed from one to another through only "accidental" changes. Thus, the change of a base metal into gold was not an essential change in the nature of the metal, but simply a superficial change in color and other qualities. It remained a "metal" in essence.

We must also remember the important role played by "purpose" in Aristotle's physical theories. Everything has a purpose, a final cause, which helps explain physical change. All things tend toward their appropriate and perfect final state. Thus, when a rock is thrown into the air, it falls back to earth because it "belongs to the earth". Metals left in the ground will mature into gold. Other metals are simply imperfect gold. The alchemist merely speeds up a completely natural and inevitable process. There is not any essential change involved at all, it is all quite natural.

In this way, alchemy was fitted into the prevalent concepts of the nature of physical matter. The "superficial" changes involved gold in the early recipes were changed into a theory of the transmutation of metals into gold; not their original intent.

Of course, the recipes were still "trade secrets" in the possession of Egyptian magician-priests. The rest of the Hellenistic world came to believe that these priests actually held the secrets to the transmutation of gold. Eventually, the priests became too influential and too interested in politics. They aroused the suspicion of the Roman emperors. Finally, the alchemists and their art were placed under strict imperial ban and the practitioners were forced to flee from Alexandria. Their flight into the Middle Eastern centers of magic and alchemy begins the next major development in the history of alchemy.

We have seen that the early Alexandrian writer, Zosimus, was already citing Syrian authorities. This indicates that there was an early Middle Eastern center of the alchemical arts to which the Alexandrian magicians were able to flee. Like everything else in the area, these centers were overwhelmed and incorporated into the Islamic empire after the world-shaping appearance of Mohammed. Alchemy became an Islamic art and was cultivated for many centuries under Moslem rule. There were a number of important contributors

such as al-Razi (died c. 923) who added much to chemical knowledge.³

Alchemy entered the mainstream of European thought as a result of the Moslem invasion of Spain. Once the Spanish empire was established, and a relative peace reigned, there was considerable interchange between the Moslems and Christian Europe. This interchange was largely mediated by the Jews who were tolerated, but never really accepted, by both sides. The Jews alone were neutral and could travel freely between Moslem and Christian empires. We know from the previous chapter that these intermediaries were well versed in Kabbalah, indicating an interesting blending of alchemy and Jewish mysticism at a very early period.

Interchange with the Moslems resulted in the translation of alchemical works on medicine into Latin. Before these Latin works, there is little evidence that the art of gold-making was known at all in Europe.⁵ But once introduced, the art spread rapidly. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, alchemy was incorporated into the intellectual system of Europe. We know that alchemy was part of the intellectual milieu of the early Renaissance because Petrarch, in his polemic against it, admitted that gold-making was a general practice in his time.⁶

In its transition to European thought, the science was defended as consistent with Christian doctrine. Its origins were considered to be divine, having been given to man by the angels.⁷ A number of Biblical citations were used to demonstrate the orthodoxy of alchemy. The great age of the patriarchs was proof for the existence of the philosopher's stone. By now, the philosopher's stone had become not only the catalyst for the transmutation of gold, but also the "fountain of youth" which granted immortality. Every place in the Old Testament that mentioned gold or "stine" was interpreted allegorically as referring to alchemy. Alchemy was simply another of the secrets hidden in nature by God. In an age when the authority of the ancient writers was considered absolute, so many authorities could be quoted: Greek, Chaldean, Persian and Egyptian, that a denial of the art seemed a repudiation of historical evidence.⁸

Thus, alchemy can be traced to the same Hellenistic roots as all the other occult sciences of the Renaissance. Its Egyptian roots reinforced the Renaissance conviction that all wisdom originated in Egypt (See Chapter Six). Its position in the mindset of the Renaissance is sufficient justification for our examination of its symbolism. Alchemy combined numerology, astrology, Kabbalah, magic, Gnosticism, mythology and Neoplatonism. Given what we have already learned about the milieu in which the Tarot was designed, it is hard to imagine that this syncretistic system would have been ignored by the designers.

Alchemy As Mystical Doctrine

Along the historical trail from the third century B.C. to the

thirteenth century A.D., alchemy made a transition from metallurgy to mysticism. Such a transition seems unintelligible, but we must make an effort to follow the steps in this change if we are to understand the symbols of alchemy.

In Alexandria, alchemy had already become the property of the Egyptian priests and formed a part of their magical system. We know from Chapter Six that Egyptian Magic was strongly influenced by Gnosticism and Neoplatonism and the combination of these elements is always associated with mysticism. The writings of Zosimus contain not only metallurgy formulae but prayers and invocations to accompany the processes. So alchemy was always associated with the supernatural and the mystical.

In a world view which endowed all of reality with life, the relationship between metallurgy and mysticism is less difficult to understand. The ancient world held to an animism which placed a soul into all natural objects. In Greek philosophy, everything in nature was living, growing and developing. Thus, to transmute metals was to deal with the soul of the metal. Without communication with the metal's soul, accompanied by prayer, the operations would not be successful. The artisans were always advised to meditate on the process so as to manipulate the spirits in the metals.

Another element which tended to associate alchemy with mysticism was the secretive nature of the documents. Initially regarded as trade secrets, the documents are full of enigmatic and allegorical language designed to protect the secrets from the uninitiated. Since such enigmatic language has always been associated with the writings of mystics, the allegories could be interpreted as the transmutation of the human soul into the divine, as easily as they could be interpreted as chemical processes. Originally, the philosopher's stone was probably a little genuine gold added to an alloy to make it look like gold. It became interpreted as the catalyst which transmuted the human soul.

As early as the ninth century, the mystical concepts of the art had begun to creep into the writings. Islamic adepts like Jabir ibn Hayyan believed that the true goal of alchemy was to lead the alchemist to a higher form of knowledge which would transform his soul.⁹

It is clear that the allegories, used to hide the secret processes, were produced by psychological "projection". A projection occurs when unconscious contents come to light as dreams, for example. Because of the feeling of mystery and the meditations accompanying the process, the chemical procedures were accompanied by psychic projections in the form of vivid images.¹⁰ Therefore, the allegories often took the form of dream narratives. These dreams provided the imagery around which the allegories were built.

To trace the steps to this point: 1) an original animism, which believed all things to be "parts of God" and therefore to contain a soul, was the source of a prayerful and meditative attitude that

accompanied the chemical procedures; 2) such meditation caused psychic projections in the form of vivid day-dreams which had their source within the unconscious of the meditator; 3) since the imagery was associated with the chemical processes, the enigmatic allegories used to hide the secrets were constructed from the material provided in these dream-like images.

What happened next was an unexpected and unintended side-effect. The psychological projections permitted long repressed unconscious conflicts to be brought to the surface and resolved. There was a natural psychological healing effect from eliciting and cultivating these psychic projections. This became an important part of the art because the practitioner felt the healthful changes that occurred in his personality. Eventually, the chemical processes became secondary to the psychological processes that resulted from the meditation. The allegories, originally designed to hide the secrets, became the secrets themselves. The chemical process became a meditative process hidden in the same psychic imagery and allegory. The perfection of the metal became the perfection of the metallurgist.

This strange transition was aided by the chemical operations themselves which, at several stages, subjected the practitioner to neural poisons. The fumes, in mild doses, would affect the alchemist in a manner analogous to the modern psychedelic drugs. The alchemists were "stoned" much of the time they were working on their arts. It must have been obvious to the alchemist that as the metals were changing in his vessel, he was also being changed. Meditation, projected imagery and neural poisons in mild doses must have been a powerful combination.

There is one further aspect of alchemy which must be mentioned. In primitive cultures, the artisan is always a magical character. After all, the artifex could turn stones into swords! Here was a man of great and secret wisdom, who could take common rocks from the ground and transform them into iron, gold and other metals. The metallurgists were the masters of fire, always a mystical and magical element. The metals he produced could be formed into spears, swords and other implements on which the culture depended. Thus, the whole culture depended upon his magic. The importance of metallurgy in transforming culture is easily seen in our designation of the early development of man: the Stone Age became the Bronze Age, became the Iron Age. The secrecy of the art, the cultural impact of the metals produced, the age and great learning of the practitioner all combined to lend an aura of magic and mysticism to the process.¹¹ Add that the operations were typically performed by a priest/wise man/shaman and that the ovens may have been associated with a temple, and we can easily see the transition of metallurgy into mysticism.

I have saved this argument for last since I believe that even the most sophisticated modern mind can detect this aura of mysticism

in his own reactions to the skilled craftsman. No matter the level of education, one is still flaggergasted to see sand heated, and then blown and twisted into a beautiful glass figure. It is "magic". We are so fascinated by such transitions that popular guided tours are available in most factories. And surely no one is so jaded by rationalism that he does not realize that a great deal of the effectiveness of a medical doctor is due to his mystique. Many cures are effected because the patient views him as the all-wise and all-powerful doctor who is able to save by potions and other mysterious processes.

Thus, there is always a sense of magic and mysticism associated with the skilled artisan. When his magic is associated with the transmutation of rocks into metals, the mystical quality increases. When he views his process as communication with God, present in the souls of the metal, and when he is subjected to toxic fumes during the process, he will come to see the mystical process as equally important with the chemical operations. Thus, making cheap jewelry becomes psychoanalysis and metallurgy becomes mysticism.¹²

The Alchemical Allegories

The stage is now set for us to explore the details of the allegories themselves. To do this we must first take a step backward and look at the basic elements of the chemical operations involved.

Physical Aspects of the Art

Since alchemy was originally concerned with producing beautiful surfaces on metals, it is easily understood that the first steps are concerned with preparing the surface. The material with which one begins is any simple metal surface, but the "prima materia" must be carefully chosen. Then the surface is subjected to heat and chemicals to remove any surface contamination and to prepare it for the new sheen. The surface was first blackened. In later interpretations, this blackening was extended to involve the "decomposition" of the entire substance in the sealed vessel so that all former characteristics were destroyed. Thus, it was prepared by reduction to "prima materia" free of any metallic characteristics. This decomposition was effected by adding the correct amounts of mercury, sulfur and salt to the vessel.

After the blackening, a long slow process was begun over slow heat to produce a white color (i.e., silver). The metal must ascend or improve itself by degrees, but of its own accord and without violence. Excessive heat, pressure or speed would ruin everything. After the surface color turns white, the heat is increased and it turns to yellow (i.e., gold) and then passes through a rainbow of iridescent colors ending as red or purple.

According to later interpreters, the material which results is not

only transmuted gold but also a catalyst that transmutes other base metals. In addition, it possesses a number of magical properties such as healing and bestowing immortality. For the most part, the chemical operations were conducted in a sealed vessel. The individual operations were putrefaction or blackening by heat, solution or causing the ingredients to dissolve, and ablution, the washing of the material, often associated with the whitening of the metal. Some operations were carried out in special distilling equipment. This equipment permitted the material to sublime into a gas, move upward in the vessel and then cool, condense and fall back into the heated portion of the vessel.

Although this in no way covers the full complexity of the chemical operations discussed in the texts, it introduces a sufficient number of terms to suit our present purposes. In later mystical interpretations, each of these chemical operations were allegorized into stages in the development of the mystic.

Fantasy Components of the Allegory

As we have already mentioned, the detailed steps in the process were not spelled out in simple chemical language. Instead a complex allegory was developed to conceal the secrets. The allegory contained a significant amount of imaginative or fantasy material and was accompanied by a profusion of enigmatic diagrams and dream-like symbolic pictures.

Even though later writers rely heavily on earlier authorities, there are significant differences in the details of the allegories. An analysis of all the versions is beyond the scope of the present effort. We can only attempt to outline the elements which are ubiquitous. Many of these allegorical elements will become clearer in a later section when we apply alchemy to an interpretation of the Tarot symbols.

The most pervading element of the allegories is the Chymical Marriage of the King and Queen, the Sun and Moon. On the simple chemical level, the king and queen are the symbols of mercury and sulfur, the main ingredients which begin the operations. The marital act is followed by the birth of the philosopher's son, the first step in the production of the philosopher's stone. The birth of the son is simply a symbol of the union of mercury and sulfur into a new chemical compound. The son, the new compound, must be consumed by the King, i.e., recombined with mercury, finally rising perfected from this experience of death.

The initial stage of blackening was allegorized as the death, burial and putrefaction of the King's body. The King must be killed and allowed to decompose. His most disgusting aspects must be allowed to surface and burn off. The subsequent whitening of the stone is pictured as the resurrection of the King from the grave, his transfiguration into a ghostly white.

There are also a number of dream-like animals which appear in the allegories and which we must call to the reader's attention. The Green Lion is a symbol of the starting material. It is both the crude metal and, by allegory, the neophyte alchemist. It is green to symbolize that it is unripe. It is a lion to signify its potential strength, animality, virility and fierceness. Later in the allegory, the green lion acquires wings (i.e., becomes spiritualized) and turns into the Red Dragon, the final philosopher's stone, red in color.

If the reader is slightly confused by these disparate elements of the allegory, I can sympathize with him. But I also plead innocent to the charge of making the material obscure. The alchemical systems are never clearly explained or logically outlined. The allegories conflict between authors and even within themselves. The admixture of dream images into the "code" produces non sequiturs. The documents are enigmatic allegories referring to secret chemical operations. As such, they were deliberately opaque. But with increasing consciousness on the part of later alchemists, they were also records of the psychological transformations taking place within the alchemist himself.

A Key to the Mysticism in the Allegories

The mystical message hidden behind the allegories is essentially the same message we have come across in other parts of the western mystical tradition. First there is the central idea of the interaction and transcendence of a fundamental duality: King/Queen, Sun/Moon, Man/Woman, Red/White, Mercury/Sulfur. This polarity and its subsequent transcendence is part and parcel of the Gnosticism inherent in the Hellenistic roots of the science. The duality of man/woman, good/evil, dark/light, yin/yang, intellect/intuition, fire/water, matter/spirit, God/man, is found throughout the alchemical literature and is evident in a great many of the enigmatic diagrams. Surely the reader will recognize that this is the same duality symbolized in the Tarot.

The basic dual of alchemy is the King and Queen, Sun and Moon, Mercury and Sulfur. Alchemy strives to resolve the duality in a new birth which follows from the union of opposites, symbolized as a sacred marriage. In the corresponding chemical operation, mercury and sulfur are combined. In the combination, their natures are changed and their polarity transcended as they are transmuted into a new chemical compound. Using an old cliché, both hydrogen and oxygen are flammable, but when combined into a new compound, H_2O , their properties are reversed and they put out flames.

The sulfur and salt of the initial operations are the body and soul of man. Mercury is the Gnostic spirit or "spark" in man.¹³ The admonitions that great care must be taken in selecting the genuine prima materia refer to finding the Divine spark, that is, acquiring

the Gnosis or realization of the divinity within man. When the work is done, the sulfur, salt and mercury have become gold, that is, the man has become God.

The same transmutation of man into God is implied in the symbol of the Green Lion, raw human nature, eventually transformed into the Red Dragon, the golden spiritual being with wings. By a similar use of allegory, the three colors, black, white and red, came to be taken for the three stages of the mystical journey: purification, illumination and union.

The original blackening or putrefaction was the breaking up of the old materialistic ego. It was dismembered, ground up, buried and allowed to rot in the soil. Chemically, this corresponded to the breaking up of the compounds into their basic elemental constituents. Spiritually, it meant the destruction of the old man, the mystical death. The old man is dead and the new soul is purified by the darkness, misery and despair which follow the emergence of the spiritual consciousness. The basic alchemical motto is *Solve et Coagula*: dissolve and reassemble. The old man is destroyed and the pieces reassembled into the new divine man. Alchemy is often called the spagiric art from *span* (separate) and *ageirein* (unite).¹⁴ This putrefaction is accomplished through heat symbolizing the asceticism which is needed to initiate the change into the new man. The violence of the death of the King corresponds to the violence of the asceticism.

After the initial blackening of asceticism and the accompanying loneliness and despair, comes the lunar stage: the whitening or ablation. This is the symbol of cleansing which follows the blackening. The human soul is transformed into silver, into the most perfect natural state. This ablation is accomplished over low heat. It is a gradual process that no longer requires the violence of asceticism. It must proceed at its own natural pace. To speed it up unnaturally would be to destroy the process. And remember that all of these processes must take place within the sealed vessel, that is, within the depths of the man's own spirit. The alchemist is counseled to find the kingdom of heaven within through introspection and meditation. By applying only gentle heat, he is to begin the cyclic process of "improvement".

The final stage is the reddening in which the highest natural state of man (silver) is transmuted into a divine state (gold). The prime matter, which is the man himself, is placed back into the sealed vessel until he reemerges as the philosopher's stone, the alchemist transformed by God-union.

The symbols of the changing levels of heat used during the process correspond nicely with the stages of mystical development. At first, strong heat and strong chemicals are needed for the blackening. This strong heat is the asceticism required to accomplish the initial destruction of the old man. Then gentle heat is required during the whitening stage. This is the stage of the resurrection of

the King's son, the rebirth in the Spirit called for by Jesus. This is a slow gradual stage which cannot be rushed by impetuous efforts on the part of the aspirant. Finally in the reddening stage, the heat is turned back up. This is the heat of Love which is universally called for in the final stages of the mystical transformation.

There are also stages when the prime matter must be subjected to distillation. That is turned from solid to gas and back again many times. This symbolizes the basically cyclic experience of mysticism in which one step forward is followed by two steps backward. This is the cycle of elation and depression as the ego is transformed by reconciliation of unconscious conflicts.

The philosopher's stone is not only the gold itself, but a catalyst as well. It can heal and it can turn other base metal into gold. Thus, the initiate who achieved God-union returns to ordinary life to help in the healing and transforming of other humans. This is the Buddhist admonition for the saint to have compassion on all sentient beings and it is the spirituality of Francis of Assisi who lived among his peers, not in the isolation of the monastery.

The Chymical Marriage refers to the union of the feminine, spiritual portions of one's character, which Jung referred to as the "anima", with the masculine, "macho", and aggressive portions. This union of the female and male traits is the same symbolism as the union of the spiritual and material, the intellectual and intuitive. The union of opposites is clearly the mystical goal. This conclusion is reached both by modern depth psychology and by ancient Neoplatonism. The classical Christian symbol is the Mystical Marriage, the loss of any distinction or polarity between God and man.

Thus, in both the general themes of the alchemical allegory as well as in the specific instruction, the mystical journey is clearly indicated. Alchemy became during its development another of the maps of consciousness, a roadmap of the stages of development of human consciousness. The alchemists were following an unorthodox route: the Western occult tradition. The opposition of the Church to alchemy was not based on a desire to repress the development of science. It was based on the realization that alchemy offered an alternative and competitive message for spirituality. It was resurrecting the Gnostic/Mystery Religion/Magical/Neoplatonic route to God which the Church had fought so hard to suppress. It should be obvious from this series of studies that the Church was never truly successful in its efforts. The tradition kept popping up in new disguises. The mystical instincts of man could never be repressed by dictum. And it was in the guise of chemical transformations that the tradition popped up again in the Renaissance where it was merged with many other independent versions of this same tradition.

Chinese Alchemy

The material presented so far in this study should form an

adequate basis for the detailed analysis of the cards which follows in the next section. But there is one further subject which must occupy our attention first: the development of alchemy in China. Although this may seem to be wandering off our path, it will serve several useful purposes. First, it will show that the magic of metallurgy was appreciated world-wide. It was not a distorted product of western culture. China also believed in the transmutation of metals into gold. Second, it will show that the transition from metallurgy to mysticism was a natural process, inherent in the venture. Gold-making seems to naturally evolve into perfecting the alchemist.

The Chinese trace the origin of their art to Tsou Yen (c 325 BC)¹⁵ but there is really little evidence that he was concerned with gold-making. He was merely cited to exaggerate the antiquity of the art. The first alchemist was probably Li Shao-Chun (130 BC). Later authors cite him as the first to discuss the transmutation of "Cinnabar" into gold. It is somewhat flabbergasting to realize that Cinnabar is Mercuric Sulfide! The Chinese began the process with the same Mercury and Sulfur as the western tradition!

Li Shao-Chun was concerned with the manufacture of gold which could then be made into dishes and glasses. Anyone who ate from these magical vessels would be granted great longevity. It was only later that the transmuted Cinnabar itself was to be consumed. A number of Chinese emperors died from this magical "gold" since cinnabar is extremely poisonous. The fascinating part is that the gold was only produced as a means to achieve immortality, the gold was not the end in itself. This is remarkably similar to the transformation of the philosopher's stone into a magic elixir which gave eternal life (both in the sense of longevity and in the sense of salvation).

All of our knowledge of Li Shao-Chun is based on discussions of his work by later authors. The oldest known manuscript is the Wei Po-yang written in 140 AD by Tsan Tung Chi. This is the oldest known text on alchemy, either Chinese or Western.¹⁶ This text is more explicit about recommending the actual consumption of the alchemical gold to confer immortality.

By the time of Hui Ssu (515-577 AD) and Chang Po-tuan (983-1082) it is clear that the chemical operations have become meditative and spiritual exercises. These authors discuss the internal elixir, the "true" mercury and the "new self" which is immortal because it is enlightened. This transformation to the new self involves a realization that there is no distinction between subject and object, no difference between the poles of the duality. Thus, once again, the alchemical operations have become symbols of the psychological process.¹⁷

The parallels between Chinese and Western alchemy are amazing. An original secret and magical transmutation of mercury and sulfur into gold was transformed into the production of a magic elixir. Then the entire process becomes a meditative exercise in which the chemical operations are an allegory for psychological changes

occurring in the alchemist himself. Metallurgy has again become mysticism.

In fact, the parallels are so close as to defy credibility. Our interest in the story is merely to reinforce our conclusions about how alchemy had changed by the time of the Renaissance and the design of the Tarot. The concepts seemed to be universal. Whether there was actual transfer of information between the ancient Mediterranean alchemists and the Chinese or whether Chinese alchemy is a completely independent and parallel development is not a matter for us to decide. Where the concepts first developed and where their transformation into mysticism occurred is also beyond the scope of our inquiry. We will leave to others the detailed inquiry into the dating of manuscripts and deciphering of ancient logs of travel. Our purpose is served in the realization that alchemical procedures were acknowledged universally as psychological processes leading to a mystical union with God.¹⁸

Alchemy and the Tarot

The purposes of this section are two-fold. First, based on the general introduction provided above, we will attempt a more detailed comparison of the symbolism of Alchemy and the Tarot. Second, we will look carefully at specific images drawn from the alchemical literature. We will argue that alchemy is a related symbolic system, drawing its images from the same sources as the Tarot (See Chapter Nine). The images used in alchemical texts are psychological projections, that is, the stuff dreams are made of. So if the Tarot designers borrowed any of their imagery from the alchemical texts, it may help explain the psychological content we have noted in the cards.

The correspondences between alchemical and Tarot symbols has been noted by a number of authors. Waite noted that the same "Secret Doctrine" was present in both.¹⁹ There is a modern Tarot deck constructed entirely of images from alchemy.²⁰ Since both alchemy and the Tarot drew on the same spectrum of occult sciences, it really should not be surprising that many of the same features appear in both.²¹

We will find some, but not all, of the Tarot symbols in the alchemical texts. For the most part, I have restricted myself to images that are strikingly similar to the Tarot. Of course, the similarities are based on my personal impressions. In some cases, the skeptical reader will be forced to admit that the alchemical and Tarot images are the same symbol drawn by different artists. In other cases, he should be able to see a distinct similarity. In still other cases, he may be tempted to maintain that the resemblance is due to this author's imagination and little else.

Fool

The Fool is a likely candidate as a symbol of the prime matter, the crude ore which begins the operations. However, this hypothesis is not validated by the alchemical texts. The closest image I have found is a blindfolded man being led over the landscape by a small animal.²²

Magician

Since, in the mystical allegory, the prime matter is actually the alchemist himself, it is not surprising that the first Tarot symbol is both Mercury (the god and the chemical) and also the Artifex (the alchemist). There are two alchemical images which resemble the Tarot card. The first shows the alchemist seated at a table on which are a ball, a cup and a crescent-shaped object.²³ The second shows the alchemist/monk standing behind a table on which are cups and vessels.²⁴ The images are strikingly similar to the Tarot card and obviously refer to the alchemist preparing the ingredients at the beginning of the work.

Papess

The first image I wish to discuss is not the best representation of the Papess, but shows all of the female or "Anima" figures of the Tarot in one symbol. The figure²⁵ shows the Anima Mundi (World card) connecting the hand of God with the material world. She stands with one foot on the land and the other on the water (Temperance and Star). She is crowned with stars (Empress) and stands on a globe (World). She has the crescent moon (Papess) at her breast and genitals and a star covering the other breast (Star). The image is described as the Anima Mundi, the moon goddess and the Egyptian Isis. This single image combines the psychological elements of a number of the "female" Tarot images.

Other alchemical images suggest the relationship among the first few cards of the deck. The Mother (Empress and Papess) and the Father (Emperor and Pope) are shown preparatory to an act of coitus (Lovers) which will produce the Royal Son (Chariot).²⁶

Other representatives which resemble the Papess show a female and male pope linked arm in arm.²⁷ The alchemists, dealing in dream images, had no problem with the concept of a female pope. She represented the feminine side of spiritual power. The presence of the female pope in alchemy makes this another possible source for this enigmatic card which has puzzled many interpreters.

The Papess is often associated with the goddess Isis. Jung describes the symbolic role of Isis in alchemy as the prime matter in its female aspect.²⁸ Thus, there is a close relationship between the Papess and the Magician or Alchemist. The alchemist is accompanied by his "sister" or Anima throughout the operations.²⁹ This female figure is obviously the spiritual side of the man. She receives instructions and materials from Hermes (both the god Mercury and

the Egyptian Psychopomp) and hands them on to the alchemist. She is thus a symbol of intuition and inspiration.

Empress

The Empress or Queen Luna is a basic symbol of alchemy. The marriage of the King and Queen (Emperor and Empress) is fundamental to the alchemical allegory. Therefore, these figures appear in dozens of representations.³⁰ A typical figure shows the enthroned pair, complete with orbs and scepters, crowning the product of their union, the philosopher's son.³¹ Another image of the Queen as mother³² closely resembles modern Empress cards. Here the figure is seated, suckling her son, seated in a field of wheat which symbolizes her fertility. Thus, both the Tarot card and the alchemical emblemata infer that the Empress is Cybele or Demeter, the earth goddess, the goddess of wheat.

Emperor and Pope

In alchemical symbolism, it is difficult to separate the Emperor and the Pope. Together, they represent the material and spiritual aspects of the King. Some representations show them as two heads on the same body.³³ In other cases, they are shown³⁴ in adjacent pictures as the King and the "Renewed" or spiritualized King.

The King as a solitary figure is common, complete with orb and scepter.³⁵ In other figures,³⁶ the King is shown in royal state, much as he appears in early hand-painted Tarots and is even surrounded by black eagles which frequently appear on the shield of the Emperor card.

The Pope as a solitary figure is much less common. A related symbol seems to be the alchemist's guide.³⁷ The figure is often referred to as Hermes, implying a spiritual guide or psychopomp. The identification is reinforced in many illustrations in which he appears presiding over the Royal Marriage.³⁸ In this capacity, he may be shown as a bishop.

Lovers

Since the union of the Royal Couple, the Hieros Gamos, is a basic theme of the alchemical allegory, hundreds of emblemata might be offered as analogs of the Tarot symbol. The two discussed here bear a striking resemblance to specific versions of the Tarot card.

The first shows the alchemist's guide as bishop conducting the ceremony.³⁸ This is quite similar to the representation in the Etteilla decks. The second shows the alchemist standing off to the side and watching the ceremony with satisfaction. This is much the same image as found in Swiss decks.³⁹

The identification of the Lovers card with the Hieros Gamos indicates that the card symbolizes the union of the opposites, the Sun and the Moon. This is the first coniunctio, the first mixture of the ingredients and the first level of union. The union of man and wife

(Mercury and Sulfur) is a premonition of the eventual God-union. The ecstasy of physical love is the first taste of the ecstasy of God-union.

Chariot

The union of the Royal Couple results in the birth of the philosopher's son. This is the conclusion of the first part of the work, the formation of a new chemical compound. The equivalent of the Chariot card in alchemical literature is the triumph of Apollo or Mars.⁴⁰ In some cases, he is shown on the chariot of the sun. Commonly, he is shown as Mars with drawn sword.

The analysis to this point suggests the first seven cards correspond to the first portion of the alchemical allegory. The alchemist (1) and his mystical soul sister (2) begin the chemical operations. The female element, Sulfur or Queen Luna (3), is united to the male element, Mercury or King Sol (4). Presided over by the Psychopomp (5), the Royal Marriage (6) takes place, resulting in the first union of opposites, the Royal Son (7). At least for this first third of the deck, the alchemical allegory and the Tarot symbols appear to be parallel.

The birth of the philosopher's son only completes the first stage of the operations. The King's son must die, be buried, travel through the underworld and be resurrected into a higher unity. Thus, the Chariot card represents Apollo, the sun god, about to travel into the sea to initiate the "night sea journey". The allegory of the Royal Marriage is over. The allegory of the "Colors" begins.

Justice

The second part of the work begins, like the first, with the careful weighing out of the ingredients. The image of the Justice card is the same Anima figure who reappears later on the Temperance and Star cards. This association is made plain in one manuscript⁴² which shows the woman with the scales in her left hand and the sword close by. But in her right hand she holds a ewer from which she pours water to bathe the King's son. Thus, the Anima in the remainder of the Tarot deck is an angelic guide who advises and assists in the work.

Many manuscripts use the symbolism of the scales. One image⁴³ shows the alchemist as monk carefully weighing the ingredients. The scales contain fire and water, while air and earth are symbolized in the background. Another image, more explicitly related to the Tarot, shows the woman with scales and sword.⁴⁴ She is presiding over the sealing of the egg, the alchemical vessel. The second work is beginning and Justice is presiding over the Royal son as he is sealed in his tomb.

Hermit

The internal aspects of the alchemical work are symbolized by the Hermit, retired from the world to meditate and prepare himself. The material is placed into a narrow vessel, hermetically sealed from

the world outside. There he undergoes putrefaction as in a grave. The texts agree that the retirement and introspection of the Hermit are necessary preliminaries for this part of the work.

The Hermit of the Tarot is similar to the alchemical symbol of Boaz, the Biblical husband of Ruth.⁴⁵ He is pictured as an old man in the depths of the earth. He is also shown as an old monk, alone and meditating in the wilderness.

At this stage of the work, the subject is within himself, sealed in the "philosophical egg" or alchemical vessel. He is overcome with sadness and suffering. His strength ebbs away and decomposition begins. This is the alchemical Blackening or Putrefaction; the beginning of the changes of color. In the mystical allegory, this is the stage of purification. This stage is marked by the practice of self-discipline and virtue (note the presence of the three virtues, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance in the second third of the deck). This stage is also characterized by asceticism. Both the virtue and the asceticism are nicely symbolized by the hermit monk.

It may seem strange to the reader that meditation, virtue and self-discipline are represented by the alchemical stage of putrefaction. But the symbol is actually quite apt. At the stage of mystical purification, all of the evil within him is brought to the surface. Typically, the mystic sees himself as worthless and sinful. This attitude fits nicely with the Blackening on the surface which is associated with this alchemical stage. To the mystic it seems that the evil old man is dying and decaying within him, calling for austerities and asceticism to rot out the last of the evil. Thus, blackening and putrefaction are apt symbols for the purification.

The Hermit symbol also stands for the introspection and depression of mid-life. The figure is always shown as an old man and this stage of introspection is a phenomenon of maturity. As the alchemist watches the metals decompose and putrefy in the vessel, he is impressed with the vanity of life (Wheel of Fortune) and the inevitable approach of his own death (card thirteen). The result is a meditative, introverted and depressed state. He is filled with melancholy and loneliness as he realizes that he too must die and decompose just like the metals before his eyes.

But the Hermit symbol also implies the idea of searching. The old monk is seen wandering in the wilderness⁴⁶ in search of something. He walks along with his cane and lantern, following the elusive footprints of the "Anima Mundi", the goal of human life. The implication is that he has turned aside from the material values and placed a new and deeper value on the search for self-perfection. He now realizes that God-union is the ultimate goal of life and sets off in pursuit of the elusive goal. He sets off on the long journey into the wilderness of his spirit.

Wheel of Fortune

The tenth Tarot card represents the Rota, the Wheel of the Great

Work. The wheel or circle is the vessel of transformation, the alchemical retort: that is, the everyday events of ordinary life.⁴⁷ Thus, the wheel is the first symbol of the process of distillation, the ups and downs, elations and tragedies of life. The psychological transformations characterizing this stage are worked out slowly and gradually within the context of the ordinary events of life. Following the radical attempts at asceticism shown in the Hermit card comes the slow transformation of life.

The wheel in alchemy may be represented as a large spiral or wheel which symbolizes the cyclic nature of the work. A typical wheel of fortune⁴⁸ indicates that the work must be repeated many times with many failures. "One step forward, two steps backward" is the motto throughout the process of purification. The individual will seek to approach God but always falls down again. He tries again and again in cycles of success and failure.

What is portrayed here is the next step in the psychological transformation. The aspirant to the life of higher consciousness attempts and fails and tries again. This is symbolized by the Wheel, the retort, within which the distillation occurs. The aspirant is turned from gas to solid and back again, i.e., from material to spiritual and back. He is not yet aware of the uselessness of attempting the transmutation through his own efforts. He strives through his efforts to increase his own spirituality but finds that he can do little. If anything these efforts make him more egocentric instead of less. When he thinks about his faults, he thinks about himself. While he attempts, he discovers that the daily grind is a vacuous exercise. He discovers that the petty successes and failures which he chose as the goal of his life are empty little exercises. He races forward with great speed and achieves nothing for he is running in circles. The despair and depression of the Hermit card are intensified in the hermetic vessel of everyday life. The twentieth century depth psychologist calls it the mid-life crisis or passage. The Renaissance alchemist called it putrefaction, the beginning of the Great Work.

Fortitude

The Fortitude symbol in the Tarot is a complex one, referring to several different alchemical images. On the hand-painted Visconti-Sforza card, we find Hercules killing the lion. Since the alchemical allegory used a great deal of dream imagery, it is not surprising to find related images with the sun-hero killing the dragon. Sometimes the sun-king and moon-queen are involved in the act together.⁴⁹ These images point out that the human instincts and drives well up at this point in the journey, harassing and threatening the journeyer. They persecute him and try to impede his progress. These Gnostic dragons must be killed lest they keep the divine spark entrapped and prevent its escape.

An alternative representation shows the Green Lion swallowing the sun.⁵⁰ In this case also, we see the divine son (i.e., sun) being

engulfed in raw, unripe matter. The woman on the card is forcing the lion's mouth open, causing it to disgorge the sun, the divine spark, the human spirit. This is "woman's work" that cannot be accomplished by courage or force. It is a rebirth, and force can only injure the infant. It requires hard work, but this is the work of the "woman", the "mother" in the man. This is clearly shown by another alchemical image which shows the lion being swallowed by the earth mother, shown as a toad, or being sucked into the feminine Moon.⁵¹ The overcoming of the instincts, the raw matter in the man, cannot be done by brute strength. It requires a woman's touch, gentle and persistent. Eventually, the ferocity of the lion will disappear and the maiden may even ride him or conduct him about on a leash.⁵²

The Anima, the woman in the man, must be awakened before the beast can be overcome. This same idea is conveyed by yet another theme in the alchemical texts, the legend of the unicorn. The elusive beast can only be captured by a pure maiden. The unicorn will fall in love with her and come willingly and lay its head in her lap. The alchemical allegory of the Lion Hunt of King Marchose by Senior has a similar theme. The lion is lured into a trap by using a "stone" for bait. The stone is identified as a woman.⁵³ Once the lion is captured by the woman, it can be easily killed. Both the allegories and the Tarot symbol seem to correspond to the mystical admonition against austere asceticism. The psychological experience is one of desperate attempts at self-consciousness and purgation from faults, and constant failure after minor successes. This was the message of the Wheel of Fortune card. Now the alchemist begins to learn that brute force will not win the day. What is needed is gentle persistence. The aggressive approach of the male only results in injury to the spirit. Instead, the man must come to know and appreciate the "Anima", the repressed feminine traits of gentleness, love, sacrifice, acceptance. These female traits have been thrust aside in the headlong plunge toward material success during the first part of life.

Hanged Man

The Tarot image of a man hanging from the tree is not common in alchemy. Nevertheless, there are a number of related images and symbols. One can find the alchemist sitting in the foliage of the maternal tree, the alchemist turning into a tree and a tree growing from the genitals of the dead king.⁵⁴

The Tarot image is definitely related to the Epigram of the Hermaphrodite, an alchemical allegory of about 1150 AD. It speaks of the alchemist climbing the maternal tree, which is overhanging the water. The sword he carried slipped and himself with it. He trapped his foot in the branches and ended up hanging upside down with his head in the water.⁵⁵ There is also the remarkable picture of the alchemist being startled to come upon himself hanging upside down in the tree.⁵⁶

The Hanged man basically represents the intensification of the blackening stage which began with the Hermit. The glory of the first coniunctio has faded into darkness and despair. There is now an intensification of this new stage termed Nigredo (blackness), Tenebrositas (darkness) or Mortificatio. The psychological state of depression led to a period of isolation (Hermit), a devaluation of the hum-drum material life (Wheel) and the beginnings of the emergence of the Anima (Strength). Now the alchemist is nearing the bottom of the black pit of depression. His attempts have failed. He has experienced the ups and downs of his own efforts (Wheel) and it has occurred to him that acceptance, not brute force, is the answer (Strength). Now at last he is ready for the total surrender which is implied in the Hanged Man. Now the alchemist is prepared to "depend", to hang upside down and swing in the breeze, to allow the process to go on without interference. Like Attis of the Mystery Religions, he is prepared to approach the Great Mother in the form of the Maternal Tree and to die emasculated at its base. The Hanged Man is the stage of surrender which prepares the alchemist for the mystical death which follows.

Death

Finally comes the mystical death as the climax of the second stage of the work. This is the penultimate card of the second third of the deck, just as the Royal Marriage (card six) was the penultimate card of the first third and represented the climax, i.e., coniunctio, of the first work. Here the subject dies to the self in the ultimate surrender to the process of transformation. This spiritual death is necessary for the spiritual rebirth of man. Rebirth is always preceded by regression. Everything must be burned (i.e., blackened) and reduced (i.e., putrefied) into that from which it sprang.

At this stage, the alchemical prime matter, i.e., the divine spark in man, must be shorn of all materiality and reduced to its basic elements. The "old forms" must die and decompose. The naked seed must be left to die in the ground to germinate into the new Divine man. This symbol has ample justification in the New Testament where Jesus often refers to the rebirth in the spirit, to the seed falling to the earth and dying, to losing one's life in order to save it. The revived King, born of the royal marriage, must die, be dismembered and decomposed in order that the divine spark be freed.

There are two alchemical images related to the Death card. The first is the god Saturn. He is the god of depression, the god of lead. This is an appropriate metal for this psychological state and we often speak of feeling leaden. Saturn is pictured as an old man with loin cloth and scythe.⁵⁷ He is sometimes pictured as peg-legged, recalling the missing foot on the skeleton of Death in the Tarot de Marseilles. He may also be winged and with an hourglass on his head.⁵⁸ These signs associate him with Kronos and the Hermit card which

began the process leading to the mystical death.

As Saturn or Kronos, the image continues to suggest the profound depression associated with the decomposition of the old man. But as the skeleton with scythe,⁵⁹ the association with the Death card is more exact. The skeleton may appear astride a coffin or holding a raven, another symbol of the Nigredo.

Temperance

In the midst of the blackest cards of the deck (Hanged Man and Death preceding and Devil and Tower to follow) comes a bright angel pouring water from vessel to vessel. The water represents the cooling waters of Jupiter. In the alchemical operations, water must be poured occasionally over the blackening and fermenting stone to slow the process. Typical images show a hand pouring water over the passionate Sun and Moon,⁶⁰ cooling their ardor. Thus, the Temperance card is a respite in the deep depression, a period in which the conflicts and stress are put aside momentarily to allow the psyche some respite from the force of the internal conflict. The sequence, Death-Temperance-Devil, also symbolizes the cyclic process of transformation, the oscillations that characterize the dark night of the soul.

Such oscillations are symbolized by the alchemical process of distillation. The stone cycles between solid (matter) and gas (spirit). The vessel is raised to white heat by the internal conflict and struggle. The stone volatilizes and rises in the retort. When it strikes the cooler upper portions, it condenses and falls. The pouring of water between the two ewers on the Temperance card suggests the same process. One alchemical image shows a woman, like the Tarot angel, presiding over the distillation represented as water flowing up and down between two vessels.⁶¹

Positioned between Death and the Devil, the angel on the Temperance card also suggests the guide to the underworld. In classical mythology, the journey to the land of shades required a ghostly guide. This mythological theme was retained in the Renaissance since Dante was guided through hell by Virgil. So the angel may represent the alchemist's guide and advisor on the journey.

Devil

The alchemist once again submerges into the depths of the Nigredo. This journey into darkness was considered an essential part of the work. The stone proceeds from a place of great terror, where many sages have been killed.⁶²

The night sea journey is typically symbolized by the journey into hell and the meeting with the Devil. This allegory was used by Homer and Virgil, and was retained by Dante. The Devil symbolizes first the depression itself, which is spoken of as a demon.⁶³ But more importantly, he represents the demon of the alchemical process, the evil influence which leads to errors. All during the journey, the

demon creeps about causing accidents.

This journey into the world of the Devil is actually a journey into the depths of the unconscious, a cathartic digging (or mining in the alchemical allegories) into repressed contents of the mind. The Black Beast must emerge and be dealt with. Alchemical representations of the Black Beast are numerous, but bear little resemblance to the Devil of the Tarot card. They are usually shown as dark and fantastic dream animals rather than actual devils. The image which is closest to the Tarot⁶⁴ show a man and woman (sun and moon) standing on either side of a cubic throne. Seated on the throne is Neptune, god of the seas (i.e., unconscious) and of the Underworld. He is shown with a trident. In other illustrations, the Sun and Moon are chained to the Great Wheel of the work by the wrists.⁶⁵ But the overall image resembles the Wheel of Fortune more than the Devil card.

Tower

The climax of the journey into hell is the experience of utter chaos. The decomposition is reaching the elemental level. As in the Tarot, the alchemical texts represent this stage by a figure falling from a ladder, a tree, or a tower. Another illustration, suggestive of the Tarot card, shows baneful spirits attacking an impregnable castle.⁶⁶

The Tower card also suggest the alchemical "Thunderstorm". Crawling forward in the darkness, the alchemist begins to climb the sacred mountain out of hell. But a violent thunderstorm overtakes him and hurls him back into the depths.⁶⁷ The alchemist may be forced back into the depths of the unconscious several times after he believes his journey through the underworld is complete.

But this moment of deepest darkness is also the beginning of the journey upward. The Thunderstorm also represents the traumatic auditory and visual experience of birth. Thus, the Tower card is both traumatic and optimistic. The long blackening period has ended, the decomposition is completed in the traumatic thunderstorm. The dark night of the soul is completed and the ascent to heaven begins.

Star

In the Chymical allegories, the blackening and death of the Nigredo is followed by the Albedo, the whitening. This whitening is a purification, a cleansing either by flames⁶⁸ (Devil) or by bathing (Temperance). The bathing may be represented by a washer woman pouring hot water over clothes,⁶⁹ an act which resembles the pouring of water in the Star image. The theme of whitening may also be portrayed as a woman (the Anima) cleansing the blackened man in a bath⁷⁰ or a woman on the beach saving the black, drowning man. The black man is seen sticking fast in black slime. A beautiful woman comes to his help. On her head she has a silver star.

This bathing or rescue is not merely a superficial cleansing but a fundamental purification that transforms the subjectum into

silver. In an image which clearly recalls the Tarot card, we see the naked queen (Anima or Anima Mundi or Moon) pouring water from two cups. On her head is the white dove, sometimes seen as a bird on the Star card. The black raven of the Nigredo has been transformed into the white dove of the Albedo.

In the chemical operations, the Albedo stage is immediately preceded by the appearance of the "scintilla", tiny sparkles or flashes of light on the surface of the material in the flask. In later Tarot decks, these flashes are already visible in the Tower card. But these flashes were called stars and this stage is symbolized by a star in the vessel.⁷¹ Thus, the stage is more closely associated with the Star card.

The appearance of the Star was the sign that the Nigredo was over and mystical illumination had begun. Depression was past and the experience would now become one of increasing light (Star, Moon, Sun). The cooling waters of Jupiter (Temperance) return in the Star card. But the distillation, the continual depression-elation cycle, is over and the waters are poured out on the ground.

Moon

The appearance of the "scintilla" does not mean that the explorations of the unconscious are over. The blackening stage is behind but one still travels on a strange dream landscape. Some of the alchemical "moonscapes" bear a striking resemblance to the Moon card.⁷² They show mounts to the left and right, surmounted by round towers and heavenly light shining on a mount between and beyond them.

In the alchemical operations, the Albedo is followed by the Lunar and Solar conjunctions. Therefore, we have to note that the placement of the Moon and Sun cards at this point in the deck cannot simply be circumstantial. These conjunctions are repetitions of the original coincidence of opposites, the Royal Marriage, but on a higher level. The Lunar stage involves further explorations of the unconscious that continue to bring up violent and dangerous symbols.

The continued violence of the unconscious exploration is often represented by two animals fighting,⁷³ the opposites struggling. The most common image is a dog and bitch, or a wolf and dog, fighting and copulating in a violent love/hate opposition. The dog is Sol and the bitch is Luna and their violent copulation is the Lunar Coniunctio. Clearly, these representations can be related to the dogs on versions of the Moon card produced after the fifteenth century.

This stage of rebirth is also represented as the emergence of the sea-creature onto land. Water, the symbol of the unconscious, yields up the creature, i.e., the traveller in the watery unconscious. This is a symbol of the fetus, also an aquatic creature in the womb, emerging from the mother in birth. The fetus, or sea-creature, is often represented as a crayfish or crab. Cancer the crab, is the only

zodiacal sign ruled by the Moon, the lady of the waters.

Thus, the crab or crayfish seen crawling out of the water in the Moon card is an appropriate symbol for this stage of birth. The symbol implies the birth of the fetus but also the possibility of "lunacy" if he stays immersed in the water/unconscious/mother. This stage is a dangerous one, as any birth must be.

Sun

The infant, born of the maternal waters in the Moon card, has emerged into the sunlit garden. The Lunar conjunction is over and the final Solar conjunction takes place. This Rose Garden of the Philosophers is an extremely common image. The Solar conjunction is also symbolized by images of children at play. Mere child's play as the alchemists call the final stages.⁷⁴ At this point the alchemist has been reborn as a spiritual child.

For the alchemists, the peaceful Rose Garden, or Garden of Paradise, was the favorite symbol for the regained state of innocence.⁷⁵ One picture shows the alchemist warming himself while the children, Sol and Luna, play in front of the fire.⁷⁶ Another image related to the Tarot shows two infant cherubs and the homunculus, as Mercury, in the egg and about to be born.⁷⁷ To make the image even more strikingly similar to the Tarot symbol, the sun, with straight and curved rays,⁷⁸ shines brightly over the cherubs.

The Solar conjunction is the triumph of the alchemical process. The prima materia has been turned into the gold of the sun. Both the whitening (silver) and the yellowing (gold) stages have now been completed. The dark midnight of hell has been transformed into the peace of noonday in Eden. The disintegration of the alchemist has been accomplished and he has been reborn (Moon card) as a child into Paradise. The only stage which remains is the changing of the gold into the Philosopher's Stone, the universal medicine and the catalyst which can turn all base metals into gold.

Judgment

This card represents the final call which transforms the gold into the Philosopher's Stone. The alchemists saw the Last Judgment in the germination and birth of the stone. In the alchemical literature we find the angel of the Tarot card using the trumpet to arouse the soul which has become dead to itself and to the world, or to rouse the sleeping Sol and Luna to their final union.⁷⁹ Images of rising from the dead are also extremely common.

The rising from the dead is often combined with the sowing of seeds. As stated in the New Testament, the seed must fall to the ground and die in order to give birth to a new plant. This same symbol of rebirth is found in Christian mysticism and in the pagan Mysteries.

The angel appears now for the last time as psychopomp. It sounds the trumpet and causes the final transformation. The angel

symbolizes the need for a higher power to accomplish this final transmutation. It is beyond the power of the alchemist to effect this final change.

World

The World card represents the end of the alchemical process, the Philosopher's Stone, the universal medicine and the catalyst that can transform any metal into gold. To understand the symbolism of the card, we must look at its two major elements: the hermaphrodite and the circle and quaternary.

The final union of opposites is symbolized by the hermaphrodite, who combines the male and female traits in one body. The androgyne is the ideal symbol for the alchemical coniunctio and appears in virtually every text.⁸⁰ It implies a state in which there is no conflict between man/woman, spirit/matter, conscious/unconscious.

The image on the World card is the Anima Mundi, the Neoplatonic Spirit of the World. Therefore, the card represents the final release of the Divine Spark in man and its union with the Anima Mundi. Thus, with the World card, the Gnostic myth is completed, nothing remains but the Anima Mundi or Demiurge who created the world. Everything has merged back into the divine beginnings and the Spirit *is* the World.

The second symbol on the World card is the circle and quaternary, the central mandorla and the four figures at the corners. This is the squaring of the circle spoken of in alchemical literature. The use of the symbol for transformation has been extensively analyzed by Jung.⁸¹ This same symbol appears throughout the world's cultures. The circle and quaternary appear in alchemy as the completion of the Opus, the mandala of the transformed man, the Philosopher's Stone.⁸²

The combination of the two symbols appears in a number of alchemical representations. For example, one shows the hermaphrodite holding the world in its hand.⁸³ This image resembles the Visconti-Sforza card on which the World is upheld by two cherubs. Another illustration shows the Anima of Mercury, surrounded by the divine aura.⁸⁴ This image recalls the Gnostic god, Phanes, surrounded by the Cosmic Egg.⁸⁵ He is holding a wand and entwined by a snake that resembles the drape on the World card. There are four male faces in the corners surrounding Phanes. This image contains all of the elements of the Tarot symbol and suggests that the alchemical and Tarot images have drawn from this Hellenistic Gnostic source.

Final Comments

The similarity between the symbolism of the Tarot and the alchemical texts seems to confirm a connection between them. It

might be argued that they simply drew upon the same tradition of symbols. Nevertheless, the extent of the similarities argues that the designers were at least cognizant of the alchemical allegories and their emblemata. Alchemy formed a part of the intellectual environment of the Renaissance and there is no reason to believe that the designers were ignorant of an art which was being practiced all around them. If the designers ignored this art it would have been strange indeed, since they seem to have delved into every other aspect of the wisdom of their times.

To point out that there are remarkable similarities is not to maintain that alchemy is *the* source of the Tarot nor that the designers slavishly copied alchemical images. Alchemy was only one of the numerous sources for the symbolism of the Tarot. But, more importantly, the illustrations discussed in this chapter almost all appeared after the Tarot cards were in existence. Thus, the designers could not have copied the specific images cited here. The imagery might have been copied from older manuscripts, but few of these have been unearthed for us to examine.

The resemblances we have discovered in the course of this study should allow us to draw a few conclusions:

1. The designers were not ignorant of the allegories and symbolism of alchemy and incorporated them into the syncretistic worldview they developed.

2. The Tarot designers showed the same propensity to convey their concepts in emblemata and pictorial symbolism as the authors of the alchemical works.

3. The Tarot and the alchemical texts outline the same mystical journey and use the same symbols, e.g., union of opposites, death-rebirth, etc., to portray the stages of the journey.

The most striking conclusion of this study is that both the allegories and the Tarot use an extensive inventory of psychological imagery. Both are preoccupied with the psychological stages of development. The oscillation of depression-elation, the need for isolation, etc. are used as the background for a map of consciousness that resembles modern theories of depth psychology.

Notes and References

1. Bernoulli, *Spiritual Development as Reflected in Alchemy and Related Disciplines IN Spiritual Disciplines* (Princeton University Press, 1960) p 309.
2. Shumaker, *Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 1972) p 169.
3. Mutlauf, *The Science of Matter IN Lindberg (ed.) Science in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1978).
4. The discussion of alchemy and Greek philosophy is drawn from Hopkins, *Alchemy, Child of Greek Philosophy* (AMS, 1967).
5. Mutlauf, *op. cit.*, p 376.
6. Burckhart, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Harper and Row, 1958) p 509.
7. Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p 6. The reference is to the *Book of Enoch*, chapter VIII. This is an apocryphal work which has always been held in high regard by occultists because of its enigmatic references. We know from the last chapter that Kabbalah was also assigned an angelic origin.
8. Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p 188.
9. Stock, *Science, Technology and Economic Progress in the Early Middle Ages IN Lindberg, op. cit.*, p. 16.
10. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (Princeton University Press, 1970) [Hereafter Jung, *MC*] p 320.
11. Ellade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (University of Chicago Press, 1978).
12. That alchemy involved the perfection of the alchemist rather than, or in addition to, the production of the philosopher's stone has been recognized since the nineteenth century. Eliphas Levi (1810-1875) clearly recognized that its goal was the perfection of man (*Transcendental Magic* (Weiser, 1976)) See also Mary Anne Atwood (nee South) *A Suggestive Inquiry into Hermetic Mystery* published in 1850. For reasons which are not known, she later bought and destroyed all copies of the book which was not republished until 1918. Realization of the mystical content of alchemy is clear in Ethan Allen Hitchcock's *Remarks upon Alchemy and the Alchemists* in 1857 and N. Landur's French article published in *L'Institut* in 1868. In 1917, Silberer published *Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult Arts* (Dover, 1971). The pioneering work of these writers was brought to fruition by Carl Jung who established that alchemy was not only the predecessor of chemistry, but also the forerunner of the modern psychology of the unconscious. See Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* Princeton University Press, 1968 [hereafter Jung, *PAA*] and *Alchemical Studies* (Princeton University Press, 1967) [hereafter Jung, *AS*].
13. Underhill, *Mysticism* (Methuen and Co., 1977) p 173.
14. Silberer, *op. cit.*, p 139.
15. Welch, *Taoism* (Beacon, 1957) p 96.
16. Waley, *The Way and the Power* (Grove, 1958) believes that the alchemic passages in the *Wei Po-yang* might be interpolations from the fourth century A.D.
17. Wilhelm (trans.) *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1962) p 6.
18. Ellade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton University Press, 1969) discusses alchemical elements in Hindu Yoga. These elements appear relatively late and probably were acquired through contact with the Chinese alchemists.
19. Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (Steinerbooks, 1971) p 60.
20. *The Golden Cycle Tarot*, 1976 by Ronn Ballard, Antoinette Sandbach, and John Sandbach.
21. Innes, *The Tarot* (Arco, 1978) p 88.
22. Jung, *PAA*, p 58.

23. De Rola, *Alchemy, the Secret Art* (Avon, 1973) plate 8. Because of the many images drawn from this work, it will be convenient to refer to it simply as ASA.

24. Fabricius, *Alchemy* (Rosenkilde and Bagger, Copenhagen, 1976) fig 15. Once again, we will use this work often and will refer to it as A.

25. A, fig 47.

26. *Ibid.*, fig 71.

27. Jung, *MC* plate 7. The crosses on the crowns definitely identify the figures as Pope and Papess, rather than King and Queen. Thus, see the shape of the crowns in plate 6.

28. *Ibid.*, pp 20 f.

29. A, fig 391

30. The king and queen as crowned figures, often in coitus, are shown in Fabricius figures: 35, 36, 38, 42, 53, 54, 58, 60, 71, 106, 107, 117, 122, 136, 167, 176, 180, 190, 201, 224, 229, 230, 232, 244, 254, 256, 263, 264, 265, 280, 281, 288, 292, 303, 307, 325, 328, 338, 386.

31. A, fig. 338

32. A, fig. 348.

33. Jung, *MC*, plate 6.

34. Jung, *PAA*, figs. 155 and 156.

35. *Ibid.*, fig. 166. Also see A, fig. 350.

36. ASA, plate 59.

37. A, figs. 90, 91, 94, 125, 138, 151.

38. A, figs. 138, 160, 256.

39. A, figs. 160 and 256.

40. ASA, plates 32, 53, 55.

41. ASA, plate 55 for the association of the triumph of the sun with the burial and death of the King on the same figure.

42. ASA, plate 43.

43. A, figs. 30, 155, 254, 325, 159.

44. A, fig. 272.

45. ASA, plate 30. A, fig. 182.

46. A fig. 84.

47. Jung, *MC*, p 15.

48. A, figs. 19 and 72. ASA, plate 19.

49. A, figs. 119 and 130.

50. ASA, plate 20. A, figs. 95, 330, 331.

51. A, fig. 105.

52. A, figs. 341, 342, 308.

53. A, p 63.

54. A, figs. 350, 146, 147.
55. A, p 102.
56. A, fig. 29.
57. A, figs. 328, 327.
58. A, figs. 257 and 324.
59. A, figs. 169, 175, 177.
60. A, fig. 46.
61. A, fig. 237.
62. A, p 20.
63. Jung, *MC*, p 352.
64. A, fig. 41.
65. A, fig. 305.
66. A, figs. 29, 32, 34. Jung, *PAA*, p 108.
67. Silberer, *op. cit.*, p 408.
68. A, fig. 194.
69. A, figs 195 and 197.
70. ASA, plate 43. A, p 94.
71. A, fig. 206.
72. A, fig. 275.
73. Jung, *MC*, p 147. A figs. 65 and 67.
74. Silberer, *op. cit.*, p 156. A, figs. 303, 304, 305, 324, 343, 347, 365, 366, 386.
75. Jung, *Aion* (Princeton University Press, 1959) p 235.
76. ASA, plate 20.
77. Jung, *PAA*, fig. 22.
78. Images of the sun with combined straight and curved rays can be found in A, figs. 23, 24, 41, 46, 70, 81, 93, 130, 141, 155, 227, 259, 275, 375, 380, 392, 399.
79. A, p 187. Jung *PAA*, fig. 48. A, figs. 267, 354, 355, 356, 358.
80. A, figs. 156, 157, 158, 160, 163, 164, 165, 166, 176, 180, 194, 199, 201, 229, 241, 242, 280, 281, 288, 289, 292, 307, 308, 359. Also see Jung, *AS*, plates B2 and B3.
81. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (Princeton University Press, 1956) [hereafter Jung, *SOT*].
82. A, figs. 279, 303, 322, 339, 383.
83. A, fig. 164.
84. Jung, *PAA*, fig 91.
85. Jung, *SOT*, plate 12.

Numerology and the Tarot

We have seen in Chapter Ten that number symbolism has long been associated with Kabbalistic interpretation of the Tarot. However, the Kabbalah reinforced, rather than introduced, numerology to Tarot symbology. Number symbolism would have been important in the Renaissance even without Kabbalah. To understand the number symbolism in the cards, we must once again journey to the Hellenistic world of late antiquity. We must trace the intellectual history of numbers along a tortuous path from Greek philosophy of 500 B.C., through Medieval interpretation of the Bible and into the art and architecture of the Renaissance. Once again we will find that the roots of the Tarot symbols are deep and complex and we must be prepared to undertake some laborious digging to understand the mindset of the designers.

Ordering of the Tarot Trumps

Before we begin our historical survey, however, it will be necessary to consider some problems associated with the numbering of the cards.¹ Since we will be concerned with numbers throughout this study, we cannot ignore the fact that variations exist. All of the important versions are summarized in Table 12-1.

The first column follows the pattern of the Tarot de Marseilles and is the ordering we have followed throughout this book. The second column is a related sequence from the sixteenth century. It differs in inverting seven and eight and in reversing the sequence nine, ten, eleven. A sixteenth century poem by Susio contains an additional inversion of cards two and three.

The third and fourth columns are closely related and date to the fifteenth century. This pattern is characterized by having the Justice card in the twentieth position and Temperance in the sixth, which forces a renumbering of the other cards. The series nine, ten, eleven is again reversed and the number of the Papess is given as three or four.

The fifth through ninth columns represent variations with the Judgment card in the highest position of the deck (card #20). The italicized numbers in the Table indicate the position of the card in the deck only, since no numbers appear on these cards. There is some reshuffling of the first cards in these decks, most commonly giving the Empress and Emperor as two and three, an order to place the Papess next to the Pope as four and five. In these decks, the virtues are collected together as five to seven, six to eight or seven to nine. These changes cause a significant alteration in the

Table 12-1. Variations in the Numbering of the Tarot Trumps.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Fool	0				0	0	0			0	78
Magus	1	1	1		1	1	1		1	15	15
Papess	2	2	4	3	4				2		
Empress	3	3	2		2		2		3		
Emperor	4	4	3		3	4	3	3	4		
Pope	5	5	5		5			4	5		
Lovers	6	6	7	8	5	5	8	5	6	13	13
Chariot	7	8	8		6	10	9	9	10	21	21
Justice	8	7	20	20	8	8	7	8	8	9	9
Hermit	9	11	11	11	11	11	12	11	12	18	18
Wheel	10	10	10	10	10	9	10			20	20
Force	11	9	9		9	7	6	7	9	11	11
Hanged Man	12	12	12	12	12	12	11	12	12		
Death	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	17	17
Temperance	14	14	6	6	7	6	5	6	7	10	10
Devil	15	15	14	14	14	14			14	14	14
Tower	16	16	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	19	19
Star	17	17	16		16	16	16		16	4	6
Moon	18	18	17		17	17	17	17	17	3	3
Sun	19	19	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	2	2
Judgment	20	20	19	19	20	20		20	20	16	16
World	21	21	21	21	19	19	19	19	19	5	5

1. Tarot de Marseilles ordering. The earliest example of this numbering is the deck of Cateiin Geoffroy, 1557.

2. Early French ordering according to Vleivil (1643-1664). See Dummett, *The Game of Tarot* pp 205 ff. This is the same ordering as given by a poem by Susio (1519-1583) see Dummett, p 390, except Susio makes the Empress two and the Papess three.

3. Steele Manuscript (c 1470). The same numbering is found in a deck at Rouen and in poems by Bertoni (1550) and Garzoni (1589) except the Chariot is seven and the Lovers eight. See Dummett, p 400.

4. Fifteenth century printed sheet at Metropolitan Museum. See Dummett, p 400.

5. Bolognese Tarot deck, modern.

6. Florentine Minchiate deck, late eighteenth century. The same ordering is found in the Orfeo deck (Dummett, p 394) and the few Catania cards (Dummett, p 399).

7. Modern Sicilian Tarot cards.

8. Fifteenth century hand-painted deck known as the "Charles VI" deck (Dummett, p 399).

9. Fifteenth century uncut sheet known as Rosenwald sheet. The same numbering is followed by the "alla Colonna" cards (Dummett, p 393).

10. Eteilla deck.

11. Nineteenth century Spanish Eteilla deck.

numbering of all of the cards in the sequence.

The final two columns in the table are based on Etteilla Tarots. They are of little historical interest, dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Given that Alliette felt free to change everything else about the designs, there is little reason to believe his strange numbering system. These decks are only included to illustrate that later decks often varied the numbering system. In fact, renumbering the cards has always been a favorite way of refashioning the deck.

Given the extent of the variations in the Table, must we despair of ever making sense of the ordering of the cards? Fortunately, it is not necessary to reach such a dire conclusion. But careful analysis is necessary before the ordering of the cards begins to make sense. The first thing we must notice is that much of the variation is due to the placement of the Virtue cards. Depending on where these three cards are placed the numbering of the remaining cards is altered. Therefore, the consistencies only appear when the Virtues are temporarily ignored.

Table 12-2 is an analysis of the *order* of the remaining eighteen cards, without the virtues. The table is concerned with the order of the cards, not the numbers assigned to each. In all cases, I have started with the highest card and ordered the cards downward, taking into account missing cards. The ordering of the Tarot de Marseilles is given in the first column. To emphasize differences, only orderings which differ from the first column are shown. In all other cases, the ordering follows the first column, or the cards are missing.

The consistency of the ordering now becomes more clear. There are only three variations. The decks from five to nine invert the Judgment and World cards. There is considerable variation in the placement of the Hermit and Wheel cards. The order of the second to fourth cards is altered to place the Papess next to the Pope. Otherwise the sequencing of the cards is the same.

It is because of the analysis in Table 12-2 that we have been able to proceed so far in our studies of the Tarot without paying attention to the problem of ordering. The inversion of the Papess and the changes in the numbering of the Hermit and Wheel have no serious effect on the interpretations offered in earlier chapters. The inversions cause little change in the overall sequencing of the symbols or in their interpretation.

But the same cannot be said of the inversion of the World and Judgment cards. As we explained in Chapter Eight, the positioning of the Judgment card is critical. If the Judgment card holds the highest place, the sequence appears orthodox. The dualist heretics and the dualist philosophers of the Renaissance rejected the doctrine of the Last Judgment. They allegorized the concept into the final Divine call to mystical union. Thus, the card should come next to last.

Table 12-2. An analysis of the Ordering of the Tarot trumps, exclusive of the Virtues (leaving eighteen cards). The columns correspond to the numbers on Table 12-1. Values are shown only when the other orderings *differ* from that shown in the first column.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
World	18				17	17		17	17
Judgment	17				18	18	18	18	18
Sun	16								
Moon	15								
Star	14								
Tower	13								
Devil	12								
Death	11								
Hanged Man	10						9		
Wheel	9	8	8	8	8	7	8		
Hermit	8	9	9	9	9	9	10	9	9
Chariot	7					8			
Lovers	6								
Pope	5								
Emperor	4		3		3		3		
Empress	3		2		2		2		
Papess	2		4		4				
Magus	1								

The change may seem trivial, but remember that in the Renaissance, belief in the doctrine of the Last Judgment was one of the keys used to prove heresy. If, on examination a person demonstrated belief in the Last Judgment, he was considered innocent of heresy. Thus, the inversion of the last two cards can be easily explained as an attempt to Christianize the Tarot. This simple change may have made the symbols more acceptable to a Catholic audience. Just as the hand-painted decks altered the symbols to suit the tastes of Royalty, so the inversion of the Judgment and World cards made the symbolism more acceptable to the orthodox. This explains why the ordering was kept intact in the French decks (columns one and two) and altered in the Italian decks (columns five-nine). The Italians made this critical change to alter the symbols in the direction of orthodoxy.

Of course, the inversion of the final two cards is not the only reason to doubt the credibility of these Italian decks. There are other reasons to believe that all of these decks have significantly altered the original symbolism. The most obvious factor is that the decks only go up to twenty! They have lost a card, or a number, or both. This is accomplished by any one of several strange devices. The minchiate deck (#six) has dropped the Papess and Pope cards and

reduced the first five cards to four. The Sicilian deck drops the offensive Papess and Pope, changes the Devil to a ship, has two fool cards and introduces Jupiter and Constancy! Surely a deck which has introduced so many other changes cannot be relied upon as evidence of the original order of the final cards.

Two of the decks accomplish the change to twenty cards by leaving some cards unnumbered. These are indicated in Table 12-1 by underlining. The Bolognese deck (#five) has twenty-one cards in the sequence of twenty by having two "five" cards! One is numbered five (Lovers), the other is the fifth card in order (Pope). Likewise the Rosenwald sheet (#nine) has one card numbered twelve and another which is logically the twelfth card in the sequence. These changes cause the deck to have twenty cards in the sequence instead of the expected twenty-one. It is hard to tell which alteration was used with the Charles VI deck (#eight). Only a partial deck is preserved and the numbering is only known from hand lettering along the top margins of the cards.

The changes in decks five to nine argue that these are alterations of the original designs and not to be relied upon. This reinforces our argument that the final two cards in these decks have been inverted. With so many other obvious changes, the ordering of the final two cards cannot be argued to be original.

Let us now re-insert the Virtues which we have set aside. At this point, we are in a position to see that reordering the Virtues is another possibility for Christianizing the deck. Once again we must look at Table 12-1. Decks five to nine, which have already introduced other Christianizing changes, such as dropping the Papess, group the Virtues as five to seven, six to eight or seven to nine. The effect of this grouping is to emphasize that these are Virtues and nothing else. When these cards are separated, their primary meaning as Virtues is less forceful. It is easier to see further symbolic meanings, not necessarily orthodox. Take, for example, the interpretations in the previous study on Alchemy. The placement of the cards according to the Tarot de Marseilles ordering indicates Justice as the weighing of the alchemical ingredients, Fortitude as the overcoming of the alchemical Green Lion and Temperance as the alchemical process of distillation. These interpretations appear legitimate and are substantiated by similar imagery in the alchemical texts. When the Virtues are placed as a group, these interpretations are destroyed and I am unable to find other alternatives which fit both the Tarot and Alchemy.

The plain fact is that grouping the Virtues early in the sequence has the effect of "deflating" any heterodox interpretation of the symbols. The system looks more Christian and more legitimate. If the Virtues are separated, they allow of further allegorical meanings which would not be acceptable to an orthodox Catholic audience.

It seems then that we have ample evidence to discredit decks five to nine as reflecting the original ordering and numbering of the

Tarot. They have changed the sequence from twenty-one to twenty. They have introduced new symbols such as Jupiter and Constancy. They have inverted the final cards, dropped the Papess and Pope and grouped the Virtues. These three changes are clearly "Christianizing" changes when viewed together.

But the same arguments do not work as well for decks three and four. At least they retain all twenty-one symbols in the sequence. However, we can see more clearly now that the placement of the Virtues cards in the sequence is also an attempt at "Christianizing". First, they place Justice in the twentieth position. Now the last three cards represent the Final Resurrection of the Dead, the Judgment or weighing of the sins and virtues of man (now the Justice card's new meaning), and only then Paradise for the Just. This produces a totally orthodox sequence that, once again, demonstrates a belief in the Last Judgment. Surely this is the same attempt to avoid the dualist heresy that we saw with decks five to nine.

The movement of the Temperance card to the sixth position can also be argued to be a nice little bit of moralizing. Now the passionate Lovers card is preceded by an admonition to restraint. This shows the overconcern with "sins" of sex which has always been a fetish of the Roman Church. Thus, I am inclined to discount the renumbering which results from the replacement of the Justice and Temperance cards. The replacements seem to be just another attempt to emasculate the symbolism.

The basic reason to discredit these attempts to Christianize the deck is that they are unsuccessful. The Tarot is still not orthodox even after the changes. Certainly the inversion of the final cards would permit a card manufacturer to argue that the deck was orthodox. But we are left with the decidedly un-Christian Papess. We still have the Hanged Man and the Tower with dubious meaning for the Christian. We still have the astrological symbols for Star, Moon and Sun. We still have Mars on his Chariot and Kronos carrying the hourglass. The symbolism remains Hellenistic, Neoplatonic, Gnostic and heterodox. The clerics who mention the Tarot in fifteenth and sixteenth century sermons were not fooled. They still regarded the system as the Devil's Picturebook.

It is because the Tarot is not an orthodox system that I argue for the originality of the Tarot de Marseilles ordering. The dualist heresies were still remembered in France, and the French manufacturers felt no need to hide the symbolic meaning of the cards. They would have felt no great compulsion to Christianize the order to fit the passionate orthodoxy which characterizes the Italian Catholic to this day. The French, still smarting from the Albigensian Crusades, were more sympathetic to the original symbolism. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the French retained the original ordering while the Italians attempted to Christianize the sequence.

But why do I argue that the Tarot de Marseilles ordering is the original and the Italian is not? Why couldn't a French card

manufacturer have changed the ordering, turning an orthodox system into an heretical one? The answer is that the Tarot is not Christian and orthodox even with the alterations. The alterations are poor attempts based on inverting a few cards and repositioning the Virtues.

It seems to me that only two logically consistent positions can be offered. Either the Tarot de Marseilles is the original ordering, or there is no consistent symbolic system in the Tarot. This latter position is not illogical, but then we must ignore all of the evidence accumulated in earlier chapters. We must discount all of the resemblances as superficial or circumstantial, ignore the Renaissance love of symbolic systems built of enigmatic imagery, and pretend that the intellectual milieu of the Renaissance was ignored by the Tarot designers. Such a position must ignore much. I prefer to argue that the Tarot is a child of its times, a symbolic system built on the prevalent intellectual concepts of the Renaissance. And this argument, which ignores none of the evidence, leads me to choose the Tarot de Marseilles as the best indicator of the original ordering of the cards.

But even if we argue successfully for the ordering of the Tarot de Marseilles in Table 12-2, we still have problems with numbering. The sequencing of the cards causes little problem for the interpretations developed throughout our studies. But variations still cause problems for our study of Numerology. Not all of the changes in numbering can be dismissed as "Christianizing". Given that all of the decks show some changes, surely some reordering could have cropped up in the Marseilles deck. All of the variations which remain are quite feasible and consistent with the interpretations we have developed in our studies.

First, there is the matter of the placement of the Virtues. I have argued that grouping them early in the sequence is an attempt to deflate their symbolism. I also see the changes in Decks three and four as a patent attempt at orthodoxy and moralizing. But there are any number of placements which would be logically consistent. The ordering of the Marseilles deck cannot be argued to be the *only* way they can be arranged. Because the Italians felt free to shift the Virtues around, there may even have been some fundamental ambiguity about their original placement. Even in the twentieth century, Waite felt compelled to reverse the position of the Justice and Fortitude cards. Perhaps we will never be certain of the original order. Under the circumstances I have retained the ordering of the Marseilles deck. The only justification for this choice is that the French deck seems to have retained the rest of the symbolic ordering. Since the deck is careful about the rest, we can hope it was careful here also.

But the argument for the placement of the Virtues in the Marseilles deck cannot be made too forcefully. We are still left with the variations in numbering shown in Table 12-3. Seven of the eight other decks show a rearrangement of the series from nine to eleven. Five

orthodox system, we are left basically with the ordering of the Tarot de Marseilles. As unlikely as it may seem, the French decks are better indicators of the original than the later Italian versions.

Bearing all of this in mind, we are finally in a position to proceed with the study of Numerology. We must now consider the historical development of Numerology. We must look at the forms of number symbolism prevalent in the Renaissance. And then we must examine what numerology can tell us about the Tarot symbols.

Numerology in the Hellenistic World

We can trace the beginnings of number symbolism to Pythagoras, born about 580 BC. Unfortunately we know nothing of the details of his system, which was always secret and mystical. But we do know that he believed that matter was "composed" of numbers. The Greeks were impressed by the fact that any material object, any complex shape, could be decomposed into relatively few simple geometric figures. Thus, any object could be broken up into mathematical entities. But it was not just that things could be conveniently described by numbers. They were essentially number.²

The essential characteristic of material objects is that they are extended in space. Extension, at its most abstract level, is number. Thus, if you peel away all of the "non-essential" aspects of a material thing, you find numbers. Number is the aspect of material objects that is closest to the ideal "World of Ideas."

This leads us to Plato, who developed his ideas on numerology in the *Timaeus*. Recall that this was the only dialogue that was widely available in the Renaissance (See Chapter Four). In this dialogue, Plato describes the creation of the world "mathematically". Creation is worked out geometrically. For example, there are exactly four elements (fire, air, water, earth) because four points are needed to form the simplest solid figure. Two points can describe a line. Three points can form a planar figure, the triangle. A fourth point must be added to form a solid figure, the triangular pyramid.

Greek mathematics also involved a theory of numbers, some of which is still retained in the twentieth century.³ They recognized a triangular number as one that could be represented by a triangle of dots. Thus, six is formed of three, two and one dot. Other triangular numbers are ten (with a base of four dots), fifteen and twenty-one. We are familiar with square and cubic numbers, but seldom are aware that these terms come from the Greek concern with geometric patterns. Square numbers can be represented by a square of dots, and cubic numbers by a cube of dots. Square numbers also have the property that they are the sum of the successive odd numbers: sixteen = one + three + five + seven. They also recognized a perfect number as one that is the sum of its divisors. For example, the first perfect number is six = three + two + one. We will return to this concern for geometric arrangements in the Appendix to this study.

It is with the later Neoplatonic philosophers, the ones most influential in the Renaissance, that we find the most advanced theories about numbers. Following Plato, Plotinus believed that numbers exist in the World of Ideas prior to any object which can be described by numbers. "Mathematicals" preexist and are in a real sense the intermediaries between the world of ideas and the world of matter. The terms which Iamblicus and Proclus use for the mathematical sound very much like Plato's description of the Anima Mundi, the World Spirit, the creative aspect of the Ideal World.⁴

How can mathematical be considered as intermediaries? The answer is simple. By their nature they take on essential features of both worlds. They are eternal and immutable. At the same time they are multiple (ergo, less than God, the One). Not only are they multiple, they are the very essence of multiplicity.

The concept of mathematical as intermediaries is also reflected in Aristotle who divides reality into theologicals (i.e., gods), mathematical and physicals. Such a division implies the real existence of all three levels as separate existants. In other places, Aristotle uses the division: theologicals, astronomicals and physicals. Obviously, like the later Neoplatonists, Aristotle equated the mathematical with the intermediary beings usually associated with the celestial spheres. The "nature" of the intermediary gods was mathematical. Numbers were thus divine and held great wisdom.

Given what we have already established about the influence of Neoplatonism in the Renaissance, we can hardly ignore this equating of numbers with the intermediary beings. We have argued that the Tarot is a Neoplatonic system representing the stages stretching from man (the Fool) to God (Anima Mundi⁵ World card). Thus, the cards of the Tarot represent intermediaries. Now we find the Neoplatonists equating numbers with such intermediaries. Surely, we will not be surprised later to find symbolic meanings in the numbers associated with the cards.

Greek Theories of Music

There is one aspect of Greek mathematics which is of particular interest to our study of the Tarot: the Pythagorean theory of harmonics. It seems strange to us that throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, mathematics was divided into Arithmetics, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. Music seems out of place on the list. And yet the Greeks had discovered an important basis for musical theory. If two strings, such as are used for the Greek Lute, are stretched side by side, plucking one string will cause the other to vibrate if the lengths of the strings are in certain simple proportions.

The physical basis of the phenomenon is quite simple. As the string vibrates, the predominant sound you hear has a frequency inversely proportional to the length of the string. But, at the same time, the string will be vibrating along half its length. With the center

point of the string as pivot, one half will be going in one direction while the other half is going in the opposite direction. Thus, we hear an "overtone" at twice the frequency of the dominant tone. This overtone causes the second string to vibrate if it is half the length of the first. The string will also vibrate in thirds, fourths, etc., but with smaller amplitudes and therefore producing weaker sounds. It is the production of overtones which gives a stringed instrument its richness of sound. The "sounding boxes" of the guitar, violin and similar instruments are simply devices to amplify these weaker overtones.

Because overtones are always produced, our ears are used to hearing them. They sound "harmonic". What Pythagoras discovered was that the ratio of the numbers (i.e., string lengths) producing these harmonious sounds are very simple. Based on the way the Greek Lute is tuned, there are three basic harmonics: $1/2$, $3/2$, $4/3$.

But this is only the beginning of the story. These ratios produce sounds that are beautiful. These beautiful sounds are somehow able to communicate directly with the human soul and produce pleasure and satisfaction. The Renaissance was impressed with the power of music to quiet chaotic influences. Just as David soothed Saul's martial spirit and Orpheus charmed the gods of the underworld, so music would always have the power to produce an harmonious effect. This is the basis on which Ficino experimented with music as magic which could alter the celestial influences.

Going well beyond music, the relationship between any two objects could be conceived as a ratio: of heights, weights, distances, etc. And whenever these ratios fell into the classic $1/2$, $3/2$, $4/3$, the result would be harmonious. These proportions were then postulated to underlay the structure of the entire cosmos.⁵ The universe was created by God through mathematics. If numbers were the essence of matter, then harmonics held the key to the relationships between objects. Music was the mathematics of relationship.

Thus it was that Music formed an integral part of the education of Medieval and Renaissance school boys. Greek harmonics were the foundation of beauty and these proportions were carefully followed in every form of art. Throughout the Middle Ages, harmonics were associated with the reconciliation or "harmonizing" of opposites. Since duality and its reconciliation are basic themes of the Tarot, it will be worth our while to explore the possibilities.

The possible "harmonic" relationships are shown in Table 12-4. Some of the pairings are at least suggestive. The Papess, a symbol of Isis, is related to the Magician, who is Hermes/Osiris and Seraphis (see Chapter Five). Since Isis is identical to Hera/Juno, she is shown related to the Emperor who is Zeus/Jupiter. She is also identical to Venus, represented by the Lovers card. In the fourth row, the Emperor is associated with his consort, the Empress, through the Lovers. The esoteric meaning of Eros on the Lovers card is also apparent in that he is associated with the darkest cards of the deck:

Hermit, Moon, Hanged Man, Devil and Judgment.

An harmonious sound will also result when a number of tones are played together in a "chord". The most complex chord which can be found in the Tarot is three (Empress), the fifth above it, four (Emperor) and its octave, six (Lovers). That certainly forms a nice combination: man and woman and physical love. The related tones in the next octave are the fourth, eight (Justice) and nine (Hermit) and the next octave, twelve (Hanged Man). Finally, we have the fourth, sixteen (Tower) and the fifth, eighteen (Moon) above this. If the reader is interested, he can confirm the harmony of this chord by playing it on the piano. The values correspond to C below middle C, G, middle C, E, G, C above middle C, E, G. Thus, it corresponds to the major C chord.

In looking over Table 12-4 and the chords which can be formed from it, some few relationships seem apparent. But the associations do not force themselves on us as unexpected or particularly revealing. The analysis certainly does not indicate that the harmonic ratios are an underlying principle of the structure of the Tarot. The problem is not a result of ambiguous numbering systems either. I have tried all of the combinations given in Table 12-1 and I have not been impressed. Our conclusion must be that the Tarot designers did not use the principles of Harmonics to construct the relationships in the deck.

Numerology in the Middle Ages

But we are jumping ahead in our story. For we have yet to establish how numerology was viewed in the Renaissance. Relationships, such as shown in Table 12-4, are only of interest once we establish the linkage between Greek mathematics and the Renaissance.

Allegorical Interpretation of the Bible

The next logical step in our story is still within the purview of the Hellenistic world. Philo of Alexandria (30 B.C. — 50 A.D.) was a Jewish scholar who took as his task the reconciliation of Greek philosophy and the Bible. He used allegory as his basic tool. Allegory has always been able to synthesize contradictory theories because it allows for secret meanings hidden beneath the surface of any text or symbol.

Of immediate relevance to our story is the use of numerical allegory by Philo. Pythagoras and Plato had established that numbers formed a linkage between things at the level of the world of ideas. Objects related through numbers were related to the same divine intermediary. To establish a mystical correlation between objects required only the establishment of some numerical identity between them.

Table 12-4. Relationships between pairs of Tarot symbols as determined by Pythagorean Harmonics. The numerical values of the card in the first column is related to the value of the other cards by the ratio indicated at the head of the column. Relationships affected by the alternative numbering system (Table 12-3, column 3) are marked with an asterisk and the new relationship is shown in the lower half of the Table.

	1/2	3/2	4/3
Magician	Papess*		
Papess*	Emperor*		
Empress*	Lovers	Papess*	
Emperor*	Justice	Lovers	Empress*
Pope	Wheel		
Justice	Tower	Hanged Man	Lovers
Hermit*	Moon	Lovers	Hanged Man
Wheel	Judgment		
Hanged Man	Lovers	Moon	Tower
Temperance	Chariot	World	
Devil		Wheel	Judgment
Magician	Empress		
Empress	Papess		
Emperor	Lovers	Empress	
Papess	Justice	Lovers	Emperor
Force	Moon	Lovers	Hanged Man

Philo reconciled Genesis and Neoplatonism through a study of the mathematical plan underlying creation. He felt this was a major point in which philosophy and the Bible agreed. Philo found evidence for this agreement in the Book of Wisdom (11:21): "Thou hast ordered all things in number, and measure, and weight." The world was created according to a simple plan. Philo pointed out that the world was created in six days. The Greeks considered six a perfect number. This demonstrates that the world, the creation of God, is perfect.

The methods of Philo were adopted by the Early Fathers of the Church in their own interpretations of the Bible. Augustine believed that the science of numbers could be a great help to the careful interpreter. Augustine used numerology to relate Noah's ark to Christ by showing that the dimensions of the ark are related to the dimensions of the human body. Thus Christ saved man who was drowning in sin.

Such allegorical interpretations sound very strange to the

modern ear, but were prevalent throughout the Middle Ages. Hugh of St. Victor, who taught at the University of Paris from 1125 onward, wrote on the Greek principles of numerology and encouraged their use in interpretations. It was largely through the use of numerical exegesis that the Renaissance was introduced to numerology. This form of exegesis required that every educated Christian have some knowledge of number symbolism. Therefore, it is not surprising that we find number symbolism in Renaissance works of art.⁶

Numerology and the Kabbalah

Renaissance syncretism had an additional source of information about number symbolism in Kabbalah. Numerology was already evident in the *Sefer Yetzirah*.⁷ However, the fullest development of Jewish number symbolism is associated with Gematria, a method for interpreting the Torah. The method was obviously influenced by contemporary Christian developments in numerical exegesis.

Gematria is based on the numerical values of the Hebrew letters.⁸ The numerical value of the letters in any word could be summed to produce a hidden allegorical message. Remember that to the Jew, the Name of a thing corresponded to its essence. This essence would be revealed through the number corresponding to that Name. This number then related the Name to the divine intermediaries of the Sefiroth.⁹ A simple example is the passage in which Abraham and 318 of his household win a battle. In fact, the name of Abraham's servant, Eliezas, corresponds to the number 318. Thus, the victory was truly miraculous since Abraham and a single servant effected the victory.¹⁰

To apply Gematria to the Tarot, we must first assign numerical values to the letters of the alphabet. Table 12-5 gives several different assignments, offered by different authors. To arrive at the numerical value of a word, one first sums the value of the individual letters. For example, if A to Z are assigned values from one to twenty-six, The Pope would be sixteen + one + sixteen + five = thirty-eight. Then the numerical values of the integers making up this number are summed until a single number remains between one and nine. Thirty-eight = three + eight = eleven = one + one = two. The word Pope corresponds to the number two.

It is possible to perform this simple exercise for the old Italian names of the Tarot symbols. If Gematria had been applied to the naming of the symbols, it would of course correspond to the Italian titles rather than the modern English names. Unfortunately, nothing much is revealed by this analysis. The results are shown in Table 12-6. There are, of course, a number of variations in spelling and in the names. I have repeated the exercise for a variety of names and the results are still disappointing.

The only thing that the Table shows is that the names of the cards (with two exceptions) correspond to mystically significant

Table 12-5. Correspondences between letters of the alphabet and numbers according to different authors.

	I	II	III
A	1		0
B	2	11 ^s 2	1
C	3	12 ^s 3	
D	4	13 ^s 4	3
E	5		4
F	6	14 ^s 5	
G	7	15 ^s 6	2
H	8	16 ^s 7	
I	9		9
J	10 ^s 1	17 ^s 8	9
K	11 ^s 2	18 ^s 9	10 ^s 1
L	12 ^s 3	19 ^s 1	11 ^s 2
M	13 ^s 4	20 ^s 2	12 ^s 3
N	14 ^s 5	21 ^s 3	13 ^s 4
O	15 ^s 6		15 ^s 6
P	16 ^s 7	22 ^s 4	16 ^s 7
Q	17 ^s 8	23 ^s 5	18 ^s 9
R	18 ^s 9	24 ^s 6	19 ^s 1
S	19 ^s 1	25 ^s 7	14 ^s 5
T	20 ^s 2	26 ^s 8	8
U	21 ^s 3		5
V	22 ^s 4	27 ^s 9	5
W	23 ^s 5	28 ^s 1	5
X	24 ^s 6	29 ^s 2	
Y	25 ^s 7	30 ^s 3	9
Z	26 ^s 8	31 ^s 4	6

I. Gray *A Complete Guide to the Tarot* (Bantam, 1970) p 184.

II. Gray *The Talking Tree* (Weiser, 1977) p 547.

III. Holy Order of Mans *Jewels of the Wise* (HOM,1974)

numbers. As we will see in a later section, three is the number of divinity (eg., Christian Trinity), six is a perfect number, seven is the number of mysticism in Jewish systems and the Old Testament, and nine is both a number of divinity (being three squared) and also a number of completion (last of the numbers of the decade). Other than that, there does not appear to be any symbolism hidden in the names. The numerical values do not suggest any hidden arrangement of the cards. It does not appear that the designers paid much attention to Gematria.

Number Symbolism in the Renaissance

The discussions of biblical interpretation and Kabbalah lead us to the Italian Renaissance, the environment of the Tarot. It is clear that the educated man in the Renaissance was surrounded by numerology. He learned Greek mathematics in school and he heard numerical exegesis in church on Sunday. The prevalent philosophy, Neoplatonism, held that numbers were the key to understanding the nature of reality.

He found numerology in poetry, especially in the structure of the poems. Dante's *Divine Comedy* has three books and each book contains thirty-three cantos. It is no accident that the structure of the poem corresponds to the number of the Holy Trinity. There is also a famous passage in the *Purgatorio*, Canto thirty-three. Here he states that astrological influences will produce a five hundred, five and ten.¹¹ The Roman numerals for five hundred, five, ten are D, V, X, the Latin word for leader.

Numerology was also followed in other arts, where the emphasis was on harmonics and beauty. Alberti, an architect practicing in Florence after 1428, strictly followed the Pythagorean proportions in his work. He believed that such a design would harmonize the soul of the beholder.¹² Of course, not all number theory was concerned with allegory. Pythagoras also established the foundations of trigonometry. Mathematics and astronomy led to advances in navigation. In art, mathematics led to careful theories of perspective which are still used today to draw flat representations of the spherical globe. Mathematics were also used by Descartes and Leibniz as the foundations of their philosophical systems.

Perhaps the most important part of the story involves the influence of numerology on the Renaissance Neoplatonists. Since we have consistently maintained that the Tarot is a Neoplatonic symbolic system, a demonstration of interest in numerology by the Neoplatonists would help establish the feasibility of numerical interpretations of the cards. And, indeed, Pico della Mirandola was fascinated by numerology.¹³ We have mentioned earlier that Ficino experimented with musical magic by singing Greek chants which naturally contained the Pythagorean ratios. In fact, Renaissance Neoplatonism provided a place for mathematics in magic which was not evident during the Middle Ages.¹⁴ The Neoplatonists must have been particularly attracted to the secrecy surrounding Pythagoras and his school. This school was as much a Mystery Religion as a school of philosophy.

The Renaissance Magus was interested in reconstructing and extending the syncretism of the Hellenistic world. Number theory provided a philosophical basis for this syncretism. Simple ratios explained how everything was interrelated. Numbers were related to the celestial intermediaries of the Gnostic systems. In addition, numerical allegory provided a valuable tool for synthesizing contradictory theories. For all these reasons, Numerology was accepted by

Table 12-6. Numerical values of the names of Tarot cards according to Gematria. Values of individual letters (A-Z corresponds to 1-26) are summed and then integers making up this number are summed.

Italian Title	3	6	7	9	Exceptions
Matto (69)		X			
Bagatto (66)	X				
Papessa (77)					5
Imperatrice (117)				X	
Imperatore (120)	X				
Papa (34)			X		
Amore (52)			X		
Caro Triumphale (160)			X		
Justizia (115)			X		
Ermita (66)	X				
Ruota (75)	X				
Forza (66)	X				
Appeso (72)				X	
Morte (71)					8
Temperentia (126)				X	
Diavolo (78)		X			
Saetta (66)	X				
Stella (69)		X			
Luna (48)	X				
Sole (51)		X			
Angelo (54)				X	
Mondo (61)			X		

the Renaissance Magus. Therefore, we will not be surprised to discover numerous correlations between the mystical meaning of numbers and the Tarot symbols.

Symbolic Meanings of the Numbers

If numerology were involved in the Tarot designs, it would likely appear in the symbolic meanings of the numbers themselves. We must seek therefore for correlations between the traditional symbolism of the numbers and the cards. As we work our way through the individual numbers, I have attempted to remain very close to the classic tradition and avoid the temptation to insert additional meanings which have been superimposed by modern occultists.¹⁵

Zero

Zero is prior to number and therefore represents the unknowable God: God in Himself, prior to any emanation through which we

could know Him. Zero is without extension and therefore without limit, it is infinite, inexpressible and unknowable. We know it only in a negative way, by saying what it is not. This is similar to our negative knowledge of the Godhead. We can only say what he is not.

Zero is also prior to number in the sense of sequence. It is before number. It is the state prior to coming into being as an extended being. It is this sense that is connected with the Fool card. He is the prime matter, the primordial man, Adam Kadmon and archetypal man of the Gnostic myth. He is nothing in the sense of not yet being determined. Therefore he is still full of potential. He is not yet limited in any way. He is still a child or even a fetus.

One

One is the monad, the first number, representing the first emanation of God. One was Plotinus' name for God. One is the father of all numbers and therefore the demiurge of all extended things which can be represented by number. All things come from unity and it comes from nothing. One is the beginning, the First Mover, the germ or seed from which the other numbers arise. In fact, it is not really a number at all. It is indivisible and yet number, by its essence, should be multiple; the number one has no multiplicity at all. It is neither even nor odd. Even numbers are representable by $2n$, that is, some number, n , multiplied by 2. And an odd number is representable by $2n + 1$. Thus, the number one fits neither category.

The first Tarot card represents Hermes. He is the "one" in the sense of being the demiurge, the father of all occult wisdom. He was the first magician and the first psychopomp. That Hermes as the magician is given the dominant number One, indicates clearly that the symbolic system which follows is "Hermetic".

Two

Two is the first of the true numbers, the first symbol of multiplicity. As such, it has special meaning in Tarot symbolism where duality is offered as the minimal representation of multiplicity. As the first symbol of multiplicity, it has an evil connotation. Two points can describe a line and therefore divide reality. Two is the symbol of division and discord.

But while it connotes duality in the sense of separation or division, it also connotes the bisexuality of all things. Recall that the *Corpus Hermeticum* calls all things androgynous (See Chapter Five). Therefore two also represents the basic connection between the material and the divine. As such, it represented meditation in the Middle Ages.¹⁶

Both the negative and positive aspects of the number Two are symbolized in the Papess.¹⁷ Duality is clear from the two pillars behind her. Yet she represents a veiled and mysterious goddess who promises the secret wisdom, that is, she promises to reveal the connections between the mortal and divine through meditation. As the

first even number, she represents femininity. In Chinese, as well as western numerology, the even numbers are female and the odd are male.

Three

The number three is naturally associated with the Triune God and therefore is a number of divinity. The Tarot contains three times seven cards. Since seven is the number of mysticism, the Tarot is the system of divine mysticism.

As the first odd number, three is a male symbol. This association fits the alternative numbering (Table 12-3, column 3) which assigns this number to the Emperor.

The number three is widely used in Christian symbols. There are three theological virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity; there were three crosses on Calvary; three Magi visited Bethlehem; Peter made three denials; there were three days before the Resurrection and three appearances afterward.

If the original designs of the Tarot have the Empress as the third card, instead of the Emperor, the symbolism of the first odd card being male is lost. But, at the same time, it is only when we reach three that we can describe objects that have a beginning, middle, and end. Therefore, according to Aristotle, three is the first complete number. As such, it is capable of reproduction. There are three stages of creation: unity, the separation into two poles, and the relationship between the poles. To the Christian, the most fundamental relationship between two objects is love. So three became associated with the union of male and female in love, ergo, parenthood. In dreams, the number three is often associated with motherhood and childbirth.

It is this aspect of the number three which is suggested in the Empress card. This is particularly clear in modern decks where the Empress is represented as pregnant and surrounded by fertile fields. If we are scandalized by tales of medieval kings who dismissed their infertile wives, we must remember that as queen or Empress, the wife represented the fertility of the nation. If the Empress were infertile, the empire might be brought to ruin.

Four

Four points are needed to form the simplest solid, a triangular pyramid or tetrahedron. Therefore, four became the symbol for solidity. It is also the first square number and the square is the most stable of the planar figures. Therefore, it is a symbol of the solid earth: there are four compass directions, four seasons in the year and four elements (fire, air, earth, water). All of these references are clearly symbolized by the Emperor sitting upon a cubic throne. He is the rock-solid, four-square foundation, the cornerstone of organization, law and order. Obviously, these connotations fit the Emperor better than the Papess who appears as four in the alternative

numbering system.

Four is also the first of the numbers of completion. The justification for this is that the sum, one + two + three + four = ten = 1 + zero = one. So the sum of the first four numbers brings us back to unity. As a number of completion, it is commonly found as representing the number of items in a list: four gospels, four horsemen of the apocalypse, four rivers in Paradise, four letters in the Hebrew word for God. The Emperor can, therefore, also represent the completion or highest point in material life: the ruler as the highest status of man on the material plane.

Four as a number of completion is extensively discussed by Jung.¹⁸ Four appears somehow psychologically complete. Because the numbers up to four sum to unity, and unity is a symbol of God, symbols of four objects or its multiples frequently appear in dreams to represent the divine or sacred. Four is simply another way of expressing unity.

As the consort of the Empress, the Emperor also represents fertility. Throughout ancient and medieval times, the ruler was considered the symbol of the vitality of the kingdom. If the ruler became feeble or impotent, he could be killed and replaced.¹⁹

The number four is also a symbol of the union of body and soul.²⁰ Being two,² it intensifies the properties of two: meditation and the linkage between the material and the divine. At the same time, it symbolizes the body because of the connotation of solidity mentioned above. It symbolizes the soul as well because it participates in all of the basic harmonic relationships (1/2, 3/2, 4/3). Under this association, assigning the Papess to number four, in the alternative numbering system, makes sense. She is woman (ergo material) and she is also pope (ergo spiritual).

Five

Five is the sum of three (male) and two (female). Therefore, it symbolizes the union of opposites, the androgyne. The implied association with celibacy should be sufficient to explain why the Pope is assigned number five.

The number five is also used for the Pope because of its religious connotations. The five books of Moses and the five wounds of Christ symbolize the most orthodox aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In fact, they may be taken to summarize its very essence.

Five is a number of marriage since it unites (sums) the male and female (two + three). Plato recommends five as the perfect number of wedding guests.²¹ Notice that some of the altered decks (Table 12-1) place the Lovers as the fifth card.

Six

Six is the first of the perfect numbers, being the sum of its divisors: six = one + two + three. As such it connotes harmony,

completion, and equilibrium. Six is commonly associated with marriage,²² being the product of two and three. As such it connotes love and is assigned to Venus.

The Lovers card is obviously associated with marriage. But the presence of Eros on the card, and the fact that six is a perfect number, carries an additional implication. The Renaissance associated Eros or blind love, with the ecstasy of God-union (See Chapter Four). Eros carries this symbolic meaning because the ecstasy of human physical love is the closest approximation to God-union which the average person experiences. So the combination of marriage, Eros, and the perfect number six, suggests that the card refers to the ecstasy of God-union.

Seven

Seven is the number most commonly used in the Bible to represent perfection. The world is perfect, and was created in seven days. It is especially the number of human perfection, being the combination (sum) of the divine number (three) and the number of materiality (four). Thus, it connotes the perfect man, uniting the divine and the material. This connotation is very plain in the Chariot card.

Seven is also a number of completion and one finds many lists with seven items: there are seven days in the week, seven planets, seven notes in the musical octave, seven colors in the rainbow, Joshua circled Jericho seven times with seven priests blowing on seven horns, seven is the favorite (and most common) dice throw, seven sacraments, seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, seven liberal arts, seven metals in the Greek system. And let us not forget there are three X seven cards in the Tarot.

Seven is a mystical number in Kabbalah because of its frequent use in the Old Testament and because of its importance in the *Sefer Yetzirah*. In addition to the days of the week and the celestial spheres, the *Sefer Yetzirah* points to the seven orifices of man (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and mouth) and divides the Hebrew alphabet into three mother letters, seven doubles and twelve simples. Since the universe is built on the model of the combinations of these letters, the number seven has an important cosmological significance.

The seventh Tarot card, the Chariot, depicts many of the aspects of seven: perfection of man, completion, security. It represents the perfection of the material man and his victory over earthly life.

Eight

Eight is the symbol of perfect balance. It is drawn as two circles, one perfectly balanced atop the other. Because of its shape, it is associated with the two serpents of the caduceus, balancing opposite forces, especially spiritual and temporal forces. Eight is also perfectly balanced because it can be divided equally in halves (four + four) and the halves again divided equally (two + two) and they

in turn (one + one). It can also be represented by even numbers only, two X two.² Because it is the cube of two, it is also a very solid number. Thus, eight is well suited for the Justice card, which represents balance. The card may be interpreted as calling for a better balance of the spiritual and the material.

Nine

Nine is a number of completion, being the last integer of the decimal cycle. The next number, ten = one + zero = one, begins a new series. As a number of completion, nine symbolizes fulfillment and attainment.

Nine is the triple triad, three X three, and therefore signifies a sacred or divine theme. Seven (Chariot) symbolized the completion of the material man, nine symbolizes the completion of the spiritual man. Therefore, the ninth Tarot card is the Hermit, the ascetic, the mystic.²³ Their mean or average, nine + seven = sixteen/two = eight (Justice) symbolizing the balance that is required between them.

Ten

With the number 10 = one + zero = one, we arrive back at unity, and therefore divinity. Ten contains all of the numbers involved in the classical Greek harmonics, ten = one + two + three + four and therefore contains all beauty and order. The geometric representation of this perfect order is the circle, precisely the symbol we see on the tenth Tarot card, the Wheel. The circle also represents the cyclic connotation of ten which restarts the fundamental decimal cycle.

Ten is yet another of the symbols of completion and often appears as the number of items in a list. There were ten commandments, ten Sephiroth and ten Aeons in the Gnostic systems. Therefore, the Wheel also suggests the completion or perfection of man: the material (Chariot) balanced (Justice) with the spiritual (Hermit).

Eleven

The major numerological significance of eleven in the Tarot deck is as the mid-point or pivot between the extremes of one and twenty-one. In card one, the Magician, we see only the male. In card eleven, Fortitude, we see a woman and a lion, i.e., both male and female symbols. In card twenty-one, the World, the male and female are totally synthesized into the androgyne.

The Fortitude card, then, is the midpoint of the deck and the pivotal point in the mystical Journey. It symbolizes a point of balance between the masculine and feminine. It shows a point of balance between the first half of the journey which emphasized the external, the masculine, progress through one's own efforts, and the second half of the journey which will involve the internal, the feminine, passive acceptance of events not due to one's own efforts.

Twelve

Twelve is the final, and most important, of the numbers of completion. Jung maintains that in all cultures, any list tends to grow until it contains twelve items. There are twelve hours in the day, twelve months in the year, twelve gifts of the Holy Ghost, twelve zodiac signs, twelve simple letters in Hebrew, twelve labors of Hercules, twelve notes in the Chromatic scale, twelve apostles, twelve days of Christmas.

Like seven (three + four), it is a combination of the number of divinity (three) and the number of materiality (four), twelve = three X four. Therefore it symbolizes the perfection of the material and spiritual aspects of man. Notice that in most Tarot decks, the legs on the Hanged man form the numeral four, while his arms form a triangle, the geometric representation of three. The Hanged Man represents the transition from the material (four) stages of the journey experienced to this point and the spiritual (three) aspects ahead.

Thirteen

The number thirteen is universally the number of death and disaster. Many large hotels have no thirteenth floor because the prejudice against thirteen is so common even in our society. Dummett¹ points out that all the alternative numbering systems (Table 12-1) are careful to reserve thirteen for the Death card. But remember that the Death card does not imply physical death. We are still in the middle of the pack and it is too soon for death to appear. The Death card implies rather the mystical death or transformation which forms the essential step in any spiritual initiation.²⁵

Twenty-one

The numbers between thirteen and twenty-one are seldom given symbolic meanings. More commonly the integers are summed and the result related to the symbolism of the numbers zero-nine. However, the Tarot card, twenty-one The World, seems to have a clear numerological significance. It is twelve reversed, and the figure on the card in many decks is clearly the Hanged Man reversed. Both figures have their legs crossed in a similar manner. The leg and arm position form a triangle and the numeral four in both cards. The World card is the Hanged Man, the beginning of the initiatory process, reversed and completed. Since it is the product of the number of divinity, three, and the mystical number, seven, the World card symbolizes the completion of the mystical journey, God-union.

Twenty-two

The total number of trumps, counting the unnumbered Fool, is twenty-two. This is a perfect number of completion in Kabbalah since this is the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, from which all things in creation are formed.

This completes our exploration of the symbolism of individual

numbers. Although we did not find much of interest in Greek harmonics (Table 12-4), or in Gematria (Table 12-6), we did find definite correlations between the individual numbers and the Tarot cards. Within the Renaissance milieu of Kabbalah and numerical exegesis, such numerical correspondences were quite meaningful.

Some elements of the symbolism are retained even in the variations given in Table 12-1. Hermes is always given the first place, as the first Magician. The second card is female corresponding to the symbolism of divisiveness and mystery. The tenth card, where we would expect to find the circle, is the Wheel of Fortune in every deck but one. The thirteenth card is always the Death card and is almost always preceded by the Hanged Man, calling for the sacrifice which leads to the mystical death. The consistency with which thirteen was reserved for the Death card, no matter what other alterations were made in the deck, is the strongest internal evidence that the symbolism of numbers was never lost. I am unwilling to accept that thirteen was considered significant and absolutely no other number in the series was given any of the symbolic meanings known to every school boy in the Renaissance.

The number symbolism of individual cards also sheds some light on the original ordering of the deck. There is no specific problem with Papes as either the second or fourth card. However, the symbolism favors the Tarot de Marseilles sequence for the Hermit and Fortitude rather than the alternative (see Table 12-3). This is another, albeit weak, argument that the Tarot de Marseilles retained the original sequencing of the cards.

Numerology in the Overall Structure of the Tarot

In many Renaissance works of art, numerological significance can be found in the structure of the work, even if the symbolism is ignored in the details. We are reminded that Dante's masterpiece has three books, each with thirty-three cantos.

The numerological significance of the Tarot has often been argued from its structure. The possible number of throws with two dice is twenty-one combinations. With three dice it is fifty-six, the number of minor arcana. Also, twenty-one is a triangular number with base six, a perfect number. Fifty-six is a pyramidal number with base twenty-one and the full deck of seventy-eight is a triangular number with base twelve. Thus, numerology seems implicit in the structure of the system.

The Trumps are composed of three sets of seven cards. This observation is key to understanding its numerological structure. If the designers intended to construct a symbolic system to represent all of reality, we would expect to find a system built on the number three. The Greeks unanimously agreed that reality had a triadic structure. We find this in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, the Chaldean Oracles, Iamblicus and Proclus.²⁶ This threefold structure was also

emphasized by Joachim of Flora and Ramon Lull. The Renaissance view of the Cosmos²⁷ was trinitarian: the divine world, the material world and the intermediate world of angels and celestial spheres. Reality was constructed from the model of the Triune God. Thus, finding three sets of seven cards is strong internal evidence for the influence of numerology on the designers and indicates their intent to symbolize all of reality.

The use of 3 X 7 symbols also suggests the mystical theme of the Tarot system. Since three is the divine number and seven is the number of mysticism, the numerology of the cards implies mysticism leading to God-union. The sum of the integers from one to twenty-one is 231 which is 33 X 7 and also 77 X 3. If three and seven have symbolic meaning then 33 and 77 would have these same meanings intensified.

A number of authors have suggested that there is a secret numerological arrangement of the cards which reveals hidden relationships.²⁸ Among others, we find arrangements of five rows with four cards each²⁹ and four rows with five cards each.³⁰ Papus³¹ develops an elaborate interpretation based on overlapping sets of three cards.

All such arrangements are actually examples of Magic Squares, which held great interest in the Renaissance. A magic square is a geometric arrangement of numbers (usually, but not always in a square) such that the sum of the numbers in the rows and columns had special significance. An example is

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

which is called the "Planetary Table".³² The square contains all of the digits from one to nine arranged so the rows and columns all add to fifteen. Such tables were common in talismans, astrological magic and other forms of magic in the Renaissance. They have remained a part of the occult tradition³³ ever since. In an appendix to this study, we will speculate on the possibilities of finding such a magic square for the Tarot Trumps.

Conclusions

The conclusions we can draw about numerology and the Tarot are similar to those we have reached in previous studies. There is ample evidence that numerology was an element of the Renaissance mindset. It was available and formed a part of the education of the Renaissance Christian. There is ample evidence of the use of numerology in Renaissance art and poetry. So there is sufficient reason to believe that some elements of numerology would be incorporated into the design of the cards.

There is little reason to believe that Gematria or Greek harmonics formed the basis around which the deck was designed. On the other hand, there is ample internal evidence for correlations between individual cards and number symbols. There is also reason to believe that the overall structure of the deck has a numerological basis. It seems reasonable to conclude that some elements of numerology are involved in the Tarot, just as there are some elements of virtually every other symbolic system prevalent in the Renaissance. The Tarot is truly a child of its times.

Notes and References

1. Dummett, *The Game of Tarot*, (Duckworth, 1980), pp 387 ff. Dummett provides an extended discussion of the variant orderings of the Tarot trumps. Columns 5-9 of Table 12-1 correspond to his Type A (p 399), Columns 3-4 are his Type B, and Columns 1-2 are his Type C (p 401). Although we arrive at different conclusions after analyzing the orderings, I am indebted to Dummett for the insight that the sequences are very similar if the Virtues are first set aside. This insight was key to my understanding of the underlying order and made it possible to argue that Types A and B were alterations of an original sequence, better reflected in Type C.

2. Butler, *Number Symbolism*, Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1970), p 10.

3. The explanation of Greek mathematics is based on Theon of Smyrna, *Mathematics Useful for Understanding Plato*, (Lawlor, trans., Wizard, 1979). This is a translation of a second century work which remained one of the basic textbooks of mathematics throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

4. The discussion of mathematical intermediaries in Neoplatonic philosophy is taken from Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*, (Nijhoff, the Netherlands, 1975). Numerology is very much in evidence in Plotinus (see especially Enneads V and VI). It is clear that the Neoplatonists adopted almost as much from Pythagoras as they did from Plato. See Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, (Columbia University Press, 1938), pp 38 ff.

5. The discussion of the importance of harmonics is taken from Butler, *op. cit.*

6. We must recall from Chapter Eight that Joachim of Flora placed great reliance on number symbolism. See Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore*, (Oxford, 1972). There are many works on the influence of numerology on Renaissance art and architecture. A particularly interesting one is Huntley, *The Divine Proportion, a Study in Mathematical Beauty*, (Dover, 1970), which is written for the mathematics student.

7. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (Schocken, 1941), p 76.

8. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, (New American Library, 1974), pp 337 ff. It must be remembered that both Greek and Hebrew used the letters of the alphabet for numbers. The use of separate "arabic" numerals is a later development. Thus, a word, i.e., a set of letters could be either a name or a number.

9. Gomez-Wippler, *A Kabbalah for the Modern World*, (Bantam, 1977).

10. King, *The Gnostics and their Remains*, (Wizard, 1973), p 256. The biblical reference is to Genesis 14:14.

11. Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, (Biancolli, trans., Penguin, 1966), p 306. To further establish the importance of numerology in Dante, it is worth noting that Dante mentions Pythagoras eight times in his works. See Hopper, *op. cit.*, p 142.

12. Butler, *op. cit.*, pp 98 ff. Number theory was actively developed in the Renaissance. For example, the Fibonacci Series in which each number is the sum of the preceding 2 numbers (1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21) was now thought to be harmonious. Lodovico Fogliano of Modena (1529) added new harmonics the minor (5/6) and major (4/5) thirds, the minor (5/8) and major (3/5) sixth, the minor (5/12) and major (2/5) tenth and the minor (5/16) and major (3/10) sixth above the octave. I haven't attempted to apply these new harmonics to the Tarot since they were developed too late to have contributed to the designs of the Tarot.

13. Shumaker, *Occult Sciences in the Renaissance*, (University of California Press, 1972), p 17.

14. Hansen, *Science and Magic*, IN Lindberg, *Science in the Middle Ages*, (University of Chicago Press, 1978), p 496.

15. Most of the discussion on symbolism of individual numbers is taken from Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, (Philosophical Library, 1962), and from Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*, (Thames and Hudson, 1978).

16. Butler, *op. cit.*, p 33.

17. In this one case there is no need for a separate discussion for the Empress which appears as the second card in the alternative numbering systems. Almost everything that is said about the Papes applies to the Empress as well.

18. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, (Princeton University Press, 1958), particularly pp 52 ff.

19. Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, (Gaster, ed., Phillips, 1959).

20. Merlan, *op. cit.*, p 52.

21. Plato, *Laws*, Paragraph 775, a-b. IN Hamilton and Cairns (eds.) *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, (Princeton University Press, 1961).

22. Theon of Smyrna, *op. cit.*, p 67. Six is also the marriage number according to Plutarch and Capella (fourth century). See Hopper, *op. cit.*, p 43.

23. The symbolism of the number nine does not appear well suited for the Fortitude card which appears in the ninth position in the alternative numbering system (Table 12-3, column 3). From the viewpoint of the symbolism, the ordering of the Tarot de Marseilles seems more suitable.

24. Fortitude fits as the symbol of the midpoint of the Trumps much better than the Hermit (Table 12-3, column 3). Once again the Tarot de Marseilles ordering appears more closely aligned with numerological symbolism.

25. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, (Harper and Row, 1958).

26. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, (Duckworth, 1972), p 130

27. Heninger, *Cosmographical Glass*, (Huntington Library, 1977), pp 92 ff.

28. Gardner, *Evolution Through the Tarot* (Weiser, 1977).

29. Holy Order of Mans, *Jewels of the Wise* (HOM, 1974).

30. Balin, *The Flight of the Feathered Serpent*, (Wisdom Garden, 1978).

31. Papus, *The Tarot of the Bohemians*, (Wilshire, 1972).

32. Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p 143.

33. For example, see Levi, *Transcendental Magic*, (Weiser, 1979), pp 383 ff.

APPENDIX

Geometric Arrangement of the Tarot

I would like to explore the possibilities of arranging the Trumps into a "Magic Square". As I mentioned in the chapter, the sum of the numbers from one to twenty-one is 231, which is either 33×7 or 77×3 . It should be possible therefore, to arrange the Trumps into three rows of seven cards, such that the rows each sum to seventy-seven and the columns to thirty-three. Although I have never seen a discussion of such an arrangement, it seems a logical route to pursue.

It turns out that there are many ways to fulfill this arrangement. To be exact, there are 2446 different ways which cannot be interchanged simply by switching the ordering of the rows and columns. I have literally examined all of these arrangements and have settled on the following based on the symbolism of the cards themselves:

21	10	8	7	5	14	12
11	4	9	20	13	17	3
1	19	16	6	15	2	18

The first column contains the beginning, middle and end of the deck. They are linked, in many decks by the infinity sign which is above the heads of the figures in one and eleven and forms ribbons on the wreath in twenty-one. There are lions on both the Fortitude and World cards.

The fourth column contains triangular symbols, each having three figures on the card in the same geometric configuration. The fifth column also contains triangular symbols. In addition, the central figures are all "supernatural". The main figures are all carrying some sort of wand (cross, scythe, torch). The Pope and Devil are both giving blessings with the right hand. Notice also that the Lovers card lies next to the Devil. The lovers have turned into the two demons.

The figures in the sixth column are all "Anima" figures. Fourteen and seventeen are linked by the pair of water vessels. The final column places the Hanged Man at the end of the World row, since one is the reversal of the other. The final column connects the up-rights of the Hanged Man, with the pillars on the Empress' throne, with the towers on the Moon card.

The top row contains all but one (Papess) of the double column images. The bottom row has all the symbols containing both a male and a female, and these cards lie side by side (nineteen, sixteen, six, fifteen). Also, all the cards having "scintilla" or sparks in the background are in this bottom row.

Personally, I find this arrangement meaningful. But the relationships are not so compelling that the reader is required to agree with

me. The internal evidence of the cards does not force this arrangement upon us. Nevertheless, the arrangement into columns of thirty-three and rows of seventy-seven has an obvious numerological significance that could well have been meaningful to the Renaissance designers.

Astrology and the Tarot Symbols

In many occult sciences, there is an underlying system of complex philosophical speculation expressed in enigmatic symbolism. Over the centuries, the key to the symbolism is lost and with it, the profound sub-structure of the system. It is forgotten *how* the system explains reality. All that is remembered is *that* it explains reality. The result is a transition from speculation to fortune-telling. What is retained is a distorted understanding that the system somehow explains everything. And if it explains the past and the present, then surely it explains the future as well. The I Ching, the enigmatic philosophical text of China, became a popular method for telling the future.¹ The same fate has befallen the Tarot cards and astrology.

Our interest in astrology, as with the other occult sciences in this series, is not in the methodology of fortune-telling. We will not be casting horoscopes. Our interest is in discovering why anyone would think that the stars could influence our future in the first place.

Our interest is in the fact that astrology was considered the "Queen of the Sciences" both in the ancient world and in the Renaissance. We have found ourselves referring to the celestial spheres and their influence throughout our explorations. We have made numerous references to the astological references in the Tarot symbols. Yet none of these references were to fortune-telling. Astrological symbolism in the Tarot taps a deeper and more esoteric level of belief in astrology. It is this deeper layer which we seek in the present study.

Historical Roots of Astrology

To understand the influence of astrology on the ancient world, we must recognize that the common people were fully occupied with food production. They had neither the background nor the time to contribute creatively to philosophy, theology or science. The nobility had the education but were occupied with administration, intrigue and war. This left the priesthood as the only class with the leisure and education to contribute to the intellectual development of culture. The priesthood developed mathematics and both abstract and observational science. But since their primary concern was for religion, all of these sciences, such as astronomy, became transformed into theology. The sociology of the ancient world caused an association of science and theology that was not severed until the sixteenth century.

But there is a further reason for the association of astronomy and religion: animism. The ancient world believed that the cosmos

was alive. God was everywhere and in all things. In such a pantheism, all things are endowed with a soul. Naturally, the power of a soul, i.e., its nearness to divinity, increased with the awesomeness of its phenomenology. The soul of a thunderstorm was "greater" than the soul of a stone. Therefore, the souls of the mysterious lights in the awesome night sky must be very near to God indeed.

The combination of animism and a scholarly priesthood resulted in deification of the principles discovered by science. Religion developed into worship of the stars, which determined the course of events, and the Sun, which preserved life. The knowledge of nature appeared inseparable from knowledge of God, i.e., science⁵ theology.²

As deified science, astronomy appears in most primitive societies. Religious architecture in Egyptian, Mayan and Celtic cultures is associated with pinpointing phenomena such as equinoxes and solstices. The religious and cultural calendar of peoples living close to the soil is strongly associated with the change of seasons. Therefore, one of the obligations of the priesthood was the proper timing of festivals and sacrifices. Since their worship influenced the smooth functioning of the cosmos, it was critically important that sacrifices be offered at the proper time. Otherwise, the Spring might not appear and the world would be locked in perpetual winter.

Although universal among primitive peoples, astrology, as we know it, probably originated with the Sumerians who gave it to the conquering Babylonians as a science and a religion.³ The oldest written accounts are Babylonian tablets of the seventh century B.C.⁴

The Babylonians emphasized the planetary and stellar spheres surrounding the earth. Each of these was associated with a deity. In this form, the religion was assimilated into the syncretism of late antiquity. Astrology formed a part of the Mystery Religions of Syria, Egypt and Persia, as well as both Hermetism and Gnosticism.³ We have seen in Chapter Five the importance of the celestial spheres in the Gnostic myth.⁵ Plato accepted that each soul was assigned to a particular star at birth.⁶ The Stoic philosophers accepted astrology and Posidonius firmly inserted it into the intellectual culture of Europe.⁷

It was through this late pagan syncretism that astrology was known to the Renaissance. Many of the classical writers accepted and discussed astrology. Among the most important were: Ptolemy, Manilius, Fumicus Maternus, Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Pliny, and, of course, Plato.⁸

In brief, pantheism and animism became codified as a sidereal religion by the scientific priesthood. The awesomeness of the night sky became the celestial deities of the syncretistic religions. And in this form it was transmitted to the Renaissance. If the reader is surprised that primitive pantheism endured from 700 B.C. to 1400 A.D., perhaps he should recall the near universal belief in "Heaven": an abode in God to which the soul passes after death, passing the

planets and stars on the way. If he finds the Gnostic myth "quaint", he should read the popular story of the "Little Prince".⁹ The myth appears to be as fascinating today as it was in the eighth century B.C.

Astrology As Theology and Philosophy

Using this condensed history for orientation, we can begin to understand how gazing at the stars became sidereal religion, and how this stellar theology can be conceived as a logically coherent doctrine. Without this understanding, we will be unable to see why the astrological system of the ancients was adapted by the Renaissance and incorporated into the Tarot.

First, we must consider animism more closely. Living close to nature, man is struck by the power and majesty of the forces about him. Foremost in its majesty and awesomeness is the sky. It is the source of all light and life. The Sun warms and nourishes the earth. The Sun causes the seasons to change and thus governs the rhythm of terrestrial life. The Sun is beautiful, remote, unapproachable, powerful, incorrupt, and pure. It is so powerful that one cannot even gaze upon it directly. Its power seems infinite and tireless. String all these adjectives together and you have the very definition of a god!

If the cold of winter and the heat of summer caused awe and wonder, then the infinite heavens which caused these phenomena must surely be divine. Today it is recognized that the primitive sense of awe and majesty, the sense of the "numinous", is the fundamental source of all religious feelings.¹⁰ To the ancients, all of the forces of nature awakened such awe. Every force of nature was endowed with "spirit", with some aspect of the overall spiritual essence pervading all of nature. In some sense, God was the immutable unity that explained all of the sources of awe in the universe.

Once we grasp that animism is "natural" rather than "ignorant" we can move on to the second element of the story, the scholarly priests. What we need to understand here is that the ancient priest was less a minister of rituals than a mystic. He had received a special call to the mystical vocation and he passed through initiation ceremonies that evoked mystical phenomena. He was accepted by the people as an explicator of mysteries only because he had experienced these mysteries. Our understanding of his mystical mission is largely due to modern scholarship on the "shaman" or priest in primitive societies.¹¹

Because of his own mystical background, the priest must have constantly reinforced animism by affirming that reality was unitary and plurality was, in some sense, illusory. The mystics would have declared it then, just as they have through all ages. For the mystic experience is not a product of the march of civilization. It is a basic instinct of humanity, inherent in every human, though seldom

permitted to express itself. If anything, the advance of civilization tends to surpress mystical experience. Primitive peoples, living closer to the forces of nature, are far more likely to understand that spirit underlies and unites nature. Thus, animism itself is an expression of the mystical instinct.

The natural animism of the people, reinforced by the mystical priesthood, eventually became codified into a religion, a doctrinal system. The numinous feelings associated with viewing the night sky were transformed into the reasoned system of astrology. Such a transformation seems inevitable or at least ubiquitous. The message of Love of Jesus was transformed into the Canon Law and Dogmatic Theology of the Middle Ages. The simple message of Buddha turned into temples and an elaborate philosophy. Such transformations can be found in every expression of man's religious spirit. The resulting "religion" has the advantage of being public and transmittable. But it has the disadvantage of leading man away from the original experience which brought the religious feelings into existence in the first place. Thus, animism and mysticism became codified into the doctrines of astrology and in that form it was easily transported throughout the ancient world. And once the mysticism underlying the dogma was lost, astrology was freed from its roots and wandered far afield, eventually becoming mere fortune-telling.

The Babylonian system was accepted by the ancient world for two reasons. First, it played upon a primitive layer of animism and mysticism universally present in the listener. One can easily imagine the Babylonian priest delivering a sermon, positioned so that his audience could see the awesome display of sunset behind him. The second reason the Babylonian system was accepted into the syncretistic systems has three parts: 1) it was elaborately reasoned out, 2) it was backed by extensive accurate observations and, 3) it showed the best developed mathematical system of the age. Its logical structure was sufficient to endear the system to the minds of the best Greek philosophers.

Greek philosophy always regarded the celestial bodies as divine. NeoPythagoreanism and Neoplatonism insisted on the divine nature of the Sun.¹² Aristotle declared the spectacle of the starry heavens to be one of the causes of religion.¹³ We should also recall that Aristotle placed the astronomicals as intermediates between the divine and the physical (See Chapter Twelve). All of the Greek philosophers mention the influence of the heavens on human life.

But with the codification of the mysticism of the stars into astrology, the original awe was turned to fear. Worship turned into conviction that all events were necessarily determined by the course of the heavens.¹⁴ The roots of this determinism are very simple. The heavens are remote and infinite. The course of the heavenly bodies is immutable and predetermined by precise mathematical laws. Since these heavenly bodies influence the course of human events,

these human occurrences must also be predetermined. The result is a fatalism determined by the stars. It was, of course, this fatalism which encouraged the astrologer to try to read the course of the future in the stars.

Belief in sidereal fatalism was so universal that it has crept into our language. We speak of Martial Arts. We notice that a person has a jovial character. We speak of someone as a lunatic. In these expressions there is a lingering belief in the influence of these celestial bodies.

However, the absolute fatalism of the stars was never really accepted. Man was a dual creature composed of body and soul. The body and its rhythms might be predetermined by stellar influence. But the soul participated directly in divine life at the highest level. Man was himself a creature of the stars. Plotinus was never willing to admit any influence of the stars on the higher aspects of the human soul.¹⁵ In fact, because his soul participated directly in the divine, his mind and will were capable of redirecting astral influences. We will return to this astrological magic in a later section.

Astrology As Science and Mathematics

When Hellenistic astrology was accepted by the Renaissance, it was not merely because of its hierarchy of divinities or its fatalism. These doctrines rode in the wake of the most impressive scientific theory of the age. Basically, the theory held that all parts of the universe were part of an organic whole, the parts interacted and influenced each other by an unceasing exchange of molecules of effluvia.¹⁵ If one accepts that "rays" reach the earth from the Sun and are effective in creating warmth and sustaining life, then more subtle radiation from other celestial bodies must also be admitted as capable of some influence.

Astrology, like our modern physics, presented itself as a system of observation, law and mathematics. It proclaimed the constancy of the laws of nature and sought to understand and apply these natural energies. The task was to observe, express and understand the laws. Then to apply this knowledge to bring the forces of nature under the dominion of man's will.

Astrology was no plaything of the ignorant. It required elaborate calculations and a considerable background in mathematics. It was very much the science of the day. To ignore it in the Hellenistic and Renaissance world would have been as incomprehensible as ignoring atomic physics in the twentieth century.

At its core was a set of careful observations, carried out over many generations. These observations confirmed the regular movement of the heavenly bodies. And the observations were extended to the influence of the heavens on earthly life. The sun causes vegetation to appear, grow and perish. It changes the seasons, bringing animals into reproductive season and into hibernation. The position and phase of the moon changes the tides. The rise of certain

constellations are always accompanied by storms.¹⁷

In simpler times when men lived closer to the movements of nature, such observations were critical for survival. It was not hard for him to see that the Sun affected life on earth. The heavenly bodies moved, and the life of the earth changed. To the common mind, still influenced by animism, this implied Divinity.

To the educated mind, the observation of the stars implied a kind of scientific order or law. The more precise the observation, the more precise the stellar movements appeared. And we must remember that the ancient observations of the night sky were precise indeed. Charts of the constellations and lists of stars of various brightness were used throughout the ancient world and Middle Ages for navigation. Their accuracy was confirmed each time a vessel returned safely to port. Such accuracy was impressive and encouraged acceptance of the science which produced it. Thus the fatalism of the stars was accepted along with the mathematics.

Scarcely anyone drew a distinction between the science of astronomy and the astrological religion which went along with it. The astrologers seemed to confirm the validity of their entire system of thought when they predicted eclipses or calculated the length of the year with incredible accuracy. Even Kepler cast horoscopes¹⁸ showing that he drew no distinction between studying the stars and accepting their influence. The more precisely the movement of the stars was understood, the more rational it seemed to accept them as symbols of the divine order at the foundation of reality. Astrology promised to predict all future events with the same accuracy that it predicted eclipses. If the astrologer could do the one, it seemed logical he could do the other.

Astrology As Magic In The Renaissance

Astrology was a science when it entered the Renaissance. But the science was not clearly distinguished from magic. Magic was simply the practical application of science. The magician was one who understood nature and applied this knowledge.

Everyone who lived in the Renaissance believed in astrology to some extent.¹⁹ Astrological symbolism is universal in Renaissance art and literature.²⁰ The astrologer was an official court officer in Italy in the fourteenth century. Astrology was tightly woven into all of the occult sciences of the period. Certain alchemical operations could only be performed under favorable planetary positions. Kabbalah identified the seven lower Sephiroth with the planetary spheres and the twelve simple letters of the Hebrew alphabet with the constellations. Astrology was the primary science of nature and fit in well with the Renaissance interest in the beauty and power of nature.

However, the Renaissance was also firmly committed to the concept of the dignity of man. Therefore, it could never fully accept the fatalism of the Babylonian religion. However profoundly the material

aspects of man could be influenced by the stars, there remained the innermost divine center which was outside the realm of matter. Ficino in his commentary on Plotinus emphatically maintains that the rational soul of man is free and above the influence of the stars.²¹ Pico della Mirandola was even more radically dedicated to human dignity and freedom than Ficino. Late in his life, largely under the influence of Savonarola, Pico wrote *Disputationes adversus astrologiam* which was published posthumously by his nephew.²² His condemnation was based primarily on the fatalism of the system.

The fatalism of astrology posed a real dilemma for the Renaissance syncretist. He could neither accept the fatalism nor ignore the science. The dilemma was solved through the invention of astrological magic. The acceptance of astrology required a theory that permitted the stars to influence man and yet gave to man the power to counteract that influence and direct his own life. Thus magic was a necessary accompaniment of astrology if the total intellectual system was to remain consistent.

The development of astrological magic can best be presented in the light of its foremost advocate, Marsilio Ficino. Ficino was attracted to astrology by the Hermetic theory of the Microcosm: "As Above, so Below." His letters are full of astrological allusions.²³ He accounted for his friendship with a man named Bembo through their favorable astrological affinities. He obviously knew a great deal about astrology and even cast horoscopes. He warned Sixtus IV of impending disaster in Italy through reading the stars.²⁴

In addition to being a priest, Ficino was also a physician. Like all physicians of the day, he had to understand astrology in order to know the celestial attributes of the medicinal plants.²⁵ In fact, his major work on astrological magic is basically a handbook for the physician.

The first point to be remembered is that man is a dual being. His soul has affinities to the celestial intelligences, just as his body has affinities to matter. A person is aligned with his celestial counterpart by the same principles which govern sympathetic magic. On the material plane, if a mandrake root looks like a little man, medicines made from it will have a powerful effect on man. Like affects like. Similarly, a person who was sluggish and apathetic was under the influence of Saturn, the slowest moving of the planets. Astrological magic is then concerned with discovering and making use of the affinities.

In a certain sense, astrology and sympathetic magic were naturally allied. Sympathetic magic maintained that obscure but subtle influences could be transferred between similar objects. Astrology simply identified the two objects as a planet and a human. Both theories are based on a preconceived notion of the unity of reality, making possible the interaction of all of its parts through exchange of influences.

Astrological magic, as developed by Ficino, is merely a species of sympathetic magic. Ficino was led to this conclusion by his

medical training. He knew there were close correlations between the planetary gods and medicinal plants. If a plant were red and irritating, it obviously was related to Mars. If it were blue and cool, it was under the influence of Venus. This type of sympathetic magic had already led to a great number of correspondences between the celestial intelligences and terrestrial objects. Each planetary sphere was associated with precious stones, odors, colors, foods, plants, clothing, songs, places and innumerable other objects.

Astrological magic, like other forms of sympathetic magic, was simply knowing the correct correspondences and using this knowledge. By making use of these affinities, the magus could influence or redirect stellar forces. If one wished to acquire the attributes of the Sun, one could wear solar colors, and eat solar foods. Talismans could be designed from the proper stones, of the proper color and engraved with the proper symbols. In this way, one could attract the desired planetary influence.

The influence of this astrological magic on the Tarot has always been clear to its interpreters. Over the years, the interpreters have assembled formidable lists of correspondences. I have summarized some of these in Table 13-1. Although these lists include references to numerology and Kabbalah, the basic logic behind them is astrological sympathetic magic.

But the theory of Ficino went well beyond recommendations on using sympathetic objects to attract the influence of the stars. The key to the manipulation of celestial influences was the concept of the "spiritus" which Ficino adapted from the late Latin Stoic writers. In a distorted throw-back to the animism which originally motivated astrology, Ficino postulated a universal cosmic spirit. This spirit was a real substance, flowing through the universe, and providing a mechanism for the transfer of influence.²⁶ This spiritus conveyed astrological influences in exactly the same way as "rays" conveyed light and heat from the sun. This immaterial substance affected matter in exactly the same way as our immaterial soul affects our bodies.²⁷

The same spiritual force which allows our mind and will to inform and direct our material bodies was responsible for conveying the influence of the celestial bodies. To control the influence of the cosmos on human life, therefore, required the manipulation of this spiritus. The whole of magic consists, then, in the control of spiritus, capturing and guarding the influx into matter.²⁸ This is precisely what the Magician of the Tarot deck is shown doing. He is intercepting the spiritus with the uplifted wand and redirecting it into the material objects around him.

This theory of the spiritus was the key factor in reconciling astrology to the Renaissance. Human dignity did not permit the fatalism of Babylonian astrology. It was inconceivable that the destiny of man should be wholly under the control of extrinsic forces. Even though the influence could only affect the material body, still this was unacceptable. The divine man must have total control over

Table 13-1. Magical correspondences with the Tarot symbols.

	Astrology ¹	Hebrew ²	Gods ³	Values ⁴	Colors ⁵
Fool	Pluto	aleph			pale yellow
Magician	Mercury	beth	Hermes	1	yellow
Papess	Virgo	gimel	Hera	2	
Empress	Libra	daleth	Demeter	3	
Emperor	Scorpio	tzaddi	Dionysius	4	scarlet
Pope	Jupiter	vau	Zeus	5	red- orange
Lovers	Venus	zain	Eros	6	orange
Chariot	Sagittarius	cheth	Mars	7	orange- yellow
Justice	Neptune	lamed	Themis	8	green
Hermit	Aquarius	yod	Kronos	9	
Wheel	Uranus	kaph	Midas	10	violet
Force	Neptune	teth	Cyrene	20	yellow
Hanged Man	Pisces	mem	Attis	30	pale blue
Death	Aries	nun	Orpheus	40	greenish- blue
Temperance	Taurus	samekh	Iris	50	blue
Devil	Saturn	ayn	Typhon	60	indigo
Tower	Mars	pe	Babel	70	scarlet
Star	Gemini	he	Anahita	80	violet
Moon	Cancer	qoph	Diana	90	violet-red
Sun	Leo	resh	Shamash	100	
Judgment	Moon	shin		200	scarlet
World	Sun	tau		300	indigo

1. Connolly, *Tarot, a New Handbook for the Apprentice*, (Newcastle, 1979).2. Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, (Weiser, 1969).3. Innes, *The Tarot*, (Arco, 1978).4. Saint-Germain, *Practical Astrology*, (Newcastle, 1973).5. Case, *The Tarot*, (Macoy, 1947).

Table 13-1 (Continued)

	Animals ¹	Weapons ²	Paths ³	Mental Powers ⁴
Fool	eagle	dagger	31	Superconsciousness
Magician	swallow	wand	30	Attention
Papess	dog		28	Memory
Empress	dove		21	Imagination
Emperor	ram	horns	15	Reason
Pope	bull	labor	11	Intuition
Lovers	magpie	tripod	24	Discernment
Chariot	turtle	furnace	25	Receptivity-Will
Justice	elephant	cross	19	Equilibrium
Hermit	eagle	lamp	12	Response
Wheel	eagle	scepter	27	Rotation
Force	lion	discipline	20	Suggestion
Hanged Man	snake	cup	18	Reversal
Death	beetle	pain	17	Transformation
Temperance	centaur	arrow	16	Verification
Devil	goat	lamp	23	Mirth
Tower	bear	sword	22	Awakening
Star	peacock	censer	13	Revelation
Moon	fish	mirror	32	Organization
Sun	lion	lamen	26	Regeneration
Judgment	lion	wand	14	Realization
World	crocodile	sickle	29	Cosmic Consciousness

1. Cavendish, *The Tarot*, (Harper and Row, 1975).

2. Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, (Weiser, 1969).

3. Gray, *The Talking Tree*, (Weiser, 1977).

4. Holy Order of Mans, *Jewels of the Wise*, (HOM, 1974).

Table 13-1 (Continued)

	Plants ¹	Stones ²	Perfume ²	Drug ²
Fool	aspen	Topaz	Galbanum	Peppermint
Magician	vervain	Opal	Mastic	
Papess	almond	Moonstone	Camphor	Juniper
Empress	moonwort	Emerald	Myrtle	
Emperor	tiger lily	Crystal	Galbanum	
Pope	mallow	Topaz	Storax	Sugar Cane
Lovers	orchid	Tourmaline	Wormwood	Ergot
Chariot	lotus	Amber	Onycha	Watercress
Justice	aloe	Emerald	Galbanum	Tobacco
Hermit	narcissus	Peridot	Narcissus	Anaphrodisiacs
Wheel	oak	Amethyst	Saffron	Cocaine
Force	sunflower	Cat's Eye	Olibanum	Carminatives
Hanged Man	water plants	Beryl	Myrrh	Cascara
Death	cactus	Snakestone	Opopanax	
Temperance	rush	Jacinth	Aloes	
Devil	thistle	Black diamond	Musk	
Tower	absinthe	Ruby	Pepper	
Star	coconut	Ruby	Dragon Blood	
Moon	opium	Chrysolight	Ambergris	Narcotics
Sun	laurel	Heliotrope	Cinnamon	Alcohol
Judgment	poppy	Opal	Olibanum	
World	ash	Onyx	Frankincense	

1. Cavendish, *The Tarot*, (Harper and Row, 1975).2. Sturzaker, *Kabbalistic Aphorisms*, (Theosophical Publishing House, 1971).

himself. Through the manipulation of the spiritus, the magician could redirect the astral influences and use them to reshape the course of events determined by the stars. Through astrological magic, man was given the ability to escape the celestial destiny and shape his own future.

Astrological Magic and Images

The astrological magician had available to him a number of methods for redirecting the spiritus. One approach used sympathetic magic as we have mentioned above. But none of the methods were more effective than the manipulation and contemplation of images. This methodology is particularly interesting to us because of the potential implication for the Tarot images.

The subject of enigmatic imagery has crossed our path a number of times in earlier studies and will return again in the next chapter on the Art of Memory. We have seen that enigmatic images were considered to be the appropriate method for conveying secret knowledge (Chapter Four). Through sympathetic magic, operations performed on an image caused an immediate effect on the object or person represented. Any ancient image captured, in some way, the divine idea represented.

The effectiveness of an image required the "drawing down" of divine influences from the World of Ideas. This is the same process as "earthing the force" in Kabbalah (See Chapter Ten). This ability was considered the premiere accomplishment of Egyptian magic. The Asclepius, an Hermetic work, describes how the Egyptian priests drew the forces of the cosmos into their statues. As a result, the image took on real power. It was not merely an idol, it was a magical object, capable of effective action in the world of matter. Remember that this operation was described in a work of Hermes, the greatest of the Gentile prophets. If God had revealed to Hermes the coming of His Son, then surely Hermes could be relied upon not to lead the pious astray. The practice of astral magic was considered a devout practice, as well as a magical operation. Thus, the Renaissance had it on the highest of authority that the most important element of ancient magic was the en-powering and manipulation of images.

The skillful manipulation of images became the foremost method for applying Ficino's theory. The enigmatic image took on a new significance as the tool of astrological magic. It is quite likely that this use of images was known to the Tarot designers, as to all educated men in the Renaissance.

Many interpreters have insisted that the Tarot is fundamentally a set of such astrological figures or talismans. Cards from the fifteenth century often show astrologers on the star or moon cards. The Fool image may be related to the image of the decade of March.²⁹ We mentioned in Chapter Nine that images of the Tarot can

be found illustrating the astrological houses in a woodcut of 1515. A fifteenth century manuscript of a sermon maintains that the planets are represented in the Tarot.³⁰

Modern interpreters have unanimously agreed that the Tarot images correspond to the planets and zodiacal signs (Table 13-2). However, the Table shows that the correspondences are not so clear as to force a uniform interpretation. Even a superficial examination will convince the reader that many of the correspondences are

Table 13-2. Attribution of the Trumps to planets and zodiacal signs.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Sun	21	0		19	19	1	21	21
Mercury	17	10		1	14	5	1	1
Venus	3	3		3	17	3	6	6
Moon	2	14		2	18	2	20	20
Mars	11	7		16	15	7	16	16
Jupiter	4	4		10	20	4	5	5
Saturn	20	12		21	13	13	15	15
Aries	5	5	5	4	1	12	13	13
Taurus	6	2	1	5	2	17	14	14
Gemini	7	15	19	6	3	19	17	17
Cancer	8	18	18	7	4	18	18	18
Leo	9	19	11	11	5	11	19	19
Virgo	10	9	3	9	6	21	2	2
Libra	12	8	8	8	7	8	3	3
Scorpio	14	16	16	13	8	20	4	4
Sagittarius	15	6	6	14	9	6	7	7
Capricorn	16	13	10	15	10	10		8
Aquarius	18	17	14	17	11	14	9	9
Pisces	19	20	17	18	12	9		12

A. Saint-Germain *Practical Astrology*, (Newcastle, 1973). Also, Papus, *Tarot of the Bohemians*, (Wilshire, 1972). Also Etteilla as given in Kaplan *The Encyclopedia of the Tarot*, (US Games, 1978), p 4 except the Fool is given to the sun.

B. Basilide, Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p 4.

C. In Papus, *op. cit.*, p 249, attributed to Wirth.

D. Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, (Weiser, 1974). Also Case, *The Tarot*, (Macoy, 1947). Also Wang, *An Introduction to the Golden Dawn Tarot*, (Weiser, 1978). Also Holy Order of Mans, *Jewels of the Wise*, (HOM, 1974).

E. Thierens, *Astrology and the Tarot*, (Newcastle, 1975).

F. Maxwell, *The Tarot*, (Weiser, 1977).

G. Connolly, *Tarot, a new Handbook for the Apprentice*, (Newcastle, 1979).

H. Zain, *The Sacred Tarot*, (Church of Light, 1969).

“forced” and artificial. It is somewhat amusing that only one of the seven lists attributes the Moon card to the moon! If there were correspondences surely some uniformity would be forced on the interpreters by the card images themselves.

But this should not be taken to mean that no correspondences whatsoever can be justified. I have assembled in Table 13-3 some correlations which appear to be justifiable. There is ample reason to believe that the planetary gods are present. Mars is often pictured in his Chariot and Hermes⁵ Mercury was the first magician. Jupiter could easily be represented by the Emperor and is substituted for the Pope card in Swiss decks. Saturn is equivalent to Kronos who is represented in the Hermit card. Venus could be represented by the Empress card or by the Lovers which resembles the Tarocchi of Mantegna print of Venus. And there can be no argument that the Sun and Moon are represented in the deck.

Table 13-3 provides a less convincing case for correspondences with the zodiacal signs. There are simply no images of the ram (Aries) or fish (Pisces). It might be argued that some correspondences seem natural, such as Libra with Justice, and Leo with Fortitude. But, as a whole, the correlations are not convincing.

There are other reasons to believe that the zodiacal signs would not be expected to be represented in the Tarot. The astrological concerns voiced by Ficino and other Renaissance writers focus on the planetary gods. Discussions of the influence of the zodiac are far less in evidence. It appears, therefore, that the stellar constellations are grouped, as they often are in Renaissance writings, into the “sphere of fixed stars” and represented by a single card, the Star.

We can also argue against the zodiacal attributions from our study of Numerology (see Chapter Twelve). There are seven planetary spheres and we have seen the importance of the number seven in the structure of the Tarot. But if we add the twelve signs, we have a total of nineteen astrological symbols. The number nineteen does not fit the series of twenty-one cards in any simple way. As a result, attempts such as Tables 13-2 and 13-3 must leave some cards unmentioned and unexplained.

Perhaps the clearest argument against the zodiacal attributions comes from examination of the minchiate deck. A variation on the Tarot, the minchiate decks contain all of the Tarot images plus additional cards representing the signs of the zodiac. If the constellations were represented in the original symbols, there would have been no reason to add these cards.

The designers of the Tarot were more likely to be concerned with representing the various “sub-stellar” intelligences mentioned in the Hermetic writings. We presented the possible correlations in Table 6-1. They may also have been more interested in representing the astrological “houses”. In Chapter Nine we looked at a 1515 woodcut in which the houses resembled the Tarot images. The second house showed a miser behind a table (Magician). The fourth was

Table 13-3. A reasonable attribution of the Trumps, consistent with their basic symbolism

Sun	19. Sun
Mercury	1. Magician (Magician is Hermes = Mercury)
Venus	3. Empress (Empress can be a variety of goddesses, including Venus, Demeter, Cybele, etc.)
	6. Lovers (Lovers card resembles the Venus print of the Tarocchi of Mantegna)
Moon	18. Moon
Mars	7. Chariot (Obviously the Triumph of Mars)
Jupiter	4. Emperor (King of the gods)
	5. Pope (Jupiter is substituted for the Pope in Swiss decks)
Saturn	9. Hermit (Saturn ⁵ Kronos)
Neptune	15. Devil (King of the Underworld)
Aries	?
Taurus	5. Pope (Bull was symbol of pope in Renaissance)
Gemini	19. Sun (two children could be twins)
Cancer	18. Moon (lobster/crab shown on card)
Leo	11. Force (Lion prominent on card)
Virgo	2. Papess
	17. Star
Libra	8. Justice (Scales)
Scorpio	13. Death (The Sting of Death ???)
Sagittarius	6. Lovers (Has arrow on card)
	16. Tower (Old Italian name of card is Arrow or Thunderbolt)
Capricorn	15. Devil (Devil is often a goat in Middle Ages)
Aquarius	14. Temperance
	17. Star (Both figures are carrying water)
Pisces	?

a hunchbacked monk with a cane (Hermit). The fifth showed two children at play (Sun). The seventh showed a man between two lovers (Lovers). The eighth was the symbol of Death, complete with skeleton and scythe. The ninth showed the Pope, the tenth the Emperor with orb and scepter and the eleventh the Wheel of Fortune.

It appears that we can argue consistently that the Tarot images represent planetary deities and other astrological entities such as the houses and sub-stellar intelligences. Certainly, by this point in our studies, the reader has seen sufficient evidence to indicate that the Tarot card represent the intermediaries stretching between God and man. The cards represent Aristotle's "astronomicals". And if the reader is convinced that some correlations exist between the cards and astrological symbols, then we can return to the Renaissance and its manipulation of images in astrological magic.

Having in his possession celestial images, such as the Tarot, the Magus took on a tremendous obligation. The cosmic forces involved were far too powerful to be utilized for personal ends. Kabbalah maintained that "earthing the force" could lead to death or insanity. In the Renaissance, the manipulation of the images and the consequent control of the astral influences was nothing less than the effort to keep the world in order.³¹ By the very arrangement of the images, cosmic forces were affected, producing either war or peace, order or chaos. It is little wonder that the Renaissance Magus took the design and manipulation of his images seriously, almost as a religious duty.

Because of the close connection between the images and the astral forces, the celestial influences themselves were capable of arranging the symbols. This is the Renaissance/Hermetic basis for the belief that the "spread" or arrangement of the Tarot cards is most important. When the Tarot began to be used for fortune-telling, sometime in the eighteenth century, this concept of astrological magic was distorted into a method of divining the future.

The reader must not impose his or her own will on the cards. Rather, the spiritus must be allowed to arrange the cards, operating through the reader as through a medium. The reader, as a composite creature of body and soul, must allow the divine influences to operate through the soul, aligning the cards according to the prevailing influences. In this way, the prevailing influences can be read back out of the cards and interpreted. The reader and subject simply allow the cards to display the astral influences being attracted by the presence of the subject.

Thus, the cards could be used for telling fortunes because they were representations of the powerful cosmic intelligences. This provides the cards with a direct connection to the "spiritus" and permits the stellar influences currently operating to be read. But this is a much distorted impression of the Renaissance concept of astrological images. The higher application of the images always involved the active manipulation of the images. Instead of permitting

the spiritus to arrange the cards, the powerful Magus would have the courage to arrange the cards himself. In this way, the stellar influences themselves could be altered and the course of future events changed.

Conclusions

The circle of our story is now complete, pantheism and animism transformed into fortune-telling. The originally profound mystical concept turned into a game. And both astrology and the Tarot suffered the same transmutation.

Because of the prevalence of astrological magic in the Renaissance and because of the presence of astrological symbols in the Tarot cards, we can argue that the original Tarot may have been associated with astrological magic. We can certainly maintain that the designers could have been conscious of the possibilities of manipulating their symbols. We will probably never know the extent to which they intended the Tarot symbols to be used for this purpose.

But while the Tarot contains astrological symbols such as Star, Moon and Sun, and may contain symbols of the planets, we cannot jump to the conclusion that the Tarot is simply an astrological system. Tables 13-2 and 13-3 argue against this conclusion. Rather, we find once again that astrology was simply one of many sources synthesized into the Tarot. Once again, we confirm our hypothesis that the Tarot is a syncretistic system of symbols which attempted to synthesize all of the wisdom known in the Renaissance.

Notes and References

1. *I Ching* (Legge, trans., Bantam, 1969).
2. Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Dover, 1956), p 33. [hereafter Cumont, *OR*].
3. Angus, *The Mystery Religions* (Dover, 1975) p 165.
4. Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (University of California Press, 1972) p 11. Although the seventh century is the oldest authentic discussion of astrology, the concepts go back much further. Certainly the idea that the soul will pass through the seven spheres after death is older. In Egyptian burial texts of 1400 B.C. we find discussion of the magic formulae needed to pass the guardians of seven gates which the soul must pass through (Papyrus of Ani, Chapter 147, see Budge, *The Book of the Dead* (Bell, 1960) pp 402 ff.). We know that the Babylonians and Egyptians were in contact by 1500 B.C. (Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* [Dover, 1960] pp 42 f.). So it is possible that some aspects of the Babylonian concept of the afterlife are actually Egyptian in origin.
5. Cumont, *OR*, p 177.
6. Plato, *Timaeus*, Paragraph 41.
7. Angus, *op. cit.*, p 166.
8. Allen, *The Star-Crossed Renaissance* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973) p 47. Recall from Chapter Five that Mani, the originator of Manichaeism was a strong believer in astrology.
9. Antoine de Saint Exupery, *The Little Prince* (Harbrace, 1970).
10. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford University Press, 1923).
11. Eliade, *Shamanism* (Princeton University Press, 1972).
12. Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (Dover, 1956) p 184.
13. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religions* (Beacon, 1958) p 255.
14. Cumont, *OR*, p 128.
15. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (Duckworth, 1972) p 71.
16. Cumont, *OR*, 171.
17. *Ibid.*, pp 166 ff.
18. Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p 54.
19. Allen, *op. cit.*, p viii. This belief in astrology was not limited to the ignorant and superstitious. Even high Churchmen and theologians, such as Cardinal d'Ailly (c1350-c1420) at the University of Paris espoused astrology (Thorndike, *The Place of Magic in the Intellectual History of Europe* (AMS, 1967) pp 101 ff.).
20. It is clear that much of Renaissance art was based on astrological knowledge of the times. See Heninger, *Touches of Sweet Harmony* (Huntington Library, 1974) p 13. Given the influence of Dante's masterpiece on the Renaissance, it is also important to point out that he accepted the influence of the stars on man. See Thorndike, *op. cit.*, p 12.
21. Allen, *op. cit.*, p 7.
22. *Ibid.*, p 20.
23. *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (Volume 1, Shephard-Walwyn, 1975).
24. Allen, *op. cit.*, pp 12 f. Most of the references to Ficino's belief in astrology are drawn from these pages.
25. The intimate relationship between astrology and medicine is discussed in Thorndike, *op. cit.*, pp 132 ff.
26. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) p 12.
27. Shumaker, *op. cit.*, p 7.
28. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1964) p 52.
29. Chastel, *The Flowering of the Italian Renaissance* (Odysset, 1965) figure 142.
30. Dummett, *The Game of Tarot* (Duckworth, 1980) p 98. As an interesting sidelight on the importance of astrological symbols in the Renaissance, Lorenzo de' Medici had seven planets personified in a triumphal procession at Florence (Thorndike, *op. cit.*, p 435).
31. Yates, *op. cit.*, p 65.

The Art of Memory

This is possibly the most complex study of the book. A great number of the lines of thought introduced earlier converge here. Individual threads of evidence begin to weave a complicated pattern. As a result, this study on the Art of Memory will serve nicely as a synopsis and summary.

It may strike the reader as strange that all these lines of thought converge around the Art of Memory. There would appear to be little to associate memorizing with the enigmatic imagery of the Tarot. And yet a number of the more insightful of modern Tarot interpreters have already suggested a connection.¹

The Art of Memory is largely a lost art today. But it was an indispensable skill in earlier times. Before the advent of printing, the cultivation of memory was an important ingredient in the background of every educated man. Elaborate systems had been developed to enhance the ability to memorize and recall. These systems were known as artificial memory.

To understand the Art of Memory as practiced in the Renaissance, we must once again begin our story in the ancient world. We must notice the art being picked up and developed by Hellenistic Neoplatonists. We must watch this practical art crossing paths with Hermetic and astrological magic, Christian meditation and Kabbalah. We must watch with amazement as artificial memory, like Alchemy, is transformed from memorizing to a methodology of mysticism. In the end, we will find that artificial memory is an important key to understanding the Tarot and the motivations of the designers.

Ancient and Medieval Sources For Artificial Memory

The art of memory was considered an essential part of Rhetoric in classical times. It was a way of memorizing all the points in a speech, or keeping a great number of facts at one's disposal in debate. The art was invented by the Greeks, probably by Simonides (c 566-468 BC).² From the Greek, the art was transferred to the Romans. Cicero, the epitome of Roman oratory, wrote about it in detail as did a number of other Latin authors.

The most explicit ancient work on the subject was Quintilian's *Institutio Oratio*.³ The method he described might be called architectural. He suggested that one form permanent mental images of a building, possibly one's home. The mental image must be formed extremely vividly in the imagination. In applying the method, one walks mentally through the house, room by room. Each room

contains a set of objects or furniture which are recalled by the imagination. Each of these objects represents a pigeonhole and one item on the list to be memorized is associated with the object. Recalling the list is then a matter of walking back through the house, noticing the objects in each room and recalling the item associated with each.

The clear discussions offered by Quintilian, however, were not known in the Renaissance. They relied almost exclusively on an anonymous treatise, *Ad Herennium*.⁴ This text admits a more general class of memory images which could include anything that is striking or dramatic, and therefore easily remembered. The figures should be personal, active, unusually dressed and either very beautiful or very ugly. It helps if the images have some strong emotional color to them. This way they may be recalled easily in great detail. The images should not be borrowed from someone else. They should be developed by each individual and based on what he feels strongly about and finds particularly vivid and memorable. It seems almost too obvious to state that these are the type of images which appear on the Tarot cards. The Tarot images continue to strike the imagination of the viewer hundreds of years after their design.

The astute reader will already have noticed a possible connection between the striking emotional images of the last paragraph and the findings of modern depth psychology. Vivid, emotionally colored images which arise spontaneously in the imagination are psychic projections, "the stuff dreams are made of". In many forms of psychoanalysis, the disturbed patient is encouraged to allow such imagery to come to the surface and be expressed, verbally or in drawings. This is found to have a therapeutic effect of bringing repressed emotions and desires to the surface where they can be handled intelligently and safely. The imagery has the effect of releasing the tremendous psychic force built up around the repressions. This release of pent-up energy can have a very healthful effect.

Thus, through the Memory Art, the educated Renaissance man was encouraged to engage in a form of repression release. Since the artificial memory was considered an essential skill, a great many men were exposed to this experience. Some, at least, must have noticed the unexpectedly healthy response. Some would have noticed that the manipulation of these emotionally powerful archetypal images was accompanied by a tremendous release of psychic pressure. We must remember that these images were not simply to be set in imagination once. The whole complex of images employed by the individual was to be revisited frequently to keep the images vivid. When the resultant images had real personal meaning and were emotionally powerful, the individual was actually being encouraged to perform a type of meditation. When the individual recognized the healthful results of these meditations, he was naturally led to think of this operation as both magical and mystical. It clearly had an effect on the practitioner's consciousness.

The therapeutic and natural effects of the constant manipulation of archetypal memory images was key to the transformation of the memory arts into mysticism and magic. And this transformation is key to our understanding of the Tarot. The Tarot is clearly composed of dream-like archetypal images. No other explanation could justify the continued fascination which the images have had over the past 400 years. It is clear from modern depth psychology that meditation on such imagery has a therapeutic effect. This natural response to the Tarot symbols is as clear in the twentieth century as it must have been in fifteenth century Italy.

The natural connection between memory images and meditation helps account for the interest of the Hellenistic Neoplatonists in artificial memory. Both Iamblicus and Porphyry discuss them.⁵ These writers, considered important mystagogues in the Renaissance, already intuited the mystical significance of the memory images, i.e., their psychological effect on the practitioner's consciousness. The interest of the ancient Neoplatonists draws in another of the threads of our story. We have maintained throughout these studies that the Tarot images are a Neoplatonic symbolic system. Now we discover that archetypal images were associated with Neoplatonism from Hellenistic times, through the medium of the memory arts. This thread also indicates that the Tarot designers would have thought of their symbolic system not only as an overview of reality but as a system of mystical meditation.

The magical implications of archetypal imagery were not lost with the disintegration of the Hellenistic culture. Throughout the Middle Ages, the *Ars Notoria* was a common practice of the magician.⁶ This art involved the use of strange images, called *Notae*. These images were fixed in the imagination and meditated upon while chanting incantations.⁷ Such a ritualization could only serve to intensify and amplify the natural psychological effects. This art was considered a part of magic and it is not clear that the magicians were aware of the connection between this art and artificial memory. But it obviously evolved from the Art of Memory through the early Hermetic magicians.

The *Notae* were even more clearly archetypal than the normal imagery of the memory arts. They were primarily astrological symbols such as images for the planetary gods. This immediately reminds us of Marsilio Ficino and his astrological magic which involved the manipulation of images for the planets (See Chapter Thirteen). And yet another thread is drawn into the cloth of our understanding. Magic, astrology and meditation on archetypal imagery such as we find in the Tarot were all closely connected in the Renaissance mindset. The connection between the Tarot imagery and the *Notae* could hardly have escaped the notice of the designers. But the *Notae* were images designed for meditation and magical operations. Therefore, the Tarot images, containing the imagery of the planetary gods, could hardly be a set of arbitrary symbols.

The magical use of the Notae in the Middle Ages did not replace the Memory Arts, it developed as a parallel practice. The use of the artificial memory continued to form an integral part of education in rhetoric throughout the Middle Ages. Albertus Magnus considered it important. Thomas Aquinas both condemned the magical uses of memory images and encouraged their proper application. Aquinas himself was renowned for his memory. He encouraged meditation on the memory images as a method for memorizing points of theology or philosophy. The practice of the artificial memory was raised by Aquinas to the status of a devotional exercise: practicing the memory arts was actively practicing Prudence.⁸

It is perhaps circumstantial but I cannot resist the temptation to draw a connection between this attitude of Aquinas and the observation that the Moral Virtue of Prudence is missing from the Tarot symbols. The other three moral virtues are represented: Justice, Fortitude and Temperance. I cannot resist suggesting that Prudence is missing in order to convey a secret message. There is no need for a separate symbol for Prudence. Meditation on the other images is itself an expression of Prudence. The implied message would be that the symbolic system is specifically designed as a meditation tool.

Even if this is fanciful, there remains the fact that Aquinas regarded the practice of memory arts as a devotional exercise. This leads us to examine the other forms of meditation practiced by the orthodox Christian mystics during the Middle Ages. Systematic meditation as we know it today was not practiced in Medieval times. The recommended approach was a type of "spiritual reading" with obvious connections to the memory arts. The aspirant would read the Bible until a passage struck him as particularly meaningful. He was then to reflect upon this meaning at length. The most widespread variant on this general practice was to concentrate on passages of the Gospels. The aspirant was to choose a particular event in the Life of Christ. He was then to totally immerse himself in the event. He was to picture every detail of the background, sights, smells, sounds, etc. Thus, just as in the Memory Arts, he was to use his imagination to meditate upon the imagery of the event. The imagery was not necessarily archetypal but events such as the Nativity, Crucifixion and Transfiguration obviously had strong emotional colorings.

The prevalence of imagery in Christian meditation exercises is clear in the earliest efforts to produce a more systematic meditation. One of the earliest works, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius,⁹ presents a method clearly developed around symbolism and imaginative images. As a preliminary exercise to meditation, the aspirant is to "compose the place". This exercise involves the imagination in vividly picturing the sights, sounds, smells and tastes that are associated with the meditation subject. Many of the subjects are drawn from the Life of Christ. But other subjects clearly

show the use of archetypal imagery. For example; the aspirant is asked to picture Christ as the great king at the head of the army of angels and the Devil as the evil general with his following of demons.

Thus, as the Memory Arts entered the Renaissance, they carried a great deal of strange baggage. The very practice of the art produced a healthful effect on one's consciousness. This meditation was recommended by the Greeks, by Romans of the stature of Cicero, by the Neoplatonic mystagogues, and even by Aquinas. Similar practices were encouraged by the magician and by the orthodox mystics. Here was an ancient, magical, mystical, orthodox, devotional practice. What Renaissance Magus, worthy of the name, could ignore that!!

Ramon Lull

But we are far from done. There are many more threads to be woven into the cloth. We must give special attention to that strange and misunderstood mystic, Ramon Lull. Lull was born in Majorca in 1232 and martyred in 1316, attempting to convert Moslems with a meditation art that combined the Art of Memory with Kabbalah.¹⁰ Lull lived his life in Spain and was among the first of the Christian Kabbalists. Through him, the thread of Kabbalah will be drawn into our picture.

Lull's worldview was Neoplatonic. There was a hierarchy of reality stretching between the infinite God, through the spiritual and celestial spheres to man. I will assume that the reader, by this time, can already detect the threads of Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, Astrology and Dualism which are implicit in this worldview.

Because this worldview matched the Neoplatonic concepts of the Renaissance, Lull's concepts were widely known and respected by Renaissance scholars such as Ficino and Pico. In fact, his version of the meditative art probably had more impact on the Renaissance than it did during his own century, when it was suspected of heresy.

The art of Lull does not depend directly on the rhetorical art of memory. It was a strange system based on Jewish letter and number mysticism. It involved images of revolving concentric circles of letters and names of God. This calls to mind the letter mysticism of Abulafia (See Chapter Ten). The incorporation of Kabbalistic letter mysticism into his system is quite deliberate. He hoped to use his Art to convert both Jews and Moslems.

What we must recall at this point is that the letter mysticism of Abulafia was a methodology for altering the state of consciousness and inducing a mystical trance. This was accomplished by a type of "free association" of letters into spontaneous words. One word was allowed to flow into another without interference by the conscious mind. This is yet another technique used by modern depth

psychology and psychoanalysis.

One numerological element of Lull's system which might have influenced the Tarot was the prevalence of the number three. Lull believed that the Trinity was the foundation of reality and that trinitarian structure could be found pervading all aspects of creation. This trinitarian structure is evident in the special attention paid to the three highest Sephiroth in the Kabbalistic system: Kether, Binah, Chokmah. And this same trinitarian structure is found in the Tarot trumps.

Lull's system was an "ars ascendendi et descendendi",¹¹ an art which described both the descent from God and the ascent to God. This dual aspect is always associated with the system of Neoplatonic intermediaries and is important for our understanding of the Tarot. By "descent" is meant that the intermediaries in the system explained how the action of God could descend to influence material creation. By "ascent" is meant that these same steps or intermediaries could be followed by the mystic back to God, back to the experience of God-union. Both of these aspects, philosophy and mysticism, are inherent in every Neoplatonic symbolic system, including the Tarot. And we must examine both aspects if we are to understand the Renaissance attitude toward symbolic systems.

Any Neoplatonic hierarchical system is a philosophical picture of reality. This is true of Lullism, the Kabbalistic Sephiroth and the Tarot. Lull was very conscious of this aspect of his system. He considered his meditation art as a method of logical investigation of creation. Because the elements of the system represented the intermediaries between God and man, meditation and manipulation of these symbols would reveal profound truths about reality. Lull believed he had discovered such a truth in the Trinitarian structure of creation. So although Lullism is closely related to the other versions of the Memory Art, it introduces a new element. In contemplating the symbols, new truth would emerge. It is not at all fanciful to maintain that the Tarot designers, developing a Neoplatonic symbolic system, and well aware of Lull's concepts, would have believed that contemplation and manipulation of the Tarot symbols would result in discovery of profound truths about reality. This is an important thread which we must not neglect to weave tightly into our story.

The use of symbols in Lullism is rather different from the manipulation of magical images in the *Ars Notoria*, or astrological magic. For Lull, the images do not contain a cosmic "spiritus" drawn down upon them by magical action. In fact, his system is based on combinations of letters and geometric figures. His symbols are totally abstract. They are not pictures in any sense of that word. The incorporation of Jewish letter mysticism into his memory art caused a significant change in the mystical system. It was not the manipulation of imaginative archetypal images that is important here but

the manipulation of letters and numbers. No wonder the later occultists were obsessed with identifying the Tarot symbols with the Hebrew letters!

For Lull, it is not the manipulation of the symbols which causes some magical action on another object. It is the act of contemplating the symbols itself which is the effective act. This act of contemplation leads the mind to God. This leads us to the second aspect of his system, the "ascent".

We have already seen in our study of Kabbalah (Chapter Ten) how the system of intermediaries, the Sephiroth, became the steps of the mystical ascent to God-union. Isaac the Blind identified the Sephiroth with the Attributes of God and maintained that meditation on these attributes would lead one closer and closer to God. As the Sephiroth became "higher", that is, more abstract and unitary, they came closer and closer to describing the true nature of the Godhead. By systematic meditation on the Sephiroth from lowest to highest, the mystic was led along this same path of ascent to God-union, to an experience of God as He is in Himself. This use of meditation on the Neoplatonic intermediaries as a systematic mystical method can be traced all the way back to Dionysius (See Chapter Seven). Dionysius held that one could only know God through his emanations, his attributes. Through knowledge of these attributes, man was led back to God. Even for Plotinus, one was led through the lower Aesthetic Virtues to the Rational Virtues and thence to God (See Chapter Four). Even in Gnosticism, the aspirant ascends back through the same celestial spheres that he passed in his descent (See Chapter Five). Thus, the idea that the mystic ascends along the same intermediate steps which were used to explain creation, is a pervading element of all Gnostic and Neoplatonic philosophical systems. Whenever one can detect a hierarchy of intermediaries stretching from God to man, as we certainly can in the Tarot, then one can immediately conclude that one has found both a philosophical picture of reality and also a system of mysticism. The two go hand in hand. I hope the reader can appreciate how the texture of our cloth is thickening and taking shape as more and more threads of evidence converge to the same conclusions.

For Lull, then, the memory arts were both a philosophical system and a method of mysticism. Of course, he did not totally discount the potential magical applications of his system. The manipulation of the symbols could be used to produce other effects and Lull speaks of an astral medicine that seems related to Hermetic magic. But the most important aspect of the art was leading the mind to God. Even when Lull deals explicitly with the rules for artificial memory, his emphasis is on contemplation. He stresses the repetitive use of the imagination to examine and recall the images of the Art.¹⁴ He emphasizes this aspect of the Art, almost to the exclusion of other portions, ignoring most of the methods presented in the memory treatises.

In the Neoplatonic mindset of the Renaissance, Lullism took a place of honor.¹⁵ The Renaissance magus saw in it the same converging threads which we have found. Lullism came recommended by its Neoplatonic core and by its relationship to artificial memory, Kabbalah and mysticism. But it was the general concepts of Lull that were incorporated into the Renaissance worldview, not the details of his complex and difficult system of letters and numbers. With so many lines of evidence converging on them, the Renaissance scholars viewed Lullism as simply another confirming thread in the cloth. They probably found the details of his system as unintelligible as modern interpreters do. They did not make use of the details, but of the spirit. This spirit can be summarized as meditation upon a set of symbols which represent steps in a ladder leading the mind to God. It is this spirit we see reflected in the Tarot.

The Art of Memory and Instructional Imagery

As we enter the milieu of the Renaissance, we find the ancient and medieval art of memory much respected and practiced. Petrarch, the most influential humanist of the early Renaissance, was an authority in the art.¹⁶ Pico della Mirandola was celebrated for his prodigious memory.¹⁷ The Renaissance saw a great proliferation of textbooks which developed complex methods for the art.

However, it must be remembered that the rules in these textbooks specified that one should use images that were striking and emotionally meaningful to the individual. Thus, the memory texts only rarely illustrate specific images. This fact argues against the Tarot being simply a memory aid and nothing else. All of the texts recommend against the production of any single series of images to serve the general public. They would be striking to the designer but would not be as effective as images the user devised for himself.

So the Art of Memory enters into the design of the Tarot in an indirect manner, as a method of meditation, a spiritual exercise. It was other influences in the Renaissance which caused the production of specific images. Probably the most important of these influences was Hermetism. We have seen (Chapter Six) that the discovery of a manuscript called the Hieroglyphica caused a resurgence of interest in enigmatic symbols. We have also seen the influence of the *Ars Notoria* which encouraged Ficino to develop his astrological magic (Chapter Thirteen) using contemplation and manipulation of astrological symbols. It is likely, therefore, that Hermetism caused the production of a specific set of images in the Tarot, while Art of Memory encouraged their application to meditation and mysticism.

Simply because the memory treatises recommended against a single set of images does not mean that memory images had no influence on the art of the period. It has already been pointed out¹⁸ that the famous early murals of Giotto, painted about 1306, show

a strong relationship to memory images recommended by the medieval theologians. In turn, it can be argued that these murals influenced the Tarot designers, along with numerous other art masterpieces of the period (See Chapter Nine).

Another important influence encouraging the production of a specific set of images was the use of imagery for instruction. In the Renaissance, as today, a picture was worth a thousand words. Therefore, the use of images for instructional purposes was common. Aside from the rare illustrations in memory texts¹⁹ a large number of illustrations were in vogue for teaching. These pictures tend to be related to the Memory Arts because the imagery is deliberately striking, enigmatic and archetypal so that it will be memorable. The connection is very strong in some cases. One might find an illustration of an angel with the twelve gifts of the Holy Ghost associated with the articles of clothing and objects held in the hands.

Another thread is woven into our understanding when we appreciate that teachers have always known that turning lessons into games was an effective heuristic device. Thus, the instructional imagery was often incorporated into a card game! There existed in the Renaissance examples of Memory Images, enigmatic, archetypal and memorable worked into the context of games of cards. Although the evidence is circumstantial, it is too striking to ignore. It is clear that the Tarot was designed for the purpose of providing an instructional tool for the common man which would teach him much about the Neoplatonic concept of reality and simultaneously encourage contemplation of the symbols with the natural consequences we have pointed out above.

Examples of other uses of instructional cards are the game of Apostles and Our Lord and the illustrations of the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*.²⁰ In 1393, Morelli²¹ mentions a card game used by children for instructional purposes. It is clear that teaching became an important function of cards.²² It is difficult to imagine that the Tarot designers ignored these other Renaissance examples. It seems very clear to me that the Tarot images were placed in the medium of a card game to disseminate a specific Neoplatonic and mystical worldview.

Thus, it was largely through the medium of instruction that the memory images came to be reduced to concrete form. The adaptation of the Art of Memory to philosophical, moral and spiritual instruction is not hard to understand when we remember that Thomas Aquinas recommended precisely this application. What better way to teach a moral principle than to imprint a memory image that depicts this principle? This accounts for many of the emblemata, enigmatic and allegorical images which appear throughout the Renaissance. Through a motivation to teach, memory images were made concrete even though this is specifically recommended against in contemporary memory treatises.

Classification of the Sciences

The classification of the sciences was yet another thread that converged on the Renaissance Tarot designers. Medieval and Renaissance scholars were encyclopedists. They did not specialize in particular fields but were expected to master all that was known. Many scholars were concerned with reducing the complexity of human knowledge into a hierarchy, based on some logical system.²³ This hierarchy would provide a framework to organize the great variety of details accumulated during their studies. This classification was particularly important for education. The systematic teaching of all human knowledge required a schema that would permit orderly presentation and avoid redundancy. The development of such a classification was well recommended, having been attempted by Plato, Aristotle, Varro (116-27 BC), Boethius (475-524), Isidore of Seville (seventh century) and Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141).²⁴

Throughout the Middle Ages, the classification of the sciences was associated with Neoplatonism and mysticism. Not only was the classification an organization of all that was known, but was, by that very fact, a hierarchy of the Aesthetic and Rational Virtues of Plotinus. Since the exercise of the intellect and the practice of the Moral virtues were important steps in the return of the mind to God, the classification of the sciences became an exercise in moral theology. Much as Aquinas and the scholastics had laid out the Cardinal, Moral and Theological virtues and related these to the spiritual progression of the soul, so the Neoplatonist outlined the pathway of purification and return to God as a hierarchy of the classes of knowledge to be mastered. And because it was associated with Neoplatonism and mysticism, a concern for the classification of sciences was often associated with heresy (See Chapter Eight). For the mystic, it became important not only to group the fields of knowledge into categories but to prioritize this list, to suggest which forms of knowledge were "higher". The Higher forms of knowledge would then be most important for leading the scholar to God through the Rational Virtues. A classification of the sciences, then, would become an outline of the steps in a mystical ascent to God.

Tarocchi of Mantegna

With this background, we are in a position to approach the set of images known as the Tarocchi of Mantegna. Known from a set of prints (not cards) that may antedate the Tarot, these images form a typical symbolic ladder from miserable man (print one) to God, the First Cause (print 50).²⁵ Although the precise purpose of the images is not known, they appear to be a classification of the sciences, organized in a set of memory images for instructional purposes and at some point may actually have been available on cards and used

as a game.²⁶ In fact, some interpreters maintain that they should be thought of as a real game of cards.²⁷

Thus, we find in these images, once attributed to Andrea Mantegna, then to Baccio Baldini and recently to Parrasio Michele of Ferrara,²⁸ the perfect example of the evolution of memory images into concrete form for the purpose of instruction and classification of the sciences. Many of the same lines of thought which appear to converge on the Tarot also converge on these prints. The suggestion that they were used for an instructional game completes the connection. The Mantegna prints and the Tarot must be thought of as two species belonging to the same genus. In examining the prints we will see many of the same characteristics which we have maintained for the Tarot throughout this series of studies. They demonstrate that our conjectures were not imaginary and that the Renaissance was indeed concerned to produce Neoplatonic symbolic systems in the form of a set of images.

We can plainly see from Table 14-1 that the prints were an attempt to organize the conditions of man, his arts, sciences, virtue and cosmology into a single sequence of images. There are a number of points in the sequence which reflect the mindset of the Renaissance. The Pope (ten) is given a higher place than the King (eight) or Emperor (nine) just as in the Tarot. There appears to be a Neoplatonic influence since the arts (Aesthetic Virtues) are given a lower place than the sciences (Rational Virtues). The orthodox nature of the sequence is clear since the Rational Virtues are subordinated to the virtues. Notice that all four moral virtues and the theological virtues are included, following the classical scholastic format. The sciences are ranked from the use of words (21-23) to the use of abstract symbols (24-25), use of the imagination (26-27) to the use of the intellect (28-30). Notice that Music is placed higher than geometry and arithmetic (See Chapter Twelve) and that astrology is given a very high place, above mere philosophy. The Neoplatonic and Gnostic influences are suggested by the high rank given to the spheres, the cosmological principles linking the world of matter to God. Notice that seven planetary spheres are presented separately, while the stars are lumped into the Eighth sphere, the sphere of fixed stars. Just as in the Tarot, the zodiacal signs are not shown as separate symbols.

The Tarot and the Mantegna prints share many features. Both are hierarchical and therefore Neoplatonic, stretching from Beggar to God. Both show Gnostic and astrological influences in the high place assigned to the planetary spheres. Both show mystical influences. In the case of the prints, the mystical intent is less emphatic but still clear from the sequential arrangement of Aesthetic, Rational, Moral, and Theological virtues, followed by the spheres and the symbols of God.

Both the prints and the Tarot have an underlying numerical structure. In the case of the prints, there are five sets of ten

Table 14-1. The Tarocchi of Mantegna.

Natural Man	The Arts	The Humanities	Cosmos & Virtues	The Spheres
1. Misero (Beggar)	11. Calliope	21. Grammatica	31. Iliaco	41. Luna
2. Fameio (Servant)	12. Urania	22. Loica	32. Chronico	42. Mercurio
3. Artixan	13. Tersicore	23. Rhetorica	33. Cosimo (World)	43. Venus
4. Mechante	14. Erato	24. Geometria	34. Temperancia	44. Sol
5. Zintilomo (Gentleman)	15. Polimnia	25. Arithmeticha	35. Prudentia	45. Marte (Mars)
6. Chavalier (Knight)	16. Thalia	26. Musicha	36. Foreza (Fortitude)	46. Jupiter
7. Doxe (Duke)	17. Melpomene	27. Poesia	37. Justicia	47. Saturno
8. Re (King)	18. Euterpe	28. Filosofia	38. Charita	48. Octava Sphera (Stars)
9. Imperator	19. Clio	29. Astrologia	39. Speranza	49. Primo Mobile (First Mover)
10. Papa	20. Apollo	30. Theologia	40. Fede (Faith)	50. Prima Causa (First Cause)

symbols. Ten is the number of completion in the decimal system. Five is two (division, matter) plus three (divine) showing that the system links the material and the divine (See Chapter Twelve).

There are also similarities in the ordering of the symbols, though the sequence is in no sense identical. Table 14-2 indicates the number of the print corresponding to each Tarot symbol. The conditions of man (prints 1-10) also occur early in the Tarot sequence. The Cosmos and Virtues (31-40) appear next, though not in the same order. The symbols of the spheres are grouped near the end of the Tarot sequence, though some symbols are scattered throughout. In spite of the differences the same hierarchical theme seems to underlie both systems.

It is equally instructive to examine the differences between the Mantegna prints and the Tarot. The first and most obvious difference is that the Mantegna prints are a classification of the sciences and little more.²⁹ This is indicated by the emphasis on the Arts and Humanities (11-30) which are ignored in the Tarot. The Mantegna prints combine memory arts + instructional imagery + classification of the sciences. There is some interest in the mystical indicated by the sequencing of symbols, but the emphasis is not carried nearly as far as in the Tarot. This is most clearly indicated by the *missing* symbols in the prints. The darkest psychological symbols, Hanged Man, Death, Devil, and Tower are missing from the prints. This shows that the prints are much less concerned with the mystical ascent than is the Tarot.

The second major difference between the symbolic systems is the absence of some of the heretical elements in the Tarot. The Emperor and Pope are not paired with their female counterparts. Thus, one of the primary indicators of Dualism is missing. The Magician is illustrated as artisan, not magician. Thus, the obvious connection to Hermetism is lost in the prints. The symbol of the Last Judgment is missing from the Mantegna system. We saw in Chapter Twelve that this card caused great embarrassment to the orthodox who often rearranged the deck to avoid its heretical implication.

Thus, by comparing the symbolic systems, we can see that the Tarocchi of Mantegna is an orthodox system, emphasizing the classification of the sciences over the mystical journey. The difference in emphasis is the difference between an intellectual exercise and a mystical adventure. They share many orthodox concepts but the Tarot has added elements of magic, mysticism and the heretical. The Tarot is a product of the same interest in the memory arts and instructional imagery, but it has an additional message to offer.

The major point we wish to take away from our consideration of the Tarocchi of Mantegna is the relationship of the Tarot to the memory art + instructional imagery + classification of the sciences. The resemblances between the Tarot and the Mantegna prints clearly establish the Tarot within this same tradition. Although the Tarot has modified the system and added additional elements

Table 14-2. The Tarot symbols correlated with the symbols of the Mantegna prints.

	Natural Man	Cosmos and Virtues	The Spheres
Fool	1. Misero		
Magician	3. Artixan		42. Mercurio
Papess			
Empress			
Emperor	9. Imperator		46. Jupiter
Pope	10. Papa		
Lovers			43. Venus
Chariot			45. Marte
Justice		37. Justicia	
Hermit		32. Chronico	47. Saturno
Wheel		32. Chronico	
Force		36. Foreza	
Hanged Man			
Death			
Temperance		34. Temperancia	
Devil			
Tower			
Star			48. Octava Sphera
Moon			41. Luna
Sun			44. Sol
Judgment			
World			49. Primo Mobile

of symbolism, the overall resemblances reinforce our argument that the Tarot was a child of its times.

Other Symbolic Systems in the Renaissance

The Tarocchi of Mantegna is not the only example of a Renaissance symbolic system which evolved from the environment of the memory arts. We must very briefly look at two other examples as further reinforcement of our argument that the Tarot was only one of many examples.

The most famous example of the Renaissance effort to capture all of reality into a single artistic medium is the Divine Comedy of Dante. Clearly, Dante's journey from the depths of Hell to the heights of heaven and the experience of God-union is an effort to encapsulate all of reality. Like the Tarot, the mode of expression involves vivid imagery. Dante's effort is another attempt to capture the abstract in imagery, with the archetypal symbolism of the

memory arts as a bridge.

A second example of this genre is the memory theater of Giulio Camillo.³⁰ This structure, which was never actually built, was an amphitheater with seven tiers of seats. On each tier and at various points throughout the structure was a system of symbolic statuary. When one stood upon the stage and looked out at the theater, the statuary formed a complete system of symbols, a visualization of all human knowledge and all stages of reality. Camillo's theater was another effort, in a very different medium, to translate the Neoplatonic hierarchy into a system of imagery related to the memory arts.

We saw in Chapter Nine the proclivity of the Renaissance to Cosmography, the illustration of all of reality in a single image.³¹ The images synthesize elements from cosmology, classification of the sciences, alchemy, Lullism, etc. We also saw that others, such as Bouelles (1512), constructed "Chains of Being" ranging from man to God. These Chains were Neoplatonic symbolic systems similar in intent to the Tarocchi of Mantegna and the Tarot.

When we find a wooden amphitheater, an epic poem, a set of prints and other artistic media all trying to accomplish the same task, it is less difficult to imagine a set of playing cards directed at this purpose. The desire to encapsulate reality into a set of images was an infatuation of the Renaissance. Its art, poetry and architecture all reflect this interest. The existence of these other efforts, using other artistic media, reinforces our contention that the Tarot is simply another example of this same trend.

To this point in our study, we have seen the Art of Memory transformed into a method of mysticism and instruction. We have seen the use of concrete images, recommended against in the memory treatises, but encouraged by the *Ars Notaria* and the desire to teach. We must now examine more closely the magical and meditative aspects of the memory arts, archetypal imagery and the Tarot.

The Hermetic Art of Memory

Through Lullism and the *Ars Notaria*, the art of memory had already begun the transformation to magic and mysticism. This transformation was completed by contact with Renaissance Neoplatonism with its Hermetic core.³² The memory images now had little to do with memorization. By imprinting the special symbols of the art in his imagination and entering into close mental rapport with them, the Renaissance magus believed he could transform his own consciousness and become identified with the *Anima Mundi*.³³ He could use a set of hierarchical symbols, like the Tarot, to ascend to God.

At the first level, the images would serve as a meditation device, a Yantra. Familiar to eastern religions, a yantra is a symbolic image which helps to focus the attention and consciousness. The object is stared at with a fixed gaze and helps to occupy the mind so

it does not wander. This is not a foreign concept to Christianity, which had always used religious art for this purpose: the crucifix, stations of the cross or even the image of the fish.³⁴

Beyond simply focusing the attention, however, there is a second level of significance in the symbols themselves. By using magical archetypal imagery, imagery associated with the hierarchy of reality, the Magus acquires universal knowledge and a magical personality, attuned to the powers of the cosmos.³⁵ Rather than calling down the spiritus into the physical image as in the use of talismans, the Magus calls down the power into the image within himself. Holding the "talisman" in imagination attuned him to the Divine Idea or astral influence involved. Instead of conferring the power on an object, he assumed the power within his own personality.

When the imagery is not only archetypal but represents the divine organization of the universe, a third level enters. The art of memory now reproduces the divine organization in memory and taps the powers of the universe.³⁶ By manipulating talismanic figures, the magician could influence the stellar effects on matter. By performing the operations within his mind, he eliminated the need for physical talismans. Since man's soul was already spiritual and therefore associated with the World of Ideas, no calling down of power was even required. Instead, the Magus *elevated himself*. Rather than calling down the spiritus, he called himself up to the stars. This, of course, was a higher concept of magical images. It was the operation within the mind of Magus that mattered. The art of memory had become a magical and religious technique that joined the soul of man to the Anima Mundi.³⁷

If the images represented the steps between man and God, then man could pass along these steps by focusing on each image in turn. Thus, it was important that the planetary spheres, the basic steps between the world of matter and the Anima Mundi, be represented in the Tarot. The roadmap must be accurate if one is not to be led astray.

The critical final step in the logic comes when the Magus can envision all of the symbols simultaneously in imagination. Holding in imagination a series of images which represents all of reality will bring all of reality into his mind. The simultaneous experience of all of reality is precisely the experience of the One. The images finally merge and fuse into the vision of the One.³⁸

If the set of images being used for meditation represent all the Ideas of the cosmos, then holding all of them simultaneously in the mind unites the Magus with all of the cosmic powers. The critical concept is clearly stated in the Divine Pyramander, attributed to Hermes Trismagistus. If you can embrace all things at once in thought, including time, place, substance, quantity, quality, you can understand God!³⁹

By looking at these successively deeper layers of implication,

we can see that the Neoplatonists transformed the art of memory to a concentration exercise, to a magical operation, to a mystical technique, by grasping all reality through symbols, one attuned oneself to the totality of the Divine Ideas and prepared oneself for the final ecstatic union with God.

This set of ideas is not unique to the Italian Renaissance. It is also clearly present in Tibetan Buddhism. Here, the student is presented with complex meditation images called Mandalas. Within the Tibetan philosophica system, these yantras represent the elements of reality. The student uses the Yantra to focus attention, to study the individual symbols and eventually to fuse all of the images into an act of union with reality, Nirvana.⁴⁰ The Tibetan yantra closest to the Renaissance concent is the "Wheel of Life" which shows heaven and hell, men, animals, ghosts, all integrated into a total symbol of reality.⁴¹

It is because of the Hermetic approach to mysticism, that we are able to argue that the Tarot is not only a Neoplatonic system of philosophy but a mystical system as well. Dante or Camillo may have captured all of the Divine Ideas in their works. But their works were too complex to be grasped all at once in the mind. The fifty symbols of the Tarocchi of Mantegna or even the thirty-five symbols of the Minchiate are clearly philosophical classifications of the sciences, but have simply too many images. Fifty symbols cannot be imagined all at once. The Tarot designers chose a smaller number, twenty-two, as the perfect compromise between representing all of reality and being able to hold the images simultaneously in mind.

Giordano Bruno

In a sense our story is complete. We have seen the art of memory transformed from memorization to instruction, to images of the Neoplatonic hierarchies, to magical operations, to mystical technique. The circumstantial evidence is simply too overwhelming to dismiss. The Tarot belongs to this development. It is a Neoplatonic concept of the hierarchical structure of reality and simultaneously an Hermetic approach to mystical union with God. We have argued this case through hundreds of pages of text, and seen most of the divergent lines of evidence converge on the art of memory.

Given the material we have assembled, there would seem to be little need to move ahead into the sixteenth century to clarify our understanding of the Tarot. However, the mystical application of the memory arts, already evident in the fifteenth century and the Tarot, really reached their culmination a hundred years later. Following this trend to its logical conclusion will have the effect of confirming our conclusions, and demonstrating that the mysticism of the Tarot was not an isolated and temporary phenomenon.

Giordano Bruno was born in 1528 and educated as a Dominican

Friar. He was expelled from the Ordar because of his strange ideas. He traveled extensively through Europe in an effort to promulgate these ideas. It is with Bruno that we reach the summit of the development of the art of memory. It is interesting to note that the invention of printing and its wide impact on the Renaissance was rapidly making the original purposes of the artificial memory obsolete. The art of memory had completed its transformation.

Bruno developed the art of memory into a truly religious system. He combined Lullism, the art of memory, magic talismans and Neoplatonic cosmology into a system of religious exercises. His religion of Love and Magic is based on the power of imagination through which the Magus attempts to hold within himself the universe in all its changing aspects. The images pass in elaborate associative order, reflecting the continuous movements of the heavens. The images are charged with emotion. Through the meditation the Magus attempts to unify the great Monas of the world within the mind of man.⁴²

The art of memory became a system of Hermetic meditation. By engraving the archetypal celestial images in memory, Bruno hoped to achieve the true "Egyptian" experience, to become the Aion.⁴³ Bruno clearly identified the exercise of the images with the mystical experience and union with God, the Anima Mundi.

Thus, with Bruno, the art of memory reached its culmination. It had become a system of religion. Not exactly orthodox since Bruno was eventually condemned as a heretic, but an occult religious system nonetheless. He emphasized the contemplation of archetypal images, particularly in complex combinations. This was a mystical exercise designed to hold all of the Divine Ideas within the mind. When the totality of the Divine Ideas were simultaneously before the mind, the Rational Virtues of Plotinus were perfected and only the step of ecstasy remained between the Magus and God. At the core of the Tarot then, is a type of mystical exercise derived from the complex web of Neoplatonic and magical influences operating in the Renaissance and reaching their zenith in Giordano Bruno. From our analysis it seems reasonable to conclude that the Tarot was, at its base, such a meditation device.

This meditative application was still evident centuries later in the Order of the Golden Dawn. We know from their documents⁴⁴ that the Tarot cards were introduced to initiates at various stages of their ceremonies. Meditation and contemplation of the images was actively recommended. At the highest level, the images of the Tarot were considered "targets" to guide astral projection.⁴⁵ When the adept engaged in astral projection, he held a particular Tarot image firmly in mind. During the experience, the image would guide the adept and permit him to aim at a specific "station". When he arrived at the intended point, the Tarot image would appear before him. The Tarot images were guideposts which he followed one after the other. In this way he avoided aimless wandering and

assured a continuously ascending journey.

Conclusions

Our journey has been a long and complex one. We have searched much of the ancient world and the Renaissance in an effort to reconstruct the mindset of the designers of the Tarot. We found much that was strange and foreign to the twentieth century. But we have established that these strange concepts were at the forefront of intellectual activity at the time the Tarot was designed.

It is particularly strange that the journey should end with the Art of Memory. But like other "occult" sciences we have seen a translation into a system of meditation and mysticism. The same fate befell both astrology and alchemy. In the case of artificial memory, the transformation caused archetypal images such as the Tarot, arranged in hierarchical structures from man to God, to be used as magical meditation devices.

The evidence I have accumulated on the symbolism of the Tarot and the motivations for its design has now all been assembled. The occultist will find many of his beliefs confirmed, but not in the way he might have expected. If the skeptic is still unable to see that nature of the Tarot as a symbolic system, then I must leave him with his narrow viewpoint. I have no further arguments to present. Nothing remains but a final study which will attempt to assemble all of the complex symbolic references we have discovered into a final explanation of the individual Tarot symbols.

Notes and References

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APPENDIX

In Chapters Three and Twelve we suggested that both the fifteenth century hand-painted decks and the later Italian decks such as the Florentine Minchiate represented alterations and Christianizations of the original Tarot designs. The Tarocchi of Mantegna prints, presented in this study, lend further evidence to this conjecture. However, this topic would have distracted from the important lines of thought developed around the memory arts. Therefore, this analysis is presented in an appendix.

There are two points which must be borne in mind. First, the Mantegna prints and the Tarot were obviously related symbolic systems. Both represented efforts to encapsulate reality into a set of images. Second, when we compared these systems in this study, we found that the Mantegna prints were orthodox and relatively non-mystical. Even if one could condemn the Tarot as heretical and occult, such a judgment would not apply to the Mantegna images.

Therefore, I would like to contend that when the hand painted decks were designed for the Visconti-Sforza family and again when the Florentines designed the Minchiate deck they fell back on the Tarocchi of Mantegna (or its predecessor) as a way to "deflate" the darker aspects of the Tarot symbolism.

Throughout I will assume that the Tarocchi of Mantegna were available to the designers of the altered decks. This is quite reasonable, but not clearly demonstrable for the Visconti-Sforza deck. The hand-painted deck was probably done about 1450 while the oldest prints we have are from about 1470. However, there is nothing militating against an earlier date of origin for the prints.

Let us begin with a consideration of the Visconti-Sforza deck. The contention is that when the deck was painted for the duke and his family, imagery from the Mantegna system was substituted for the crude and objectionable imagery of the woodblock-printed popular decks. Thus, in addition to removing objectionable imagery, the artist also chose a more elegant artistic model than the crudely made printed decks.

If we assume that this is the order in which things happened, then the considerable resemblances between the Visconti-Sforza deck and the Mantegna images are easily explained. The Misero and the Fool cards are similar. Both figures carry a stick and are bare-legged. The Imperator sits upon a throne with scepter and orb and even has his legs crossed. The Papa sits on a throne, holding keys. The images of Justicia and Temperancia are virtually identical to the corresponding Tarot cards.

The similarity in style between the Tarocchi and the Visconti-Sforza decks goes beyond the images on the cards. The background of rolling hills, with scattered tufts of grass in the foreground and the suggestion of a cliff edge are found in the Tarocchi prints (11-19) and in the Visconti-Sforza cards (14-19). The background of trees

with vertical stems is found in the Iliaco and Cosimo as well as in the Tarot Papess, Emperor, Chariot, Hermit and Judgment.

These similarities are too great to be easily dismissed. They indicate an intimate relationship between the two sets of images. I would contend that this relationship exists because the Tarot painter copied imagery from the Mantegna system.

Of course, from our point of view, the interest focuses on places where the Tarot designer modified the designs of the hand-printed decks. The first modification was on the Star card. Here the artist shows a cloaked young lady looking up at a star in the upper right hand corner of the card. This is precisely the image on the Mantegna print of Speranza, Hope. Astrology was turned into a Theological virtue. Of course, the symbolism really doesn't fit since the other virtues, Faith and Charity, are absent and the Star still is associated with the Moon and Sun cards.

A second alteration was made by changing the symbolism of the World card. Instead of showing a figure surmounting the world with four figures in the corner, a symbol associated with the Anima Mundi, the artist shows two Putti holding up a globe. Decker (*Playing Card IX (1): 28*) has pointed out that the image is a combination of the Mantegna Iliaco and Cosimo (prints 31 and 33). The result is that the highest card of the Tarot deck is identified with cosmological principles that lie below the virtues and spheres. The Anima Mundi the creative principle of God (i.e., Prima Mobile) has been reduced to secondary cosmological principles. This alteration changes the symbolic meaning of the entire sequence. The symbols of the deck no longer lead logically to God-union as the highest goal of man.

The deck was further de-mystified by omitting the Devil and Tower cards. Once again the artist may have followed the lead of the Tarocchi of Mantegna which also omits these psychological symbols. In all three of the alterations we have pointed out, the artist of the Visconti-Sforza deck appears to have used the Tarocchi of Mantegna as a model. And in all three instances he used his model to modify the deck and remove the obvious mystical and occult tendencies.

A similar reversion to the Tarocchi of Mantegna was also used to demystify the Florentine minchiate deck. The minchiate deck accomplished its Christianization first by omitting the Papess and Empress cards with their implications of heretical dualism. In addition, it added a number of symbols to the Tarot series. Some, such as the four elements and the twelve zodiacal signs, have the effect of making the system closer to a classification of the sciences. But Table 14-3 shows that images were reinserted from the Mantegna system or a close relative. The representation of the early cards as the hierarchy of the conditions of man is made plainer by the addition of the Duke and King cards from the Mantegna system. A Christianization is achieved by picking up the fourth Moral virtue,

Prudence and all three Theological virtues.

The net effect of these additions was to make the minchiate less a mystical system based on heretical dualism and much more an orthodox classification of the sciences which follows the Tarocchi of Mantegna more closely. Thus, it appears that in both the hand-painted decks and in the minchiate, the symbolism of the Mantegna series was superimposed on the parallel Tarot symbols. The effect was to "deflate" the heretical, mystical and unorthodox aspects of the Tarot.

Table 14-3. A comparison of the imagery of the Tarocchi of Mantegna, The Tarot and the Florentine Minchiate.

Mantegna Prints	Tarot	Minchiate
1. Misero	Fool	Fool
3. Artixan	(Magician)	Juggler
7. Doxe		Duke
8. Re		King
9. Emperor	(Emperor)	(Emperor)
10. Papa	Pope	
32. Chronico	Wheel	Wheel
34. Temperancia	Temperance	Temperance
35. Prudence		Prudence
36. Foreza	Force	Force
37. Justicia	Justice	Justice
38. Charita		Charity
39. Speranza		Hope
40. Fede		Faith
41. Luna	Moon	Moon
42. Mercurio	(Magician)	
43. Venus	Lovers	Lovers
44. Sol	Sun	Sun
45. Marte	Chariot	Chariot
46. Jupiter	(Emperor)	(Emperor)
47. Saturno	Hermit	Hermit
48. Octava Sphera	Star	Star
49. Primo Mobile	World	World

A Final Interpretation of the Cards

An Analysis of the Tarot Symbols

In contrast with the complexity of the last few studies, this final chapter is quite simple. We will assemble all of the bits and pieces of interpretation into a final analysis of the individual cards. The intention is to view the cards the way the original designers might have. To do this, we will place ourselves into the mindset of the Renaissance and suggest what the Renaissance Magus might have seen in the cards.

We have now come full circle. We will be analyzing the cards one by one, just as we did in the first chapter of the book. But the approach will now be more systematic. We will restrict ourselves to interpretations which might have occurred to the educated Renaissance man. Thus, we must view the symbols as allegories with the many layers of wisdom which the Renaissance attempted to synthesize into one view of reality.

Throughout this presentation, we will be analyzing the images on a very intellectual plane, on the level of the philosophical systems of the Renaissance. However, it must be remembered that the Tarot has meaning at a more fundamental level. They are archetypal symbols as well as expressions of a philosophy. Therefore, the cards may convey special meanings to the individual reader. We will not deal with this level of interpretation here, but the reader can be assured that such meaning was very much within the intent of the designers. The personal meaning of the symbols can never be analyzed completely, and that too was very much the intent of the designers. The reader should feel free to find his own meaning in the cards and realize that the designers fully desired him to find those meanings.

Fool

First and foremost, the Fool is the base of the Neoplatonic hierarchy: man in his misery, without spiritual meaning. He is Adam Cadmon, primal man, the end product of creation, having acquired his human traits from the Archons as he passed through the spheres. The position of the Fool is clear from the next few cards which depict much higher conditions of man, just as the Tarocchi of Mantegna.

The Fool is the symbol of the spirit trapped in matter. He is the dumb ox, the unawakened man. He is oblivious of the dangers around him and of the warnings of the animal because he does not realize his true situation. He is still asleep, he has not yet received

the Gnosis. He is unaware of the magical powers which can be acquired by seeking the keys in nature. Because of his ignorance of natural magic, he is still subject to the fatalism of the stars.

To the Renaissance Magus, the Fool must have represented the mass of men, the foolish crowd going from nowhere to nowhere; unenlightened and unaware of the divine heights his human nature is capable of. He is mankind unaware of his mission to reunite his spark with the Godhead. When this card is represented as the beggar, it surely represents the divine sunk to the lowest possible depths of the darkness of matter; man sunk to the level of an animal. And yet, there is hope in the card because despair is the motivation which causes the Fool to begin the journey, to begin the search for wisdom. The beggar is thus the symbol of the divine spark beginning to become aware. The divine nature senses a vague dissatisfaction with material existence and begins to search.

The card is assigned the number Zero, which is no number at all. Zero is prior to number, therefore, it is not yet defined or limited. He is nothing yet. The zero is shaped like an egg and is the symbol of pure potency, the possibilities inherent in every man. If he is the Fool, he is also Prime Matter, the crude material which begins the Alchemical work. As prime matter, he is not yet shaped and can still be formed into anything, even the gold of the philosophers. The Fool is the unshaped that will be shaped by the journey.

As either Jester or Beggar, the Fool is a traveler, carrying a walking stick and beginning the long journey to God. He is the symbol of the beginning of the journey and the traveler as well. The Fool is the traveler who will climb the Kabbalistic Tree of Life and be transformed by the journey.

The Fool is not only the naive beginner, the unredeemed man before initiation into the Mysteries. He is also the redeemed initiate, returning to society to save others. He is the Fool for Christ and might have suggested the Cathari Perfect to Italians of the fifteenth century. The poverty of the Fool is voluntary. His lack of concern for the world about him is not due to ignorance but to wisdom. He realizes his divine nature and is unconcerned about the material universe. Mere material dangers mean little now that he has achieved God-union. His ragged clothes and hobo sack are not all he possesses, they are all he needs. He is now the Green Man of the Spring Festivals, the April Fool, the reborn man of Spring. He symbolizes all rebirth and revitalization. He is the mystery god, Mithras, who is often accompanied by a small dog. The word fool comes from the Latin "follis", a bag of wind. But this cannot be taken simply in its negative connotation. It also means that he is air, ethereal matter, floating in a world of his own.

As the court jester, the Fool also suggests an enlightened fool. The jester alone was allowed to satirize because he was not ambitious. He could see the intrigues because he was not involved. He

was not involved; not in the court, not in ambition, not even in material life. He is the carefree traveler through life, the ideal of Christianity and certainly the ideal of dualist Christianity. He is both mankind at the beginning of the journey and mankind at the end of the journey.

The Magician

In some decks, the Magician is the artisan, the skilled craftsman, the worker with his hands. As such, he is one step in the Neoplatonic hierarchy above the Fool. At least he recognizes the practicalities of life. He is natural man, the ordinary believer.

Though barely above the level of misery, the Magician represents the basic dignity and divine mission of man. Since he possesses both body and soul, he stands between the spiritual and material worlds. He is a channel of power, a channel of divine influence that flows through him and animates nature. As the temple of the divine spark, he is the reason for existence, the reason for matter and its master. He represents, therefore, the potential that exists in every man to recognize his divine mission and accomplish it with the innate talents and abilities he possesses. He may only be a workman, but his dignity as a human being would have struck the Renaissance viewer of the card.

The Magician is out-of-doors because he has begun to understand his role in nature. He has begun to recognize the power of Sympathetic Magic. Unlike the Fool, who was unaware of his surroundings, the Magician is learning to master nature. He carries with him the magic wand, the Caduceus, the Staff of Moses. With it and with his knowledge, he controls the world about him. He has acquired magical power through development of the intellectual potentials within himself. He is discovering the keys which God has implanted in Nature and he is beginning to put them into use as God intended. He is using reason to apply and cultivate the natural beauty about him. He understands nature and knows the keys that permit him to put this understanding to practical use.

Because he has developed his skills, the Magician might have suggested the cultivation of the highest talent, the intellect. This development of knowledge is the first real step forward taken by the Fool. He is the scholar of the Torah, the ordinary man elevating himself through study. The Magician might even have suggested Gnosis itself, the initial awareness that puts the Fool onto the mystic trail. The Magician recognizes the basic duality of the universe. "As above, so below", the Hermetic formula, is symbolized by his hand positions.

It is the Magician who reveals this Gnosis to the Fool. He is the initiator, the psychopomp, Hermes. To the Fool, he appears as liberated, full of knowledge and full of power. To the Renaissance mind, the Magician must have represented the developed man of intellect,

strongly contrasted with the Fool. The juxtaposition of the cards would have suggested the introduction of wisdom to the naivete and lack of awareness of the Fool. The magician represents the Humanist, the developed man who serves as inspiration to the common herd. To the Fool, fresh on his journey, he seems the exemplar of the ultimate goal of his journey, the Magus, the realized man.

The Magician would naturally suggest Mercury-Thoth-Hermes. Hermes was the first magician, the first alchemist, the first prophet, the first initiator and hierophant. He represents the magician of ancient Egypt who drew the astral influences into the statues of the Temples. In contrast to the Fool, subject to astral fatalism, the Magician has learned to ascent to the stars, shape the astral influences and control the future.

The Magician as both beginning and goal, both ordinary believer and Hermetic master seems contradictory. But it is precisely this type of contradictory meaning hidden behind the obvious which appealed to the Renaissance. This double meaning is also suggested by its assignment of the number One. One is both the beginning, the first number, and one is also the goal, the endpoint; unity, the One. One is the first number, a natural symbol of beginning. But one is also the symbol of God, the Plotinian One, the resolution of the duality of creation. One is the number of wisdom and power, the symbol of the underlying unity in a Neoplatonic view of the world. The Magus is unified, he has it "all together". He is the symbol of one-pointed-ness, of attention and concentration and the powers which follow from their cultivation. He is the symbol of the unity which constitutes the initial Gnosis given to the Fool: unity in a duality of spirit and matter.

When the Magus is represented as an artisan, a skilled craftsman, the Renaissance mind must have thought of the alchemist. The skilled hands of the workman have always inspired awe in the uninitiated; he seems to work magic. Thus, the artisan would have suggested the Alchemist beginning to operate on the Prime Matter of the Fool. The alchemist is seen as psychopomp, as initiator of the alchemical operation. He will transform the consciousness of the Fool into gold.

In many representations, the Magus is a trickster, a common roadside charlatan. But the secrets of magic have always been hidden behind the veil of legerdemain. He is only trickster to those who do not realize his true powers. The Kabbalistic masters also practiced the practical arts: magic talismans and trinkets. But this was a cover for the deeper and more significant aspects of their art. Thus, the card may be interpreted as Trickster, Magician, Alchemist, or Magus, depending on the depth of vision.

Because the Magus was both Mercury, a planetary god, and also a trickster, the astute viewer would have recognized an Archon. He would have been seen, not as a god full of wisdom and goodness, but a deluded angel with many powers over material creation. A mere

juggler who creates matter and keeps man deluded and trapped. He is the source of illusion, the Maya of this world. In this interpretation, he is an initial evil influence on the Fool. Immediately after setting out on the journey, the Fool runs up against the ploys of the demiurge. He meets a planetary god, an archon, who will attempt to convince the Fool that he can achieve fulfillment by remaining within the confines of material and economic society. He will try to convince him to stay the ordinary believer, the worker, the artisan. The Magician is the delusion of the importance of material possessions, money and success. He tempts the Fool to give up the journey even before he begins.

The Papess

The Papess is the first of the Tarot's symbols of duality. She is Isis, contrasting with the Egyptian Hermes who preceded her. She is a female pope in obvious polarity to the male Pope (card five). This male/female contrast symbolizes duality throughout human culture.

The Papess is assigned the number two, the first female number, the number of materiality. Two represents dualism, the initial division of the One, a split in the unity. She is often shown with two pillars behind her. The Magician showed the unification of the personality through developing innate talents. This card shows the duality which still remains. The Magician showed the Fool an underlying unity in creation. The Papess alerts him to its apparent duality. The first emanation of God (Kether) is male (Chokmah). The second is female (Binah). It is this duality which is generative, which produces the rest of the emanations and the physical world. Together, the first two cards represent the total Gnosis, the nature of reality, One underlying two. This has always been the message of Gnosticism and the Dualist Heresies.

This card suggests the heretical influences on the Tarot. As female and number two, she symbolizes dualism. As a female pope she represents the unorthodox. The Christian Church admitted no females to its hierarchy. But the ancient mystery religions did, and so did the dualist heresies. The Papess represents not orthodox religion, but the secret, the occult, and the heretical. In the Visconti-Sforza deck, she may represent Manfreda, a dualist heretic elected pope by her followers. Orthodox symbolic systems, such as the Tarocchi of Mantegna, were also Neoplatonic hierarchical systems, but they contained no female symbols among the conditions of man. Thus, the presence of the Papess hints at heresy.

The Magician represented the overt results of Gnosis: the developed man of power. The Papess represents the mysterious, intuitive aspects of Gnosis, the secret esoteric knowledge unveiled in the Mysteries. This is clear in the veil which stretches between the pillars behind her and in the very fact that this is a mysterious

female.

To the Renaissance viewer, this mysterious female might be seen as the personification of Gnostic Wisdom. She is Sophia, wisdom trapped in dark matter. Her veil is the curtain set by Sophia between the Light and the lower worlds. She is the Shekinah, the presence of God among the just Jews, the world spirit, the spiritual bride of the just man. She is Mary, Virgin bride of the Church. The veil represents Maya, illusion, the guise behind which wisdom is hidden in the world. She is the Anima. She is Shakti, the powerful force buried deep in each human. If the Magus represents the intellectual potential in man, the Papess represents the innate spiritual power.

The Magician symbolizes intellectual and manual skills. He is the artisan and alchemist. The Priestess represents the hidden talents of man, the intuitive and the mystical. She is the "sister" of the Alchemist; the other, the feminine and intuitive part which is equally essential to the conduct of the Great Work. The intellectual knowledge of the Alchemist is not sufficient by itself.

In astrology, she is Diana, the spiritual aspects of the moon. The Papess represents the watery, mystical, psychic aspects of the moon. It is hard to believe that the stars influence man. But it is hard to deny that the moon causes the tides, makes one romantic and occludes the sun in an eclipse, blocking off the life-giving force. Because the moon affects the tides, it is associated with water, the universal symbol of the unconscious. Because the moon complements the sun, it also symbolizes life: sun and moon, light and water. Thus, the Papess would suggest both mystery and life. The Papess, Empress and Moon cards all suggest the moon as an archetypal symbol of life, yet dark and mysterious.

This card represents the receptive, the feminine. The sun radiates energy. The moon merely reflects it. The Magus actively controls magical energies. He makes things happen. The Papess observes passively and allows the energy to reflect from her, without distorting it by her actions. To the Renaissance mind, this symbol might have suggested the calm and centered life essential as a balance to the active life of the Magus.

The Empress

The Empress is another symbol of dualism, another female figure added to the classification of the sciences. She is consort and dual of the Emperor. Although not a spiritual symbol like the Papess, the Empress still indicates the strong tendencies toward dualism found throughout the deck.

This card, like the Papess, symbolizes the moon. Archetypically, any female can be referred to the darkness and receptivity of the moon in contrast to the light and activity of the sun. The Papess card emphasized the spiritual aspects of the moon, the darkness

and mystery. The Empress, the wife and mother, emphasizes the maternal and life-giving aspects of the Moon symbol. The mystery of the Papess is replaced by the loving openness of the motherly Empress. The Empress proclaims life, while the celibate Papess seems to reject it. To the Renaissance Magus, familiar with alchemical allegories, the Empress would immediately recall Queen Luna, the consort of King Sol. Their union is the first step of the Great Work.

The Empress as Queen Luna recalls a number of additional references which must have occurred to the Renaissance mind. She is Mary, the fecund Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, the woman of the Book of Revelations with the moon under her feet. The Empress is also Binah, the second and female emanation from Kether. She is Venus, the goddess of love and the archon of the planetary sphere. She is given the number three, the first complete number and, therefore, the first capable of reproduction. The Empress exemplifies the archetype of the Mother: loving, fecund, life-giving.

As the archetypal Mother, the Empress would recall the earth goddesses Cybele, Demeter, Mother Nature. These are chthonic goddesses, goddesses of the earth and fertility, goddesses of the natural cycle of winter and summer, warmth and cold. As an earth goddess, she recommends to the Fool an appreciation of the beauty and power of nature. Nature is the benevolent and loving holder of God's secrets. As the mother symbol, the Empress elicits the Oedipus complex, the desire to crawl back into the womb. This is not an incestuous desire or a desire for the peace and quiet of nothingness. It is a desire for a return to the beginning, a return to a time when all possibilities were still open and no doors were shut. It is this desire for rebirth that is symbolized by the initiations of the mystery religions. This psychological connection between the Mother, the fertile Earth, and rebirth caused the chthonic goddesses such as Istar, Demeter and Cybele to be worshipped in the Mysteries.

The Empress represents the optimistic aspects of Gnosis. The divine spark is trapped in matter, but matter and darkness need not be rejected by asceticism. The material world is infused with the divine. It is loving and maternal. This card symbolizes the "laughing landscape" of the Hassidic Jew. Life is to be glorified and elevated, not rejected. Nature incorporates the sparks of God and is to be appreciated as a good. This card proclaims the beauties of nature and the wisdom to be found in that beauty. Man is a natural being, a part of nature and must not reject this aspect of his being.

Since the Empress is Earth Goddess and Nature, she symbolizes the secrets bound in nature by God. This is the nature which the Magician seeks to control. But nature is the Empress, she cannot easily be conquered. Thus, the Fool should not try to control nature. He should not try to escape physical nature and material destiny through the Papess' flight of the spirit.

The Empress is also Venus, the goddess of Love. Because of

the power of Nature, it is well that she is loving and gentle. This card proclaims that love is the fundamental law of nature. The Empress balances the ethereal tendencies of the Papess by pointing to the loving, protecting and life-giving properties of nature. Nature must be cherished and respected, not rejected. This card instructs the traveling Fool not to adopt asceticism. The Fool is material and should respect his material being.

The standard Neoplatonic hierarchy begins with the conditions of man: beggar, artisan, rulers, pope. The early cards of the Tarot seem to carry an additional message: a theory about the development of religious consciousness in man. First comes animism: the magician or shaman and the spiritual mystery of the female Papess. Historically, this animism was codified into the ancient cults of the Mother Goddess (Empress). This stage was followed by the male dominated hierarchies of the Greeks and Romans, symbolized by the Emperor. Finally, there is the monotheism and established church of Christianity (Pope). Thus, the early cards of the Tarot may be a statement about the progressive development of religious consciousness, both through history and through the life of the individual.

The Emperor

The next two cards represent man as ruler of matter (Emperor) and spirit (Pope); the aspirant must rule both body and spirit to progress. The Emperor is master of himself, master of the secrets of nature, master even of Mother Nature (Empress).

The Emperor symbolizes Jupiter, ruler of the gods. To the Gnostic, the ruler of the gods would be the Demiurge, the first emanation of God and creator of the material universe. The Emperor is Chokmah, the first and male emanation from Kether. He would also suggest Osiris, ruler of the underworld and harsh judge of souls.

As Demiurge, the Emperor has evil connotations. The Empress was Venus, also a planetary deity, but represented the benevolent aspects of the Archons. The Emperor represents the evil and scheming aspects. The Law and Order suggested by the Emperor are but another layer of illusion, designed to keep the spirit entrapped and ignorant.

The Emperor is a symbol of masculinity. As such, he contrasts sharply with the Empress and Papess which preceded him. The juxtaposition of Empress and Emperor implies the archetypal contrast of male and female as opposite poles of duality. This duality is also suggested by the two pillars often shown on his throne.

If the Papess and Empress suggested the Moon, the Emperor is clearly the Sun, the active and masculine element. He is Mithras, the Sun-God. As the Sun, he is the symbol of virility and health. He is the King of European tradition who sustains the fertility of the kingdom through his own virility.

The Emperor is assigned the number four, the symbol of solidity

and firmness. Four is the number of solidity because the simplest solid figure, the triangular pyramid, is formed by lines connecting four points. Four points are also needed to form a square, the most solid and stable of two-dimensional figures.

Four is also a symbol of completeness and the Emperor is the epitome or completion of the material cycle. Within the world of men, the Emperor is solid, "four-square", dependable, complete. These aspects of the symbol are often reinforced by picturing the Emperor upon a cubic, solid throne with his legs crossed in the form of the number four. The Emperor is complete. He is the symbol of the highest state achievable by the Fool within the economic and social system. Only spiritual development can raise him higher.

To the Alchemist, the Emperor is King Sol. Together with the Empress, he forms the Royal Couple which must be united in the Chymical Marriage to produce the Philosopher's Son, the reborn man. They represent the male-female duality which must be transcended in the mystical rebirth. The Emperor displays the exaggerated masculine traits of aggressiveness and competition which must be softened by the Empress' passivity and gentleness, before the crude ore of the Fool can be transmuted into gold.

The Pope

As the Emperor represents the highest development of the material potentials of man, the Pope represents the development of the spiritual. The highest spiritual position attainable in the Church is the Pope, the Vicar of Christ. The juxtaposition of Emperor and Pope represents the balance between the material and the spiritual, both of which must be developed. This balance is indicated by the number five, assigned to the Pope card. Five is the sum of three (divinity, spirituality) and two (matter, divisiveness).

As Pope, he is Pontifex, bridge-builder between God and man. Thus, the Pope is a more exoteric representation of the concepts in the Magician card. The Magician is the unofficial, esoteric mediator of celestial forces. The Pope is the official intermediary.

As the channel through which the grace of God reaches man, the Pope would have suggested the Hierophant, the wise man who offered the saving Gnosis. He would have suggested the priest of the Mystery Religions: the High Priest of Isis and the Initiator at Eleusis. He presides over the ceremonies and dispenses the blessings of initiation. He is the Babylonian high priest, the Astrologer. He is Hermes presiding over the Hieros Gamos. He is the Renewed King of alchemy, the Emperor spiritualized. To the dualist heretic he would also have suggested the supreme heretical Pope in Bulgaria.

As Pontifex, the Pope might have suggested the spiritual discipline required to bridge the gap between matter and spirit. He represents strictness and rigidity and adherence to the traditional. Therefore, he contrasts with the Empress who advised a natural and

accepting route to Gnosis. The Empress would appear self-indulgent to the Pope.

The Pope also contrasts with the Papess. As the Emperor forms the male dual of the Empress, the Pope is the masculine antithesis of the Papess. If she represented the esoteric and mysterious, the Pope must represent the exoteric, the ritual and the liturgical. He represents the open and available side of Gnosis which the Renaissance designer recognized and respected in the Roman Church. After all, the purpose of the Renaissance designer was to reconcile the mystical with the Christian.

The Lovers

The Lovers card shows once again the basic male-female duality found throughout the deck: Adam and Eve, Attis and the Great Mother, Isis and Serapis. The card might also have suggested the High Priest and Priestess of the Eleusian mysteries whose union produced the new child, the soul reborn. As the first card with both male and female figures, the Lovers might represent Choice: Venus vs. Mars, love vs. aggression, esoteric vs. exoteric, unconscious vs. conscious, marriage vs. celibacy, ecstasy vs. theology, mystery vs. philosophy, personal creativity vs. external guidance. The Lovers card offers the basic choice which must be made by the Fool between the disciplined spirituality of the Pope and the mysteries of the Papess, between the free, natural development of the Empress and the strict rule of the Emperor. The fundamental choice is between intellect and instinct.

In many decks, Eros indicates that the Fool will choose the natural path. When viewed in the context of the Renaissance, this choice may seem logical. The remainder of the deck indicates that the natural path was chosen. In some decks, it is impossible to tell which choice will be made.

The Renaissance viewer should have recognized the choice between sacred (Platonic) and profane (Passionate) love. This was a popular theme for Renaissance poetry. The theme originated with Petrarch: *Trattato d'Amore*, the Treatise on Love. Perhaps the card indicates that the paths are equally valid. Whichever path he chooses will be right for him. It matters little whether Paris chooses Hera, Athena or Aphrodite. They are all beautiful and each path has its advantages and its disadvantages.

Nevertheless, knowing the Renaissance as we do, we would guess that the Fool will choose the Passionate. The very presence of Eros suggests this choice since he symbolizes ecstasy and God-union through blind love. Eros represents the death of the lover, the voluntary death of love in mystical experience. Love holds the body and soul together but always calls the spirit upward. Thus, the sensuous would be the proper course, but sensuous in the Renaissance sense of nature and its beauties.

There is another aspect to the card beyond Choice. The presence of both male and female and the suggestion of love could also indicate marriage: the union of the opposites, rather than a choice between the extremes. To the alchemist, the card might represent the Chymical Marriage of King Sol and Queen Luna: the Hieros Gamos, the union of the opposites in the syzygy. This card represents the initial union of the divine pair. Astrologically, the card is the seventh house, Uxor = Marriage. Numerologically, $6 = 3$ (male) \times 2 (female). Six is a basic symbol of marriage. The Lovers would have suggested alchemical Fixation, the initial blending of Mercury and Sulfur. This is not yet a full union, but an initial mixing and heating.

To the Kabbalist, this card would recall the sacredness of marriage and sexual union: the union of the primal Adam and Eve. To the Jew, marriage and sex are sacred obligations, critical to the spiritual union of the Shekinah with the Jewish people. To the Kabbalist, physical union of the sexes is a symbol of the union of the opposites, a sacred sacrament. Taking his cue from the Kabbalah, the Renaissance Magus must have recognized the mystical significance of the Lovers card.

The card, of course, immediately implies Love, the message of Jesus. In fact, the card resembles the Venus image of the Tarocchi of Mantegna. To the Gnostic and Neoplatonist, love is a critical ingredient of reality. Love causes the opposites to attract, instead of repel. This attraction is necessary for the eventual union and transcendence of the opposites. Love demonstrates that the duality is superficial and is underlaid by a basic unity. After all, God did not create man and woman as polar opposites. At first there was only primal man, an androgyne. God took Eve from the side of Adam and split the original unity. Thus, man and woman are merely different aspects of the same underlying unity.

The last few cards indicate the basic messages which will guide the Fool on his journey. The Empress counsels a respect for the body as a part of nature and a concomitant concern for physical health. The Emperor counsels mental discipline and development of will-power. The Pope counsels spiritual discipline. And now, the Lovers card counsels a respect for love, both physical and mystical. These are the principles given to the Fool to guide his next steps. At this point in his journey, he is given these directions. He is being taught from *outside*. Later, he will have to operate on his own and develop his own principles. He will have to guide himself from *within*.

The Chariot

According to the prophecies of Joachim, there are three ages in human history. The first is the period of the Old Testament, the natural man. The seventh card is the end of the first third of the Trumps, the end of the first third of the Fool's journey, the end of the first age of man. It represents the Fool at this point in his travels.

As a result of the experiences he has been through, he is a victor. He has achieved a certain stability of character, a certain ego consolidation. He is physically mature and married, he is materially secure and better prepared to undertake the spiritual journey without the distractions of physical want. The ego is crystallized and the personality is matured. The first hurdle of life is surmounted.

The Fool has emerged as a victor. He is Christ Triumphant, Mithras victorious over the Bull, Man as victor over himself. This consolidation of the ego represents the highest condition of natural man, man prior to the spiritual transformations which follow.

To the Alchemist, the Chariot is the stage of Exhultation. The first part of the Great Work is completed. Achieving success in the early stages, the alchemist has a peak experience, a manic state in which the transcending mystical experience is tasted. Queen Luna (three) and King Sol (four) have been united (summed) to produce the philosopher's son (seven).

This exultation is clear from the symbolism of the card. The chariot is the body, the horses are the instincts, and the charioteer is the mind. All parts are functioning harmoniously and no reins are needed. The horses pull in different directions so the duality is still present. Yet the mind is master and the car moves forward. The chariot is cubic, like the Emperor's throne, to symbolize the solidity of the ego. The Fool as charioteer is safe within the solid cube of his personality. The Chariot is a magic circle, protecting the Fool. The Chariot is the psychic armor developed through his experiences. Temporarily, the duality is under control. But the duality is still there, not yet transcended. The victory of the Chariot is a temporary one.

Seven is the mystical number, the sum of the divine (three) and the material (four). The duality of male/female has, to some extent, been surmounted in the marriage of the Lovers card. The result is the reborn King, the mature ego or personality. He has control of his bodily functions. He has trained his intellect and will and begun to take on the properties of the Emperor, the master of all he surveys. His disciplined mind and body allow him to overcome the obstacles set up by circumstances. He dictates his own path. From here on, the path will be internal and few guides will appear to lead him. The Fool now understands the common rules of society and can proceed with little concern for the petty annoyances of adolescence. He has received adequate instruction from without, now he must proceed within. He has completed the first and material part of his journey. The seventh card, therefore, takes on the properties of the Sabbath, the seventh and last day, the day of rest between the stages of the voyage. He is now secure and at rest. The first "week" of the Fool's journey is over.

To the Kabbalist, the card might suggest Ezechial's Chariot, the subject of Merkabah mysticism. In this card, man appears as the master of the chariot, the master of the wheels of life. Since seven is the mystical number, the discovery of Ezechial's Chariot on this

card is not accidental.

The juxtaposition of the sixth card, Venus, and the seventh, Mars, would suggest additional connotations to the Renaissance mind. The Chariot is clearly the triumphal chariot of Mars, the Roman god of war. The union of Venus and Mars is a common theme of Renaissance art. The message of the paintings is that the war-like tendencies of the developed male personality must be softened by the gentleness and love of the woman. Ultimately, Venus must conquer the Victorious Mars before further progress can occur.

To the Renaissance mind, the Charioteer must also have suggested the hero of mythology: the sun-god. The Chariot would suggest the hero beginning his Quest, off in search of the Holy Grail. The Fool is about to begin the night sea journey, the journey within.

Justice

Justice is the beginning of the second third of the deck and the first of the moral virtues which the Fool will meet on this leg of his journey. In fact, the second third of the journey begins (eight), ends (fourteen), and is centered (eleven) on these virtues. This suggests that the Fool, now matured physically, with the material life in hand, must concentrate on his spiritual development. The presence of virtues in the deck shows that the Renaissance designer was not rejecting the wisdom of the Church, the wisdom of the Scholastics, rather he was trying to synthesize it with the wisdom of the ancients.

Justice is the virtue which is encountered first. The victory of the Chariot might lead the Fool to exert force over others to attain his ends. This tendency of the man of power must be tempered by strict adherence to Justice. Unfortunately, our modern culture has never risen above this level. This is demonstrated in our glorification of youth. One tries not to get old. There is something tragic about the fifty-year-old woman on television, so proud that her hands are like the twenty-year-old's. She seems not to realize her own maturity and its potential for self-development. Our society is obsessed with youth and the problems of youth. Society seems not to realize that the path lies open ahead to further maturity and accomplishment on the spiritual plane.

Justice is first and foremost a symbol of balance. Venus (six) and Mars (seven) must unite to form the child, Harmony. The juxtaposition of female, male and balance is a classic theme of Renaissance art. Harmony, as the child of Venus and Mars, is a common expression of this theme. A certain victory has been achieved in the Chariot. But the victory is incomplete because it is overbalanced toward the male, aggressive side. Justice calls the Fool back to a more balanced position.

The theme of balance is also reflected in the numerology of the card. Eight is formed of two circles, one balanced atop the other. It is composed of perfectly balanced and equal parts. It can be

divided into 4 + 4, then into 2 + 2 and 1 + 1. The seventh card symbolizes material achievement. The ninth card, as we will see, symbolizes spiritual achievement. The eighth card is the balance between them, $(7 + 9)/2 = 8$.

The card also suggests balance in other ways. Astrologically, this might be Libra, the scales, again a symbol of balance. The Alchemist might see this symbol as the weighing and balancing of the ingredients to begin the next phase of the Opus. In Christian art, the virtues are presented as spiritual figures, that is, angels. An angel is neither male nor female. It is an androgyne, a creature that balances and transcends the duality of male and female.

Mythologically, the figure of Justice is probably derived from the goddess Themis. However, it also suggests the weighing of the soul by Maat in the Egyptian afterlife and by Christ in Christian pious tradition. In this sense, the card suggests a judgment on the soul of the Charioteer. He is being warned that the journey is not over and he will be closely judged for his actions and decisions from now on. Justice indicates a harsh judgment unless he achieves a new balance.

The Hermit

The Fool, as Hermit, starts off on the journey again. But now he is older and wiser and the landscape is more barren. The Hermit realizes that his development no longer depends on the material world, the details of the landscape are unimportant, the details of life fade into the background. This is a journey inward, not outward. He has put off the armor of the Charioteer. He carries nothing but staff and lantern. The lantern is the wisdom he has gained from his experiences. The staff is the support, the self-confidence he has gained from his victories in material life. He will still need this support for a little while before he can cast it away.

The Fool is now undergoing the trial of the Journeyman, the Pilgrim, the wandering monk. He has become the Perfect, the Cathari preacher. He is the wandering Kabbalistic "Master of the Name". He is the Hermetic master out searching nature for its secrets.

The Hermit is a religious ascetic. Such a symbol would have appealed to the Renaissance designer both from his own Christian tradition and from the pessimistic Gnosis. Mani, for example, saw asceticism as the only logical course, once the Gnosis was revealed to the aspirant. This ascetic ideal was retained throughout the dualist heresies. Astrologically, the ninth house is Piety, suggesting again the Hermit and asceticism. The Hermit recalls the Desert Fathers and the ascetic ideal of Eastern Orthodoxy, introduced into Renaissance Italy by the Byzantine scholars.

Basically, the Hermit depicts the Fool, having achieved success over material life, finding the victory hollow. He has discovered the vacuousness of petty ambitions and empty goals. This awareness

results in a kind of depression. Today we call it the midlife crisis. In the Renaissance, it was the beginning of the Great Opus, the alchemical journey.

The Hermit now retires from the victory Chariot. He becomes more introspective as he tries to decide how he can achieve a more balanced approach. He has become the old Alchemist, his lantern in hand, following the vague footsteps of the Anima Mundi.

This depression is a result of age, of years living the inane material life. Thus, the Hermit is often represented as the god, Kronos, the god of time, the oldest of gods. He carries an hourglass to designate his concern with time. Kronos is the god pictured on Renaissance illustrations of the Triumph of Time. The old alchemist is now pausing, quietly musing over the significance of the process. He realizes that time is passing and that his opportunities for progress can easily slip away.

The Hermit represents temporary isolation and introspection. This period of isolation was a common preparation for initiation in the Mystery Religions. The real trial of the period is loneliness. But this loneliness is needed if the Fool is to break free from the hypnotic entrapment of constant activity in the world. The isolation makes it clear that the development of the whole man, which the Fool is seeking, can only be achieved by transformation within himself, not by victory over persons and things about him. Man is ultimately alone.

In spite of the need for further progress, the Hermit represents the completion of a stage of development. The number nine is the completion of the decimal cycle. The next number, $10 = 1 + 0 = 1$, and begins a new cycle of integers. At this stage, the Hermit has reached a plateau and is often shown standing on a mountain top. In passing beyond Justice, he has truly completed one cycle and is ready to begin a new one. Now the Hermit holds aloft his lantern so that others may find the way into the second age of Joachim. The Hermit wears a gray cloak to indicate that he had completed the first phase of unification; gray is the synthesis of black and white, the yin/yang of duality.

The Wheel of Fortune

The Hermit temporarily retired from the world to recollect himself and begin the journey inward. He has realized the true nature of reality and the divine mission to surmount duality. The Hermit is the first stage of the escape from the entrapment of matter.

The Wheel represents the fruit of his musings: material reality is a great wheel; there is much motion but no progress. The wheel symbolizes the oscillations of life: light/dark, happy/sad, success/failure. These oscillations are reflected in nature in the change from day to night and from summer to winter. The cycle itself is the Archon's trap, a wheel of torture, not of progress and motion. The

motion is only apparent.

On a cosmic scale, the Wheel is an overview of reality. Some individuals are falling off the Wheel, back into the darkness of matter. Others are rising toward the spirit. The Wheel represents the great celestial sphere, the great circle of creation. The number ten is the symbol of the completion of a cycle. It contains all of the Pythagorean harmonies. Geometrically, ten is a circle, a wheel, the great wheel of the Cosmos. Thus, the card represents reality itself.

The Wheel is not only the Cosmos, it also represents the insight that life and reality are a great, energy-producing flywheel. The forces of life are turning and providing all the energy needed for the transformations which the Fool will undergo. The daily turn of events is sufficient to amplify the Fool's meager efforts into a major transmutation. The Wheel of life itself is sufficient to provide the power. The initiations he is to experience are all part of the natural life forces within him: the divine spark, transformation, change, cycling, all are natural processes of reality. Change is inherent in life.

Many modern decks show the alchemical symbols of salt, sulfur, mercury and dissolution on the spokes of the Wheel. The tossing and turning of the wheel of life, the stress of everyday living can be viewed as the Great Wheel of the Opus, the Vessel of Transformation. The Alchemist used a retort, which constantly agitated the mixture by turning it into a gas and back into a liquid. Through everyday events, the ingredients are mixed and dissolved into each other, producing a new synthesis.

It is now clear to the Fool that the majority of human souls are trapped on the great Wheel of life, their fortunes are determined by the stars, the turn of the wheel of fortune, destiny. At one moment the Emperor is ruler, the next moment he is in exile. The Fool is gaining a new perspective on life as an endless wheel. The trap can only be escaped by standing back and taking a long look at it.

After the isolation and loneliness of the Hermit, the Wheel also represents the temptation to abandon the journey and step back into the world. There may be no progress, but there is a degree of security in the endless cycle. The Fool is tempted to get back on the wheel and join his fellow man, become one of the boys, accept the rewards of money and prestige and power. This seems more secure than moving forward as a loner. He can rejoin society and dive back into the eddy. In this way, the sensation of whirling motion will fill his mind, as the Archon intended, and he never need face the difficult and lonely journey that is required to fulfill his mission.

On modern decks the outer circle of the Wheel of Fortune contains the letters of the Tetragrammaton, the Divine Name. This suggests that the wheel is a Lullian wheel, a letter mixer of the type recommended by Ramon Lull and the Kabbalist Abulafia. Such a wheel must have suggested to the Renaissance viewer a system of Hermetic meditation which the Fool might apply to his further progress.

The Wheel also suggests the wheel of Ezechial. The four creatures in the corners of the modern decks confirm the reference to the Biblical account. Thus, the card might have suggested the Merkabah mysticism. This might be yet another tool which the Fool could use to accelerate his spiritual development.

Fortitude

Fortitude is the second virtue displayed to the Fool. The slow and dangerous effort to escape the Wheel of Life requires Fortitude and the accompanying gifts of perseverance and long-suffering. The Fool must cultivate these virtues if he is to endure the trials of the spiritual life.

The Strength card indicates that the time has come to get off the Wheel and approach the lion of the instincts. Not to beat it down with the sword, but to tame it; to teach it to channel its tremendous strength. This card must have recalled the Medieval recipe for catching a Unicorn. No force or deceit could trap the animal. Instead, a maiden was recruited to sit alone in the forest. If the maiden was pure and beautiful, the unicorn would fall in love with her and come willingly and lay its head in her lap.

The lion represents matter in the symbolism of Alchemy. The "Green Lion", the astrological Leo, has swallowed the sun, the spark of Light, and must be made to disgorge it. This is why the woman on the card appears to be opening, instead of shutting, the lion's mouth. The lion of matter will release the spirit if gentle strength and persistence are applied. Once released, the Fool has access to an internal control to match the external control he gained in the Chariot. He has reconciled spirit and matter within himself. As a result, he finds a new freedom from the conflict of the instincts.

The card represents a type of Sphinx, a mythological Egyptian beast with a lion's body and a woman's breasts and head. The combination of the strength of the lion and the gentleness of the woman represents another reconciliation of the opposites, a transcending of duality. Once the Fool becomes conscious of internal conflict, the advice is to resolve the conflict through patience and gentleness.

The eleventh card is the central point of the Trumps, the pivot between the two halves of the deck. It is the balance point between the cards of matter (1-10) and the cards of the spirit (12-21). On the card, the spirit as woman touches matter as lion. This is a symbol of the Neoplatonic intermediary between matter and the One. Dynamis, Strength, was one of the explicit emanations in Basilides' system. The number $11 = 1 + 1 = 2$, is once again a symbol of duality, matter and spirit touching. To the Hermetist, this card is the spirit, the mind of man, gaining mastery over matter or nature by means of Sympathetic magic.

The advice on this card, the advice for gentle strength, comes from optimistic Gnosis. The advice is not to gain supremacy by force.

Some of the earliest cards seemed to counsel that approach, with Hercules killing the lion with a club. This implication might have appealed to both Roman and Eastern Christians since they held a long tradition of asceticism dating back to the Desert Fathers. But the typical card advises that the lion be calmed and pacified, not beaten to death. As the Empress advised, the body should not be rejected by austerities, rather it should be respected and its strength and health brought to bear on spiritual development as an ally instead of an enemy. The Beauty is counseled to kiss the Beast and transform it into a powerful Prince.

The Hanged Man

The Hanged Man is assigned the number twelve, the number of completion. He is the completion of the first half of the journey and the beginning of the second half. Now everything is reversed, all values are turned upside-down. The soul is willingly undertaking the journey to the underworld discussed by Homer and Virgil. In the beginning of the Divine Comedy, Dante states that he starts his mystical journey as he enters the second half of his life. This card, even more than the Hermit, is the symbol of the midlife crisis. The Hermit began the process with the preliminary depression and isolation of the Nigredo. The Nigredo now begins in earnest with the Hanged Man, the transmutation gains momentum. The Hanged Man represents life in suspension, pausing and balancing on the tip before the descent into Hell.

Just as the sexual instincts are aroused at puberty, the mystical instincts are aroused at maturity. Hormonal changes and a realization of the aging process combine to elicit a new driving force. The card represents a second period of passivity and isolation, another period of reevaluation. The Fool must "suspend" himself between the pillars of duality. He must swing free, hanging by the knot of his faith. He must have faith in the natural process of change which is about to occur. His mind is suspended for now, he is in meditation, in samadhi. Now is the period for sacrificing, letting go of the ego defenses he has developed.

Everything he has built up to this point must be surrendered. The entire ego structure, the aggressive masculinity which carried him successfully through the first half of his journey, must now be abandoned. The ego which permitted the victory of the Chariot must now be destroyed before further progress can be made.

His position, hanging from the Mother Tree, must have reminded the Renaissance scholar of myths of sacrifice associated with sacred trees. Odin hung nine days from a tree. Attis castrated himself at the base of the Maternal Tree. The Hermaphrodite in the Alchemical allegory hung upside down from the tree over the river.

Moakley pointed out that the Hanged Man is a "shame painting", a hanging in effigy, the treatment afforded a traitor. The

image on the card also resembles St. Sebastian as he was commonly depicted in Renaissance art. Thus the Hanged Man is also a martyr. The two concepts combine nicely. The Hanged Man is a traitor to his former values. He is being hung by his former colleagues, still entrapped on the Wheel. He is a martyr because he has sacrificed his former life for his new mission. This surrender of life is tantamount to being a traitor in the eyes of worldly men. But the Hanged Man must go on with this sacrifice, with this martyrdom and shame, if he is to proceed.

The position of the Hanged Man might also have suggested a "Witches Cradle" to the Renaissance viewer. The cradle was a medieval device for altering the state of consciousness. In the cradle, sensory deprivation, disorientation and dizzying motion were combined. The witch was tightly bound and suspended so that she swayed gently. The result was a hypnotic or meditative state.

Thus, the card would have the connotation of a meditative state, a suspending of the senses. Meditation involves diving into the unconscious and the unconscious has always been symbolized by water. Thus, there is a suggestion of purification and trial prior to initiation by water (Baptism). Purification by washing was a common preparation for initiation.

Through meditation, the Hanged Man has become "rooted" in the unconscious. The Fool's head is suspended at the level of the tree roots, suggesting that a radical, i.e., root-level, change is taking place. The earthy or material foundations of the personality are being spiritualized. The uprights from which he is suspended have been trimmed of branches, indicating that the superficial is being trimmed away. The Fool is getting down to basics.

The trimmed branches also suggest the tree or Axis Mundi of the shaman. The medicine man climbs the tree on the stubs of the trimmed branches. He climbs into heaven to receive revelations, just as the Fool has climbed his gibbet and suspended himself to receive enlightenment. The uprights might also have recalled to the Renaissance Magus, the Tree of Life of Kabbalah, which is rooted in heaven instead of the earth. The tree of the Sephiroth is upside down, just like the Hanged Man. The position of the Hanged Man might have suggested to the Neoplatonist that man's true roots and support are from above. Man is rooted in the spirit. He hangs, that is, he "depends" on the One. His feet must be firmly planted in the sky.

Death

The thirteenth card, the unlucky card, is Death: the Grim Reaper. The skeleton is the universal symbol of death. It appears frequently in the medieval Dance of Death. It is the symbol of the eighth astrological house, Mors. This primary meaning would have been as obvious to the Renaissance viewer as it is to us today.

But, remembering the Christian foundations of the Renaissance,

the symbol of Death represented a transformation, not an ending. After all, this card comes in the middle of the deck, not at the end. This death occurs *during* this life, not at its end. In the Tarot, Death, Hell (fifteen), and Judgment (twenty) are events of the second half of life, events in the mature mystical life. The death in the Tarot is a passage to a higher life. Death, at the end of life or during it, was the cathartic experience that ended the old life, but began the new life as well.

To the Hermetic magician, sensitive to the processes of nature, death was continuance, not an ending. Individual cells of the body die in order that the body may live. The female spider dies that her young may eat her body and live. The skeleton on the card is not still, it is moving. Time flows on and causes change. Time and life continue. Life flows on as a force that is beyond the individual. The old must die to free resources for the young. When an animal dies, life loses nothing, others grow to take its place. Every man is a participant in this flow of life. The end is not *him*. Life is interested in him as a conveyer and continuer of something that transcends him. He is enseminator, contributor, teacher, lover — a giver of life. Life is not for him; he is for life.

To the Alchemist the card symbolizes Putrefaction. The skeleton, the grave and death are often used in this way in the alchemical allegories. The stage of decay; the final portion of the Nigredo, occurs when the old life is peeled off the skeleton. The skeleton is the soul, in the sense of the rock-strong underpinnings of the flacid body. The Fool must be stripped down to the skeleton and the new spiritual man built up from this foundation.

The mystic transformation is often described as a death experience. The old life is dead, left behind forever. The break is so absolute that death and decay are obvious symbols. All connections to the past are cut, once and for all. The mystic also experiences death in the sense of the suspension of the senses, of life itself. The flow of life seems to stop during the experience.

The death card has always been considered frightful. The fear of death is one of the most basic fears of man. Thus, the card symbolizes not only the mystical transformation, but also the danger and fear associated with the initiatory experience. The aspirant to initiation was subjected to dramatic presentations of his death that were made as realistic as possible. Apuleius described his initiation into the Mysteries of Isis as a real death, a visit to the gates of the underworld. Hermes' disciple, Tat, also described his initiatory experience as a death. This death was the entry point into the underworld, the world of Dante. This step is the beginning of the night sea journey, the journey to the underworld, the journey to God.

Temperance

At the end of the second third of the Trumps, the Fool is

presented with the last of the moral virtues, another symbol of balance, a warning to take the middle road and avoid the extremes. For the Dualist, the pessimistic Gnostic, Temperance would have implied asceticism: keeping the instincts under control. But in the traditional Christian view, all of the virtues are seen as middle paths. In the case of Temperance, the path is between starvation and gluttony, between libertinism and austerity. Aristotle defined virtue as the golden mean, the path between the extremes. The Fool is well advised to adopt the Golden Mean. The next few cards require him to travel a narrow road and keep his balance.

The Renaissance mind must have immediately related to the image of the angel. The angel is the mediator between the world of ideas and the world of matter. It is the divine messenger sent to guide and protect the sparks entrapped by the archons. It is the guardian angel of Christianity and the messenger of Judaism. As the Fool begins his descent, it is appropriate that he meet an angel to guide him. The water flowing between the angel's cups might have suggested the flow of spirit from above to below. But the angel is also the archon, keeping the flow of life contained between the duals, allowing no drops of Light to escape the constant back and forth motion.

To the alchemist, the card would represent the mixing of the ingredients at the beginning of the next part of the Work. It might also suggest the process of Distillation, of extracting the essence. The Syrian alchemist Maria is pictured with two cups in the background. Water is flowing from the cup above into the cup below. The card might also represent the metallurgical process of tempering, of thrusting the hot steel repeatedly into cold water to harden it through severe trial.

Thus, at the beginning of his "night sea journey", the Fool is given a series of messages. A divine messenger, an angel, appears to guide him, just as Virgil appeared to Dante at the beginning of his journey into Hell. The messenger appears as Temperance, a moral virtue. The Fool is counseled to maintain balance, the Golden Mean. The second message the angel delivers is that the constant oscillations between the poles of the duality generate the heat, the energy to drive the transformation which is about to be experienced by the Fool. The angel also represents the process of tempering and warns the Fool that trials are awaiting him on the next phase of his journey.

With the mystical death of card thirteen, the Fool has entered the world of the spirit, the world of angels. The Fool has traveled from the material world of the Chariot into the deep internal world within. In the first seven cards, the Fool experienced struggle and victory on the material plane. In the second seven stages, he struggled with transition on the moral/spiritual/mental plane. Although he was constantly assisted and advised, his present position is the result of his own efforts. Beyond this point, it matters less what the

Fool *does*, than what is done *to* and *through* him. He is as passive now as he was active in the Chariot. The rest of the journey depends on his acceptance and cooperation, not on his initiative.

The Devil

This is Baphomet, the idol supposedly worshipped by the Knights Templar, the chthonic god they adopted in the East. This is Mithras who is often pictured with two boys holding torches. One torch is pointed upward and the other downward. This is Pan, the lustful earth god perhaps suggesting sexual magic, untamed sexuality, and being overcome by animal forces. This is the astrological Neptune or Hades, the ruler of the Sea and god of the underworld.

The concept of the Devil in Judeo-Christian tradition, and throughout western culture, stems directly from Middle Eastern dualism. Satan is part of the angelology which the Jews acquired in Babylon and carried back with them from exile. The devil is the evil principle, Ahriman, the dark pole of the duality.

Notice that this Devil has a navel. He is "born of woman" and is not an angel at all. He has bat wings and therefore is a creature of the night, a creature of the unconscious. He is therefore a creature of dreams, the shadow that appears in the night. He is the dark man within, an archetypal image. According to Jung, the Devil and any creature of the night represents the "Shadow". It is a projection of the evil within every man. This evil must be faced and accepted before a man can be truly whole, truly "holy".

In the Renaissance, the image of the Devil must have suggested the evil Archon, the Demiurge, keeping mankind bound in the chains of matter. To the Gnostic, this is the "god" of Genesis. Mankind is shown on many decks as two creatures, sometimes man and woman and sometimes a pair of demons. They are chained to the Devil's throne. However, the chains are loosely fashioned and the creatures can easily slip them off and walk to the light. The tie to materialism is through their own wills.

The image might also have suggested Black Magic: summoning the Devil and making pacts with him. This is black magic in contrast to the white or "natural" magic of card one. Perhaps the card suggests a temptation to dabble in this dark and improper use of magic, as the Fool's knowledge of the forces of reality increases.

The card also represents the next step in the journey that began with the mystical death of card thirteen. The subsequent cards follow closely the myth of Dante: death, meeting the guide, journey to hell and finally meeting the Devil. This is the face-to-face meeting with the god of the underworld spoken of in the Mystery Religions. But in fact, the journey is to the depths of the Fool's own consciousness.

The Tower

To the Gnostic or Neoplatonist, the image on the Tower card would immediately bring to mind the fall of the soul into matter. The symbols of the duality which entrap the fallen soul are shown on the card as a falling man and woman. Notice that the force which is hurling the victims down is a heavenly force, the force of the archons.

The card also suggests the Tower of Babel, the product of man's pride. Pride is the last bastion of the ego, just as the fortified Tower is the last line of defense. The cathartic destruction of pride is the final catastrophe: the loss of the protective self-image, the loss of the last vestige of self-sufficiency displayed in the Chariot. The Fool can no longer depend upon himself. In this third cycle of the Tarot deck, the final and most radical transformations will occur. In this final sequence, we find the darkest and the brightest cards of the deck.

The Kabbalist might see the Tower of Babel as a warning of what might happen if the Fool tries to reach the heavens through his own efforts. In the tradition of Merkabah mysticism, there are three dangers involved in the ascent to the Chariot. All of these dangers are represented in the final third of the Tarot deck. First, there is the danger of being drowned in the unconscious (fourteen Temperance, seventeen Star, eighteen Moon). Second, there is fire (fifteen Devil, sixteen Tower). Third, there is lightning (sixteen Tower). These dangers can only harm the mystic if he resists. He must accept everything and not be fearful. He must attempt nothing on his own. The Fool, at this stage, must be submissive to the forces acting upon him and within him. He cannot and must not try to build his own Tower, he must be drawn up into heaven passively.

The sparks in the background of the card might represent the Scintilla of alchemy. These are the sparks of light that appear on the surface of the subjectum in the vessel. They indicate that the Nigredo or blackening is over and the Albedo or whitening is about to begin.

The alchemist might also see the allegorical Thunderstorm in this card. An old name for the Tower was the Lightning Bolt. In the allegory, a thunderstorm catches the alchemist ascending into heaven and hurls him back down. He must begin the Great Work from the beginning. The alchemical Thunderstorm and the Tower card both emphasize the catastrophic aspects of this stage of the mystical journey. The final catharsis of the ego-bound man is anything but mild and pleasant. But then the Fool is undergoing a rebirth, and birth is always traumatic. Perhaps the card means to suggest something of the visual and auditory experience of the trauma of birth.

The Tower card is sometimes shown as Adam and Eve being exiled from the Garden of Eden. In some cards, the "yods" or sparks

falling in the background form a Kabbalistic "Tree of Life", again referencing the story of Genesis.

The card might also suggest the "Mouth of Hell", a device of the Renaissance stage, which represented the entry into the underworld. The card is named the "House of the Devil" in some old decks. These references carry on the theme of the journey to the underworld, the night sea journey, the psychological journey to the center of consciousness. Clearly the Tower card is a symbol of the darkest and most frightful aspects of the mystical journey: the Dark Night of the Soul.

The card might also suggest the "Golden Legend", a pious fiction in wide circulation in Medieval times. According to this apocryphal account of Christ's life, as the Holy Family fled Herod into Egypt, the pagan temples crumbled in each town they passed through.

On a more mystical level, the card would have suggested a sudden influx of spiritual energy, an enthusiasm or ecstasy. This influx of energy has caused another inversion. The figures are once more turned upside down as in the Hanged Man. A new level of consciousness has been reached, turning things topsy-turvy. The energy influx is, in a sense, the Divine Will breaking down man's stubborn resistance. The danger to the Fool at this stage is resistance. Remember the story of the drunken man who falls and doesn't get hurt because he doesn't resist. His body is completely supple and he just lets it happen.

The Star

The figure on this card is obviously a good spirit, an angel, the Anima in her most cooperative and loving aspect. She might represent the Shekinah of the Kabbalists, or perhaps Hebe, the cup-bearer of the Gods. She is Virgo and Aquarius. She is the Virgin Mary, the star of the sea, Maris Stella.

The card might have suggested Isis, as the goddess of the Nile. At the Temple at Philae, Isis is shown pouring out the saving waters of the Nile onto the parched earth about her, sustaining and nurturing life. Some decks even show an ibis, the sacred bird of Isis, in the background.

The astrological implications of this card are obvious. Early cards show astrologers with compass and astrolabe. The name of the card itself indicates that the Fool has begun the celestial journey of the Gnostics. He left matter in the mystical death, journeyed through Hell, and now is ascending through the celestial spheres to reach God. The jars held by the figure are the Gnostic duals being poured out. The Fool is no longer trapped. The flow of life is no longer contained between the extremes of the duality as in the Temperance card. The Star represents new directions, the divine light shining on the Fool and guiding him.

The Nigredo, the dark phase of the mystical journey, is over. Dante's trip through hell is completed and the ascent of Mount Purgatory has begun. The Ablution, or whitening phase, of the alchemical work has been initiated. The whitening is a cleansing process, a washing, indicated by the water being poured out. The faint glimmers or sparks on the Tower card have brightened into stars. The light will continue to grow.

The growing light is a symbol of Hope, the light in the darkness. The early hand-painted decks show a woman reaching for a star, the traditional symbol for the theological virtue of Hope. Minchiate decks show Magi and the star becomes the Star of Bethlehem, the star of Hope. Although both of these representations are Christianizations of the primitive astrological references in the card, they at least retain one aspect of the card's meaning.

There are three closely related cards in the Tarot series, Papess, Temperance, and Star. All three show young women, i.e., Anima. The mysterious and seductive woman (Papess) became more (Temperance) and more (Star) open, more and more available. The aloof Papess becomes naked on the Star card. The flow of life, contained within the vessels in the Temperance card, is now freely poured out. The Fool is becoming reconciled with the mysterious woman within him, his passivity, his love, his gentleness. His feminine traits are no longer mysterious and repressed. They are now accepted and assimilated into his new personality. The sum of the three cards, $2 + 14 + 17 = 33$, the number of the divine, doubled. The assimilation of the anima has helped the Fool reach the Divine.

The flow of energy represented by the flowing water on this card is the life force suggested in earlier cards. By the constant agitation and distillation of this force in the Temperance card, by the constant tossing between the extremes of the duality, by the constant movement in and out of the unconscious, the life force has been brought under control and allowed to flow freely. The psychic force associated with the Anima has now been released. The Fool has passed through the Baptism of Fire (Cards fifteen and sixteen) and the Baptism of Water (Card seventeen). He is being well prepared for initiation.

The Moon

The Moon is the celestial sphere which determines the fluctuations of the tides. Thus, the Moon has always been associated with water and the unconscious. The crayfish on the card suggests Cancer, an aquatic creature, a creature of the unconscious. Cancer is the only zodiacal sign ruled by the Moon. Because of the association between the Moon and the unconscious, the Moon's power over man is associated with the psyche. The Moon causes man to be both romantic and a lunatic.

To the Renaissance alchemist, the card might have suggested

the process of Dissolution, the trial by "bitter water". Even though the Fool has begun the ascent through the spheres, still the struggle with the unconscious continues. The Fool must continue to "dissolve" back into the waters of the unconscious. The card represents these secondary trips to the underworld. To the Christian mystic, this is the Dark Night of the Spirit, another period of depression and loneliness that affects a catharsis at a higher and more spiritual level. During this Dissolution, acid distrust and self-criticism combine to dissolve away the final, deep-rooted patterns of old behavior in the mystic.

In the Moon card, the Fool, represented by the crayfish, is emerging from the waters of the unconscious. The general format of the card resembles medieval representations of the element Water. The crayfish is a creature of the waters, an aquatic being, and therefore represents the fetus about to be born. The Fool is emerging from the waters of the unconscious which he entered with card thirteen.

The Fool is being reborn onto a strange landscape. His old familiar world is gone. The material universe he seemed to conquer in the Chariot is now unfamiliar. He is not master, he is a stranger. His spirit is now seen clearly as an exile and an alien in this world. The Kabbalist might see this card as a symbol of the Diaspora, the long exile of the Jews from their homeland. The Fool realizes also that he is an exile from his true home in God.

The Fool continues his mystical journey through the celestial sphere of the Moon, over the strange and mysterious moon-lit landscape. The Moon here symbolizes melancholia, loneliness, a feeling of alienation. All of these are common symptoms of the mystical traveler during the Dark Night of the Spirit.

The Sun

The Fool has now reached the sphere of the Sun and all is brightness and light. The dark parts of the journey are ended. The light has continuously increased in a succession of enlightenments from the sparks of the Tower to the full sunlight.

The Fool has been transformed into a little child, just as Christ advised. And since the darkest part of the journey is past, the children now dance for joy. This same imagery is found in Alchemy where the children dance around the light of the fire.

The Sun itself is a natural mandala and the children are playing about a mandala formed by a fairy ring in the grass. But unlike the other mandala encountered by the Fool, the Wheel of Fortune, the children are not captive. They are not trapped, but dance in and out, poised on the motionless center. No matter how fast the wheel turns, the center remains still. The children escape the dilemma through the center, neither extreme of the duality is chosen. It is the center, the reconciliation of the opposites, which makes escape possible.

The suggestion of a sunny garden would have awakened many

associations in the Renaissance mind. The children could be Adam and Eve before they ate the fruit. And yet the children appear to be outside the garden; the flowers are on the other side of the wall. This would suggest the first parents after the expulsion from the garden, after they had been freed from the trap, after they ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, after they had received the Gnosis. They are free and that is why they are dancing for joy.

The garden would also have suggested the Heavenly Garden of Paradise, the Rose Garden of the Philosopher, the reward of the just. The alchemist has received the first fruits of his labors. The metal has been blackened, then whitened, and has now turned yellow. The metal has turned to gold, the yellow color of the Sun. The Heavenly Garden, the reward of the faithful, is often pictured in Renaissance art. The children play there carefreely because there is no evil which has not been surmounted.

In astrology, the Sun is the most influential of the celestial bodies. The Sun is the source of all light and life on earth. The sun-god formed the summit of many primitive hierarchies. The Sun would thus suggest Osiris and other sun-gods who had journeyed, as the Fool has done, through the underworld, through the oceans of the night and emerged to rise in the East at dawn.

The Sun card suggests rebirth as an innocent child. This rebirth represents the dawn of a new life for the Fool, now changed into a completely new being by his experiences. The Philosopher's Son has been resurrected, as gold, as the Sun. The Fool now dances in the bright light of the Sun, in the brightness of his illumination.

Judgment

If the Tower card suggested the fall of the Spirit into matter, this card suggests the rise of the spirit back out of its prison, out of the grave. The angel, the divine messenger, is calling the spark from its tomb. The Mandeian and Manichaeian religions were known as "religions of the call" because they saw this final step as a direct call from God. The alchemist might have seen this card as the Coagula, the rebirth and recrystallization of the Stone, following the long process of Solve, of breaking down the old structure. The alchemists also maintained that this final process required direct assistance from above.

The card suggests a call to higher things. The fetus on the Moon card became a spiritual child on the Sun symbol. The Fool has now grown and the time has come to answer the call of the One as a spiritual adult. But before God-union itself can occur, there must come the final call, the final uplifting.

All mystical traditions agree on the absolute necessity of this call. The final step to the mystical experience involves the direct intervention of the divine. A mystic may stand on the threshold all

his life, having completed all of the preparatory steps, and never receive the final call. The Fool has completed all of the tasks over which he has some control. But now he must wait. The experience of God-union is a gift, the result of a specific personal summons. No act of man can earn or force this grace.

Of course, to the orthodox Christian, the card suggested the Last Judgment and the Resurrection of the Dead. When Christ returns at the end of time, the period of trial is over. All departed souls will rejoin their reconstituted bodies. Then the just will receive their final reward in the Heavenly Paradise. The imagery of the card is clearly drawn from this doctrinal source.

We must remember that this orthodox interpretation is only possible when the card comes last in the deck, at the end of the Fool's journey. It occupies this last place in the Bolognese deck and related "Christianized" versions of the Tarot. The dualist heretics denied the doctrine of the Last Judgment. The spirit of man was to escape the body and rejoin God in mystical experience during this life. Rejoining the spirit to the body after it had escaped was madness. If the Perfects performed the supreme act of suicide in order to escape the prison of the body, it made no sense for Christ to "reward" them by reuniting them to their bodies.

The World

To the Renaissance mind, this card clearly represented the union of the spirit with the Anima Mundi, the aspect of God with which intimate union was possible. This is Plotinus' union with the One, the highest purpose of human existence. This is the vision of the Chariot, the ascent to Kether. Finally, the Hanged Man has become right-side-up again. The number twelve has been reversed to $21 = 3 \times 7$, the product of the divine and the mystical. The Divine ecstasy has been reached and the spirit is free of duality, protected by the wreath of victory from the further influence of the archons, the four figures in the corners of the card.

The pillars of duality, found on so many of the earlier cards, no longer constrain. In many decks, the figure holds the pillars as tiny wands in the hand, completely under control. The Fool is now the Initiate of the Mysteries. He can operate within duality. Duality is a magic wand instead of chains. In some older cards, the figure is shown astride the world, the Fool is now "on top of things".

The figure on the card is an angel, an androgyne. Throughout the Tarot sequence, the opposition of male and female has symbolized duality. Now duality is transcended and the distinction between male and female is gone. The figure is Adam Cadmon of Kabbalah, the primal man of the Gnostic myth, still an androgyne, not yet separated into male and female. The spark of light has escaped its prison. Adam, the original androgyne, has been reconstituted. Man is once again in his original state.

The card contains the circle + four of the mandala, in this case formed by the wreath and the four beasts. This symbol has been identified by Jung as the primary symbol of transformation. It is the wheel and four beasts of Ezechial's mystical vision. It is the "squaring of the circle" of Alchemy. It is the Aion of primitive Gnosticism. It is the symbol of the Anima Mundi and of the Initiate. They have been united and are now represented by a single symbol. The Fool is God.

In the long and frightful transition from card twelve to card twenty-one, the night sea journey of the sun-god has been completed. After the willing surrender of the former life and a preliminary ordeal (twelve), the aspirant passed through the mystical death (thirteen), met the angelic guide (fourteen) and was conducted into the underworld. Here, the Fool encountered the Devil (fifteen) and experienced the trauma of the House of the Devil (sixteen). Subsequently, he begins the ascent through the celestial spheres, passing through the fixed stars (seventeen), the Moon (eighteen), and the Sun (nineteen). Finally, the angel called him out of the tomb of his body (twenty) to complete the initiation in God-union (twenty-one). The Fool has become the divine androgyne.

But life has not ended because the journey is over. The Fool is now the Philosopher's Stone. Thus, he has become a catalyst capable of simplifying the transition for others. The zero formed by the wreath is the zero of the Fool card and the initiate now returns to the world. The Fool is now transfigured into the "Fool for Christ" and returns as a carefree wanderer to bring the Gnosis to others. The journey is over and the Fool is still the Fool, but transformed and divinized.

ROBERT V. O'NEILL is a research scientist with a doctorate in biological science. He has authored over a hundred reports, articles, and books on the theory of environmental systems. He is a member of a number of professional societies and is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He has served on advisory committees for the National Science Foundation and the National Academy of Sciences. He has presented his research at Harvard, Cornell, Berkeley, and a number of other universities. He has also lectured in England, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Israel, and Venezuela.



Dr. O'Neill's interest in the mystical stems from early training for the Catholic priesthood, including several years in a religious cloister. For eighteen years he has studied Zen Buddhism through the martial arts. Combining his research experience with a concern for the transcendental, he has studied religious and secular mysticism across the breadth of human cultures. This research permitted him to find in the Tarot a truly Western approach to mysticism. He saw in the Tarot symbols a profound mystical philosophy, psychology, and methodology. This discovery led to a decade of serious study into the sources and meaning of the symbols.

While many people are familiar with the Tarot cards as a device for fortunetelling, few realize they were not designed for this purpose. This book develops the thesis that the Tarot was originally a "cosmograph," a pictorial representation of the universe and man's role in it. The evidence indicates that the cards were designed during the Renaissance to present a profound mystical philosophy to the common people. They are an expression of a Western mystical tradition with philosophic roots in Neoplatonism and religious roots in Gnosticism and the Mystery Religions.

To demonstrate his thesis, the author takes us on an exciting intellectual journey back to the sources of Western thought in Greece, Egypt, and the Middle East. He argues that the mystical insights of this early period began a tradition which endured throughout European history. Because unsupervised mystical experience was considered dangerous by the official Church, the insights were transmitted through enigmatic symbols which can still be found in Kabbalah, Alchemy, Numerology, and Astrology. All of these occult traditions were integrated during the Renaissance into the symbols of the Tarot. By carefully documenting every step of his argument, the author presents us with the first truly scholarly interpretation of the Tarot symbols.

But the book is more than an historical reconstruction of the Tarot symbols. It delves into the psychology of archetypic symbols and argues that the Tarot presents a complete meditation system. Although the underlying philosophy may seem arcane in the 20th century, the psychological insights remain valid. Thus, the Tarot is presented as an approach to religious experience that is deeply founded in our own Western traditions.



FAIRWAY PRESS

DRAWER L • LIMA, OHIO 45802

7569 / ISBN 0-89536-936-2

Cover design by Kathy D. Sarka