

## **Kabbalistic Symbolism in the Tarot, Part I: Rectifying the Tarot**

By Jeffrey R. Day — August 28, 2020.

The most popular Tarot deck in use today is that of Rider-Waite-Smith. It was beautifully illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith based on specifications given to her by poet and occult scholar Arthur Edward Waite, who was a prominent member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Rider-Waite-Smith deck was first published in 1909 along with Waite's booklet entitled "*The Key to the Tarot*," which was shortly thereafter republished as "*The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*" with images of the cards included.

The Golden Dawn system of initiation promoted a cohesive and systematic arrangement of occult information within its "knowledge lectures," a course of studies undertaken following advancement into each grade as one progressed along the path of initiation. These knowledge lectures specifically included instruction regarding the Tarot, the Hebrew Alphabet, and the Kabbalah. Waite's views on these subjects, and in turn, the design of the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, were highly influenced by these teachings as well as by the personal ideas of S. L. MacGregor Mathers, one of the founders of the Golden Dawn, who published "*The Tarot: Its Occult Significance, Use in Fortune-Telling, and Method of Play, Etc.*" in 1888.

Mathers, in his writings, makes reference back to Éliphas Lévi's system of Tarot associations. Waite was familiar with Lévi's ideas but also critical of them. In *The Key to the Tarot*, Waite writes of the Hermit card, "Éliphas Lévi has allocated this card to Prudence, but in so doing he has been actuated by the wish to fill a gap which would otherwise occur in the symbolism," and of the Hanged Man card, "This is the symbol which is supposed to represent Prudence, and Éliphas Lévi says, in his most shallow and plausible manner, that it is the adept bound by his engagements." By even suggesting that Prudence has a proper place, Waite seems, a few pages later, to have contradicted his own criticism of Lévi's motivations. I do not mean to do Waite a disservice in saying this, but merely to show that the understanding of Tarot was not unanimously agreed upon, and some contrary opinions were strongly held.

Before Waite, Lévi and Mathers had both promoted systems where the 22 Tarot Trumps were correlated to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, an idea which Waite would accept and adapt in his own system.

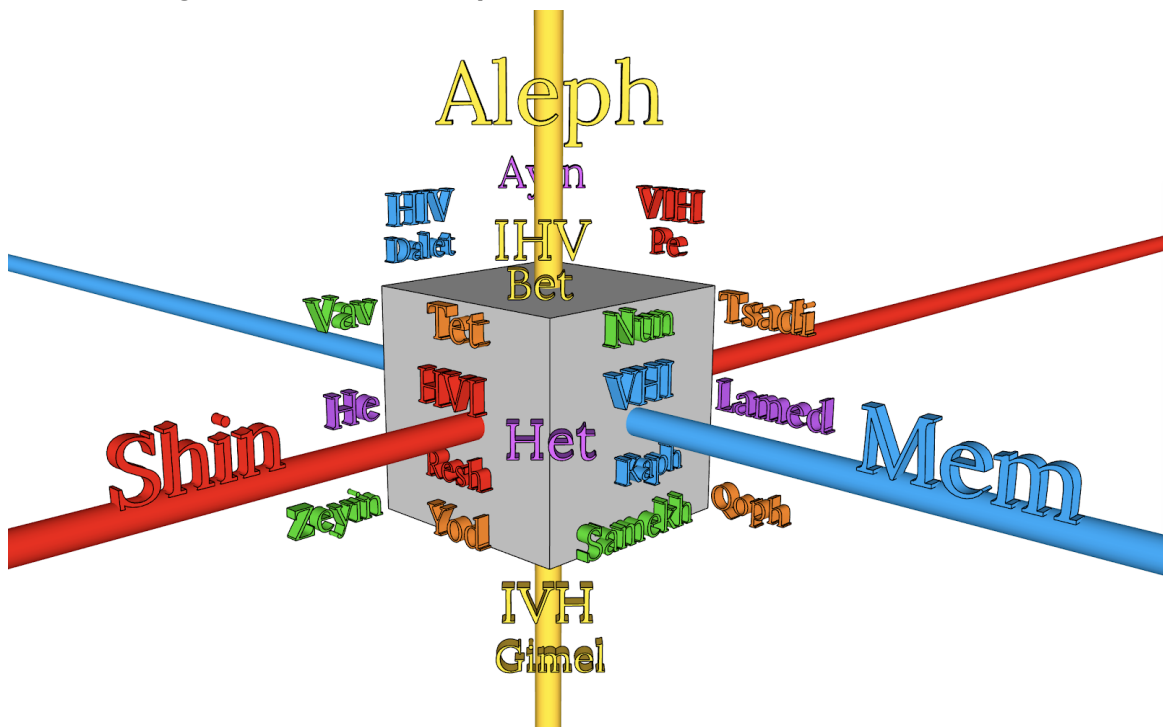
According to Mathers, Trump No. 1, which he termed the Juggler or Magician, is correlated to Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; Trump No. 2, The High Priestess or Female Pope, is correlated to the letter Bet. The letters continued to be

assigned in their natural sequence up through Trump No. 20, the Last Judgement, which was correlated to Resh. At this point, Mathers interposes the un-numbered Foolish Man card, correlating it with the letter Shin, which allows for the displacement of Trump No. 21, The Universe, out of its apparent sequence, allowing it to be put in relation to Tav, the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

In 1887, the year before Mathers had published his book, *The Tarot: Etc.*, one of the other founders of the Golden Dawn, William Wynn Westcott, had published his English translation of the “*Sefer Yetzirah*,” an ancient mystical Hebrew text from which the ideas that had later been developed into the Kabbalah were sourced. Of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, Mathers commented as follows in his book:

“It certainly gives, in my opinion, the Qabalistical Key of the Tarot; [...] In fact, it may be called a treatise on the ten and the twenty-two. The numbers from one to ten are said to symbolize the Spirit, Air, Water, Fire, Height, Depth, East, West, North, South. The twenty-two letters are divided into three Mother Letters, A, M, SH, referring to Air, Water, and Fire; seven double letters, B, G, D, K, P, R, Th, referring to the seven planets, etc.; and twelve simple letters, H, V, Z, Ch, T, Y, L, N, S, O, Tz, Q, referring to the twelve signs of the Zodiac, etc.”

**Figure 1. The Cube of Space, described in Sefer Yetzirah**



A plain and precise reading of the text of *Sefer Yetzirah* will allow one to construct the “Cube of Space” (see Figure 1,) a conceptualization of three dimensional space wherein the point of Origin is related to the Spirit, the Height-Depth axis to the Air, the East-West axis to Water, the North-South axis to Fire, six of the double letters individually to the Top, Bottom, East, West, North, and South faces of the cube, the remaining double letter to its interior, and the twelve simple letters to the twelve edges thereof.

I will not attempt to document the exact process by which the Kabbalistic diagram referred to as the “Tree of Life” was developed, but I wish to call attention to its earliest published form, Johann Reuchlin’s illustration for “*Porta Lucis*,” published in 1516, shown in Figure 2, and also to its two most fully developed forms in Judaism, that of Rabbi Isaac Luria (often called today by

Figure 2. Reuchlin’s Tree, c. 1516

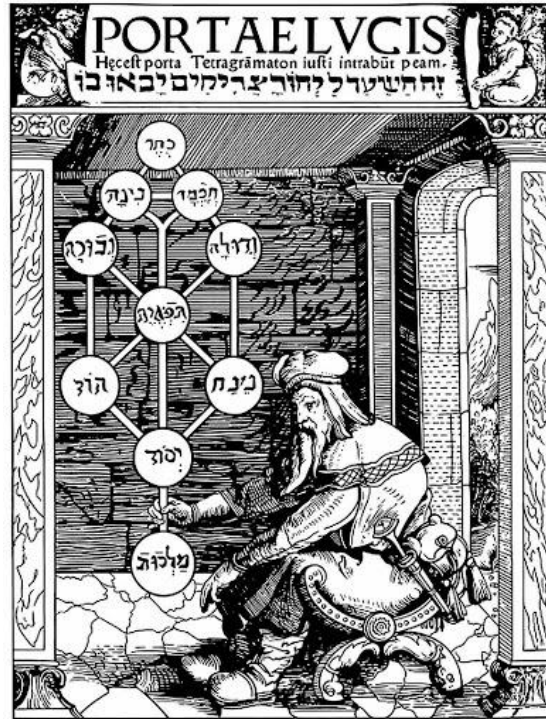
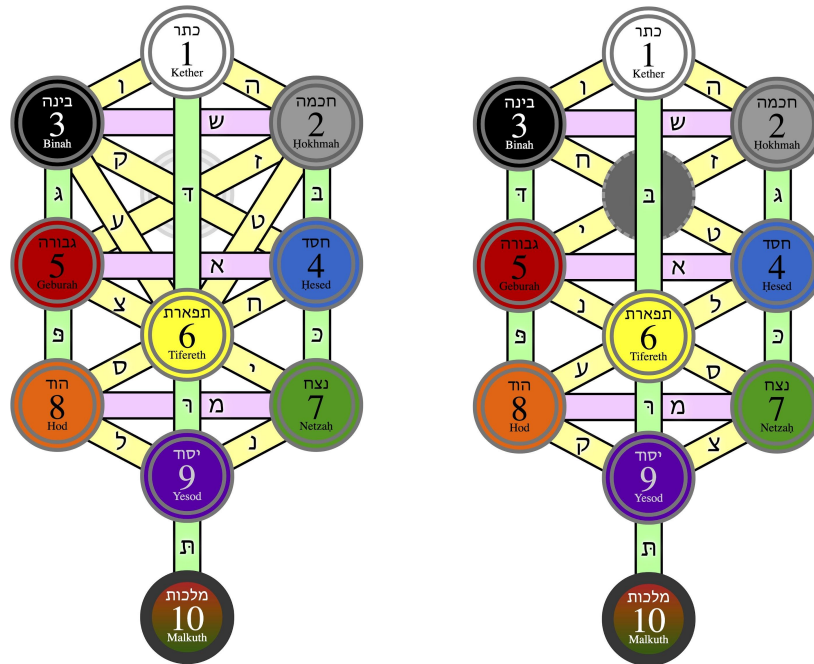


Figure 3. The ARI Tree (c. 1573) and the GRA Tree (c. 1884)



his Hebrew acronym, “The ARI”), and that of Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman (“The GRA,”) which are both shown in Figure 3. While the earlier form did not even have 22 paths connecting the ten Sephirot, each of the later forms of the Tree feature three horizontal paths, seven vertical paths, and twelve diagonal paths, infusing them with a similarity to the *Sefer Yetzirah’s* Cube of Space. Both of these highly renowned Rabbis chose to place the three mother letters on the horizontal paths, the seven double letters on the vertical paths, and the twelve simple letters on the diagonal paths.

**Figure 4. The Star (Tarot de Marseille)**



Mathers was not the first to correlate the 22 paths to the Trump cards of the Tarot, and he openly credits one of Lévi’s disciples for this association. This, however, provided Waite a foundation upon which to begin his work, and I have included the resulting correspondences in Table 1, which I have adjusted to use the more familiar Rider-Waite-Smith card names. This system had some less-than-desirable characteristics. For example, the letter Tsadi, which is attributed to Aquarius by *Sefer Yetzirah* is actually paired with the card entitled The Moon, even though the preceding card, The Star, clearly depicts the iconography of Aquarius, the water bearer, on its face. (See Figure 4)

**Table 1. Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers’ Foundation for Correspondences**

A	I - The Magician	<b>AIR</b>	L	XII - The Hanged Man	Libra
B	II - The High Priestess	<b>1st Planet</b>	M	XIII - Death	<b>WATER</b>
G	III - The Empress	<b>2nd Planet</b>	N	XIV - Temperance	Scorpio
D	IV - The Emperor	<b>3rd Planet</b>	S	XV - The Devil	Sagittarius
H	V - The Hierophant	Aries	O	XVI - The Tower	Capricorn
V	VI - The Lovers	Taurus	P	XVII - The Star	<b>5th Planet</b>
Z	VII - The Chariot	Gemini	TZ	XVIII - The Moon	Aquarius
CH	VIII - Justice	Cancer	Q	XIX - The Sun	Pisces
T	IX - The Hermit	Leo	R	XX - Judgement	<b>6th Planet</b>
I	X - Wheel of Fortune	Virgo	SH	0 - The Fool	<b>FIRE</b>
K	XI - Strength	<b>4th Planet</b>	TH	XXI - The World	<b>7th Planet</b>

The “*Cipher Manuscripts*,” the founding documents of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and the basis of their ritual and knowledge lectures were, it is claimed, obtained by Westcott in 1886 and deciphered by him in 1887. Folio 32 in this document presents a different set of associations, where the Fool is inserted at the beginning of the sequence. This pushes the remaining cards down by one, allowing The Star to line up with Tsadi. The manuscript gives its table of associations with the mother letters first, followed by the double letters, and concluding with the simple letters. I have re-arranged these into alphabetical order, and deciphered the corresponding card names, while attempting to leave indication of any stray or indistinguishable markings. The results of this can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. Golden Dawn Cipher Manuscript Tarot Correspondences**

A	I - 11 - Fool	<b>AIR</b>	L	VIII - 22 - Justice = X*	*Libra
B	☐ - 12 - Juggler	<b>Mercury</b>	M	XII~ - 23 - Hanged Man	<b>WATER</b>
G	II - 13 - High Priestess • π	<b>The Moon</b>	N	XIII - 24 - Death	Scorpio
D	III - 14 - Empress • η	<b>Venus</b>	S	XIV - 25 - Temperance	Sagittarius
H	IV - 15 - Emperor	Aries	O	XV - 25 - Devil	Capricorn
V	V - 16 - Hierophant	Taurus	P	XVI - 27 - Tower Struck by ⚡	☐ <b>Mars</b>
Z	VI - 17 - Lovers •• Gemini	Gemini	TZ	XVII - 28 - Star	Aquarius
CH	VII - 18 - Chariot	☐	Q	XVIII - 29 - Moon	Pisces
T	XI - 19 - Strength = VI_I*	*Leo	R	XIX - 30 - Sun	<b>The Sun</b>
I	IX - 20 - Prudence Hermit	Virgo	SH	XX - 31 - Judgment	<b>FIRE</b>
K	X - 21 - ☉ Rota Wheel	☐ <b>Jupiter</b>	TH	XXI - 32 - The World	<b>Saturn</b>

\* A set of brackets and crossed arrows are shown between these four signs and numerals in the manuscript.

It is curious that the Fool is given the first roman numeral, while the Magician, here called the Juggler, is lacking a distinct numeral. (There is something given in that position in the manuscript, but I cannot tell if it is a crossed numeral or some other marking.)

Mathers presumably came to terms with the associations in Westcott’s deciphered manuscript, as something very close to these became the official associations taught in the Golden Dawn knowledge lectures.

As mentioned earlier, Waite shows disagreement with Lévi's system of associations. It is likely his Golden Dawn training and Mathers' own changing views which incited Waite's disdain for Lévi's system. The Cipher Manuscript has a set of arrows drawn on it which indicate an exchange between astrological signs and an extra set of Numerals for the Strength and Justice cards. The extra set of numerals were included in the Cipher Manuscript as it was originally written, but it is unclear whether the arrows and brackets were original or drawn in at some later time. In designing the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, Waite goes one step further than the manuscript, and actually renumbers the Strength card to VIII rather than XI, and Justice to XI rather than VIII, officially exchanging their sequence in the deck, a change that is reflected in numerous subsequent decks down to the present time.

**Table 3. Arthur Edward Waite's Tarot Correspondences**

A	0 - The Fool	<b>AIR</b>	L	XI - Justice (old VIII)	Libra
B	I - The Magician	<b>Mercury</b>	M	XII - The Hanged Man	<b>WATER</b>
G	II - The High Priestess	<b>The Moon</b>	N	XIII - Death	Scorpio
D	III - The Empress	<b>Venus</b>	S	XIV - Temperance	Sagittarius
H	IV - The Emperor	Aries	O	XV - The Devil	Capricorn
V	V - The Hierophant	Taurus	P	XVI - The Tower	<b>Mars</b>
Z	VI - The Lovers	Gemini	TZ	XVII - The Star	Aquarius
CH	VII - The Chariot	Cancer	Q	XVIII - The Moon	Pisces
T	VIII - Strength (old XI)	Leo	R	XIX - The Sun	<b>The Sun</b>
I	IX - The Hermit	Virgo	SH	XX - Judgement	<b>FIRE</b>
K	X - Wheel of Fortune	<b>Jupiter</b>	TH	XXI - The World	<b>Saturn</b>

This system of associations, listed in Table 3, has many pleasing qualities. The Star lines up with Tsadi, bringing the depiction of Aquarius into alignment. Owing to the swap between Justice and Strength, Leo now lines up with Strength, which depicts a Lion, and Libra lines up with Justice, which depicts a set of Scales.

The Devil card's correspondence with Capricorn is also a pleasing association, albeit one which requires some explanation. The Devil in medieval decks such as the Tarot de Marseille was depicted standing on a pedestal over two figures bound in chains, with antlers and ears like a deer, and long tails. The Devil also had antlers, as well as wings

like a dragon, female breasts, a face on its belly, eyes on its knees, and male genitalia. In a nod to Lévi, Waite replaced this traditional Devil figure with an adaptation of Lévi's Sabbatic Goat illustration from the frontispieces of his 1854 book *"Dogme et Rituel."* Lévi describes the image in his own words as follows:

"The goat on the frontispiece carries the sign of the pentagram on the forehead, with one point at the top, a symbol of light, his two hands forming the sign of hermetism, the one pointing up to the white moon of Chesed, the other pointing down to the black one of Geburah. This sign expresses the perfect harmony of mercy with justice. His one arm is female, the other male like the ones of the androgyn of Khunrath, the attributes of which we had to unite with those of our goat because he is one and the same symbol. The flame of intelligence shining between his horns is the magic light of the universal balance, the image of the soul elevated above matter, as the flame, whilst being tied to matter, shines above it. The beast's head expresses the horror of the sinner, whose materially acting, solely responsible part has to bear the punishment exclusively; because the soul is insensitive according to its nature and can only suffer when it materializes. The rod standing instead of genitals symbolizes eternal life, the body covered with scales, the water, the semi-circle above it, the atmosphere, the feathers following above, the volatile. Humanity is represented by the two breasts and the androgyn arms of this sphinx of the occult sciences."

By the time Waite was designing his deck, this illustration by Lévi had become popularly associated with Baphomet, a name found in trial manuscripts from 1307, during the Papal Inquisition against the Knights Templar, and which referred to an idol or deity the Templars were accused of worshipping.

In astrology, Capricorn was traditionally depicted by a horned sea-goat, probably originally associated with the Sumerian deity Enki. That Capricorn is a mixture of a land and sea animal, that The Devil card had already depicted a union of opposing attributes, and that Lévi's illustration was specifically a Goat, were sufficient justifications for Waite to make this symbolic advancement.

The Death card's association with Scorpio is also somewhat pleasing, if only for its resonance with a passage in the Christian Greek scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:55-56:

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?  
The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

At a first glance, The Sun card aligning with The Sun as a Planet is also a good match. However, there are a number of problems here. First, it appears that Golden Dawn forced the planetary assignments into their system arbitrarily. Even in the *Cipher Manuscript*, the planets associated with K and P are scribbled out and re-written next to their original positions, perhaps evidence that the author of the *Cipher Manuscripts* was still indecisive about the proper associations as it was being penned.

The Appendix of Don Karr's 2019 edition of "*Notes on Editions of 'Sefer Yetzirah' in English*" (<https://www.themathesontrust.org/library/book-of-formation-sefer-yetzirah>) which is available online thanks to The Matheson Trust For the Study of Comparative Religion, gives an analysis of 16 different editions of the text. Ten of them, including some of the earliest manuscripts, are in agreement with the following order:

B=Saturn, G=Jupiter, D=Mars, K=Sun, P=Venus, R=Mercury, Th=Moon.

Four editions, including Westcott's own, give the following order:

B=Moon, G=Mars, D=Sun, K=Venus, P=Mercury, R=Saturn, Th=Jupiter.

Westcott's edition gives a different sequence in the body of Chapter 4, however, it doesn't explicitly correlate them to each letter at that time, as it does in the Supplement to Chapter 4, from where the above sequence is drawn. The body of Chapter 4 lists them as follows:

Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars.

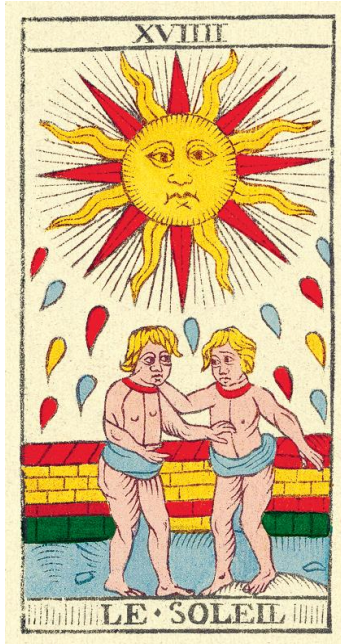
There are two outlying manuscripts in Karr's analysis, neither of which matches any of the above sequences, nor each other. One of those outliers is the The Golden Dawn's manuscript—a version of the text which has been specifically altered to conform with The Golden Dawn's teachings, and uses the same sequence given in the *Cipher Manuscripts*:

B=Mercury, G=Moon, D=Venus, K=Jupiter, P=Mars, R=Sun, Th=Saturn.

It can be observed that the only instance in which The Sun lines up with the letter Resh is through the forceful editing of a centuries-old source text. By drawing your attention to the Tarot de Marseille version of this card (See Figure 5), I would also like to point out another problem created by associating it to one of the double letters.



**Figure 5. The Sun  
(Tarot de Marseille)**



The Tarot de Marseille clearly depicts the astrological symbol of Gemini, the Twins, on the card labeled The Sun.

If a card called “The Star” is assigned to Aquarius, and a card called “The Moon” is assigned to Pisces (we will address this shortly, as it is also problematic,) and The Sun depicts the Twins on it, it starts to make less sense to assign it to the letter Resh, especially if the Sun was forced onto that letter, rather than being present in the text of *Sefer Yetzirah*.

Waite obscured this discrepancy by removing the twins from the card, and replacing them with a lone child, triumphantly riding on a horse, bearing a red banner.

Waite and The Golden Dawn’s methodology has a logical inconsistency to it; in one case, they swapped the cards (Strength and Justice), and in another similar case, they resorted to altering the source-text of *Sefer Yetzirah* and the ancient attributions of the Hebrew letters themselves.

It is easier for us today, historically speaking, to see that the order of the Trumps was not always so rigidly defined. Other decks which are cousins to the Tarot de Marseille, such as Tarocco Bolognese (dating to around 1459), have a similar but slightly different sequence to them. The fact that several decks share the same set of trumps but with a different sequence gives us reason to speculate that perhaps the sequence we are familiar with is not what was first intended by the hands that incorporated astrological symbolism into the artwork to begin with.

What if we take basically the same task undertaken by the framers of the Golden Dawn and Waite, and attempt to accomplish it with a consistent approach, scrupulously maintaining the associations given in *Sefer Yetzirah*, and instead, shuffling the cards, as it were, until we find the best solution? Can meaningful and strong Elemental, Planetary and Zodiacal correlations be found, without resorting to arbitrary assignments or obfuscation of mismatched material? Whether or not a correlation to Kabbalah was ever intended by the Tarot artists, and specific theories about how and why the symbolism got associated with the cards to begin with are possible to explore, but I will leave those for another time to discuss. Let us for now presume that the endeavor is worthy, and see if we can achieve a satisfactory result.

Let us begin by examining the Tarot de Marseille for other astrological symbolism, to see what additional clues can be found. The Lovers features Cupid wielding a bow and arrow. The Archer is the symbol of Sagittarius. This could be a match. The Moon depicts a Lobster, which was a common medieval emblem of Cancer (See Figure 7,) making a total of eight acceptable matches so far. (See Table 4)

Figure 6. The Lovers and The Moon (Tarot de Marseille)

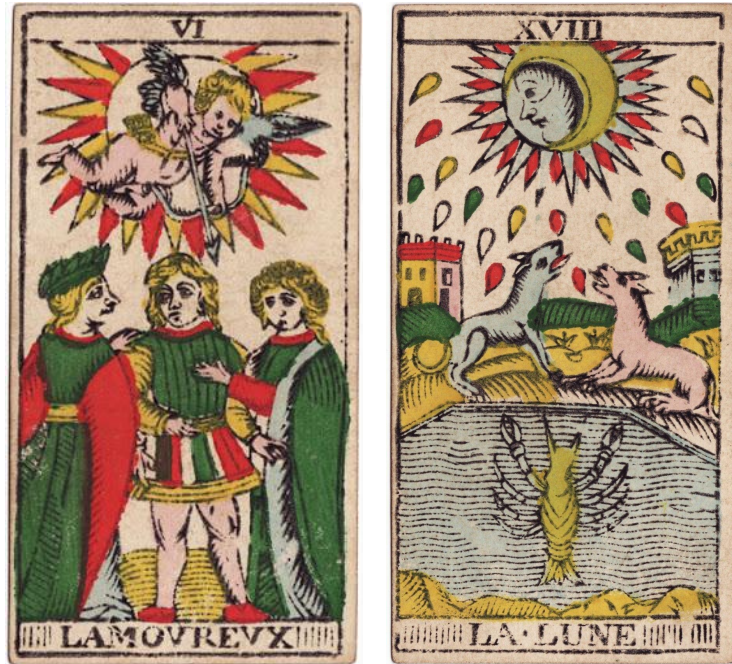


Figure 7. A 16th century German woodcut depicting the twelve Zodiac signs.





I would like to propose one more match that I think is clear enough to demonstrate.

The simplified Pisces symbol is supposed to represent two fish, connected together, yet facing opposite directions:

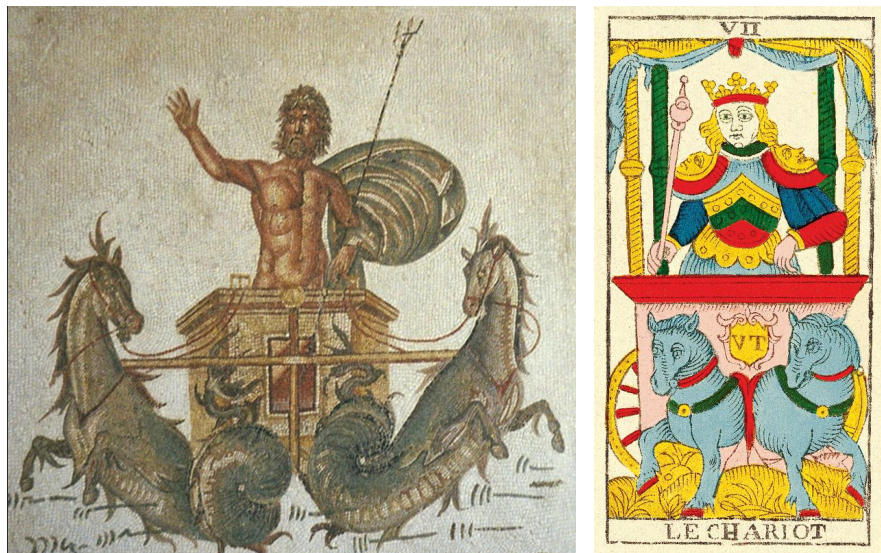


This has a visual similarity with the two horses yoked together on the front of The Chariot. I'd like to propose that these were not actually intended to be horses, but Hippocampus; half-horse, half-fish, creatures pulling Poseidon's Chariot. Some variants of the Tarot de Marseille even show composite creatures with human faces pulling the Chariot. Because of this, Waite chose to have them depicted as Egyptian Sphinxes. Compare the Pisces symbol and the Tarot de

**Table 4. Surface-Level Zodiac Imagery in Tarot de Marseille**

Aries	Ram	
Taurus	Bull	
Gemini	Twins	The Sun
Cancer	Lobster	The Moon
Leo	Lion	Strength
Virgo	Maiden with Harvest	
Libra	Scales	Justice
Scorpio	Scorpion	Death
Sagittarius	Archer	The Lovers
Capricorn	Goat-Fish	The Devil
Aquarius	Water-Bearer	The Star
Pisces	Two Fish on a String	

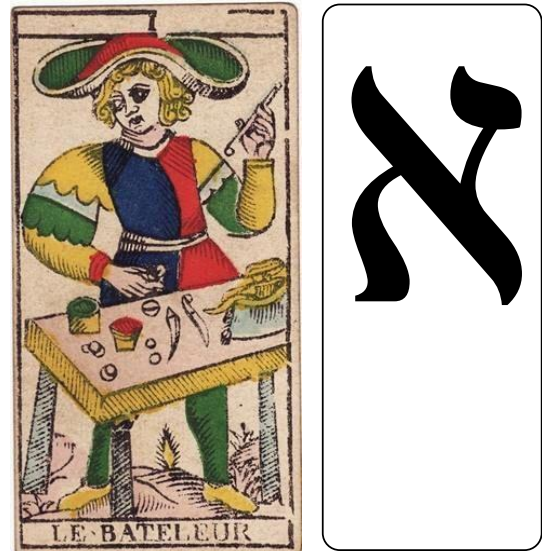
**Figure 8. A mosaic of the Chariot of Poseidon dating from the imperial Roman period (Left), and The Chariot, Tarot de Marseille (Right)**



Marseille Chariot card to the mosaic of Poseidon’s Chariot in Figure 8 which is housed at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis and dates from the imperial Roman period.

Since the placement of the Fool on Aleph was motivated by a desire to shift the cards to a more pleasing arrangement, and since by our rules, we may shuffle the cards as much as necessary, I advocate a return to the correspondence between The Magician and Aleph, supported by the oft-noted connection between the shape of the letter Aleph itself and the Magician’s posture in the Tarot de Marseille (See Figure 9.) It is interesting that Wait chose to reverse the Magician’s arms, potentially in an effort to obscure this connection.

**Figure 9. Aleph and the Magician**



Mars and Venus are the archetypal Male and Female symbols, so I am going to tentatively allocate the Emperor and Empress to them, and the “Tower Struck by Lightning” can be allocated to Jupiter, the God of Thunder. We have now placed well over half of the trump cards. Table 5 shows our progress so far.

**Table 5. Starting Point for a Rectified Tarot**

A	The Magician	<b>AIR</b>	L	Justice	Libra
B		<b>Saturn</b>	M		<b>WATER</b>
G	The Tower	<b>Jupiter</b>	N	Death	Scorpio
D	The Emperor	<b>Mars</b>	S	The Lovers	Sagittarius
H		Aries	O	The Devil	Capricorn
V		Taurus	P	The Empress	<b>Venus</b>
Z	The Sun	Gemini	TZ	The Star	Aquarius
CH	The Moon	Cancer	Q	The Chariot	Pisces
T	Strength	Leo	R		<b>Mercury</b>
I		Virgo	SH		<b>FIRE</b>
K		<b>The Sun</b>	TH		<b>The Moon</b>

At this point, the remaining trumps are: The Fool, The High Priestess, The Hierophant, The Hermit, Wheel of Fortune, Hanged Man, Temperance, Judgement, and The World.

While investigating The Hermit, I discovered something rather surprising. Upon first glance, the Tarot de Marseille version of The Hermit doesn't seem too surprising. An old man with a walking staff holding a lantern, just like the Rider-Waite-Smith version of the same. Compare, however, to the Visconti Tarot, and there is a striking difference. The object in the old man's hand is an hourglass, not a lantern. Further comparison to Le tarot dit de Charles VI shows an intermediate state between the clear Hourglass and what seems to be a lantern. It seems likely that a misinterpretation of notches indicating the narrow part of an hourglass evolved into light-rays when certain cards were colored.

**Figure 10. The Hermit from Tarot de Marseille (Left), Tarot dit de Charles VI (Center), and Cary-Yale Visconti (Right)**



With his proper identity as Father Time revealed, it is clear that the Hermit should be allocated to Saturn, whose Greek equivalent is Cronus. As Time, with perfect hindsight and Wisdom, I would agree with Lévi that he is certainly well-qualified to serve double duty as Prudence. (The artist behind the 15th century Italian so-called Mantegna engravings seemed to be in agreement with this association, but as they are slightly off-topic, I will leave it to the reader to examine these if curious.)

I will admit that the remaining associations beyond this point are not as firm as those presented thus far, but I will make a case for what I believe to be the best system.

Temperance, Fortitude (Strength), Prudence (The Hermit), and Justice, are termed the four cardinal virtues. There is no shortage of reference material to see how they have been depicted in medieval art and classical architecture. The Temperance, Strength, and Justice cards featured in Tarot de Marseille decks are entirely standard in their appearance. Temperance is a winged maiden, diluting a jug of wine with water. We have yet to find a match for Virgo, who is also supposed to be depicted as a maiden (a young woman, not necessarily a virgin), except that she should be holding a sheaf of wheat, representative of harvest time. For lack of a better match, one might be tempted to place Temperance in this position. One who is more familiar with the highly embellished Rider-Waite-Smith version of the Wheel of Fortune may be put at a disadvantage here due to the unnecessary inclusion of the four tetramorphic creatures in the corners of the card. The tetramorphic creatures are themselves the symbols of Leo, Taurus, Aquarius, and Scorpio, which would seem to place this card outside of the role of representing a single Zodiac sign. The Tarot de Marseille, however, reveals that this card is no more than a depiction of the wheel belonging to Lady Fortuna. Fortuna, whose Greek equivalent was Tyche, is often depicted with one hand on a ship's rudder, and the other bearing a cornucopia or some ears of grain. She is associated with the bounty of the soil and the fruitfulness of women, and may be properly assigned to Virgo.

Mercury is considered the messenger of the Gods. The planet Mercury was given its name because of its apparent behavior in the sky. Being closest to the Sun its orbit is shorter than that of earth. Because of this, it goes retrograde three times a year, meaning that it passes the earth and appears to travel backwards in the sky from our viewpoint. To this position I allocate The Fool. I'll call your attention back to Mathers' pre-Golden Dawn system, where it held the penultimate position in the alphabet, as was the case in Lévi, Etteilla, and Papus' Tarot systems as well. In moving it just one position before that, I'd like to think I am not making too much of a leap. I find the Rider-Waite-Smith artwork for the Fool to be particularly well-suited for this association, as it seems to properly represent the attributes of the youthful Mercury. Although he is not drawn with winged shoes, I can easily imagine him setting foot off of the precipice and taking flight.

We have three pairs left. Two elements—Fire and Water, two planets—the Sun and the Moon, and two Zodiac signs—Aries and Taurus.

The World card in the Tarot de Marseille is depicted with the four tetramorphic creatures, one in each corner. This is also true in the Rider-Waite-Smith version of the card. Unlike the Wheel of Fortune, however, it is an original feature of the card, and may be used to rule out The World as a depiction of one of the twelve Zodiac signs.



We are left with the remaining candidates for Zodiac-associated cards: The High Priestess, the Hierophant, the Hanged Man and Judgement. The High Priestess and Hierophant are a coupled pair, and in the Tarot de Marseille are called the Popess and the Pope. This means they should belong to the same level of classification. One of them cannot be a Planet while the other is an Element, for example. I cannot think of any conceivable way that the Hanged Man or Judgement would make sense for either Aries, the Ram, or Taurus, the Bull. Therefore, by process of elimination, we can conclude that The High Priestess and the Hierophant are the remaining two Zodiac signs. We will decide which is Aries and which is Taurus at a later point.

The next task is to match Fire, Water, the Sun and the Moon, from the remaining cards: The Hanged Man, Judgement, Temperance, and the World.

In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the three mother letters are those from which everything else is created. Fire and Water are primal forces, there from the beginning of creation, but the Sun and the Moon are specific creations.

The Hebrew Word most often translated “The World” is ha-Olam, which is somewhat equivalent to the Greek word Cosmos. It does not refer to this planet earth, but rather, to the vastness of time and space. The term ha-Olam can be translated as “the Age” (an era or aeon), or even as the Universe. The reason Earth, the fourth classical element, is not represented amongst the mother letters, is because the Torah begins with the spirit (wind) of God hovering over the face of the deep (waters.) The dry land is separated out from the waters later. The primordial waters are therefore understood to have contained earth within them. *Sefer Yetzirah*, Chapter 3, paragraph 2 says, “The nature of the heavens is fire, the nature of air is wind [ruach], the nature of earth is water.” I think this concept is sufficient to demonstrate that The World is the proper card to be associated with Water.

The Tarot de Marseille and Rider-Waite-Smith decks both depict the Judgement card as an Angel, descending from Heaven, sounding the blast of the last Trumpet, calling forth the dead from their graves in resurrection. If The World represents the primordial Waters at the beginning of creation, Judgement represents the ultimate wrapping-up scene of this existence, the heavenly hope for the human Soul. The remaining mother letter, Aleph, the Magician, stands between them, representative of the human being in the fullness of life, with one arm raised to heaven, and the other pointing down to the earth.

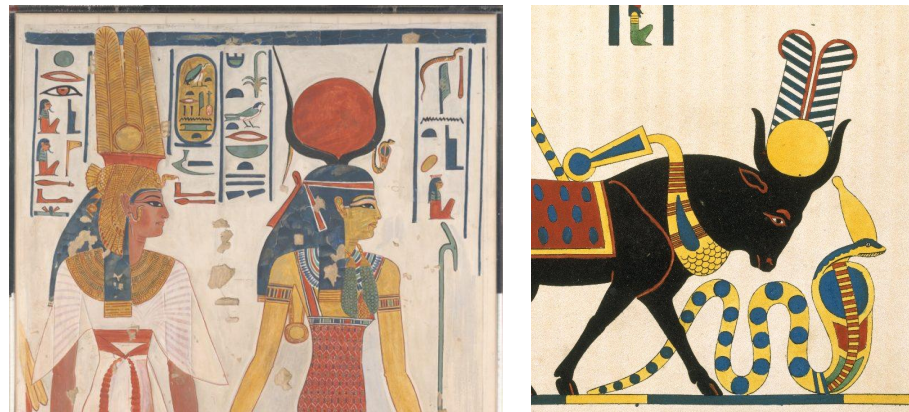
Just two cards remain, Temperance and the Hanged Man. The Hanged Man's body is postured in an obvious Alchemical symbol of Sulphur, typifying masculinity, dryness and heat. Alchemy is a subject that will be touched on more in a future article. More importantly, the Hanged Man represents the death and resurrection of the Sun, as understood by the ancients, and represented by solar deities in the pantheons of many cultures. His peaceful face shows no fear, as he descends below the horizon, knowing that he will rise again another day. The Visconti version of the card even contains subtle flames surrounding his torso and shoulders.

Temperance is seen calibrating the proportions of water and wine. This typifies the role of the Moon in governing over the waters of the seas and the blood of the menstrual cycle. Wine is frequently employed as a symbol for blood, such as in the Jewish Passover Seder, where ten drops of wine are used to represent the plagues of the Exodus story.

With all the Planets and Elements in order, the only matter left to be determined is which of the High Priestess or Hierophant is Aries and which is Taurus? In this one case, I will turn to the Rider-Waite-Smith artwork for some insight.

The High Priestess is identifiable by her crown, and by the pillars which flank her, as a depiction of the Egyptian Goddess Isis. Egyptology was still relatively young during the time period in which the Golden Dawn flourished, and invoking Egyptian

**Figure 11. Nefertiti being led by Isis (Left), Metropolitan Museum of Art; Apis, Taureau Consacré a la Lune, N372.2, Brooklyn Museum (Right)**



motifs was very fashionable. Greeks and Romans had anciently mistaken Isis's iconography for that of a Moon goddess, and this misunderstanding of Isis was carried down into the teachings of the Golden Dawn. Her crown, in actuality, is a solar disc between a pair of cow horns, and she is the mother of the Apis Bull (See Figure 11.). Once the facts of this Goddess are known, its resemblance to the Taurus symbol is very striking.

Isis' mate would be Osiris, Egyptian Lord of the Underworld and Judge of the Dead,



who is usually depicted wielding a shepherd's crook and a flail, and is sometimes depicted with a pair of Ram's Horns on his head (See Figure 12.)

I will admit that a connection linking the Ram and Bull with the most popular divine couple in the Egyptian Pantheon is merely a happy accident. The Tarocco Bolognese, a close cousin to the Tarot deck, is lacking the distinct cards of Pope, Popess, Emperor, and Empress, having in their place, "the four Moors." So, being amongst the most malleable of the trumps, perhaps some creativity is admissible to fill this symbolic void.

Before the history of the Tarot was traced by modern historians, it was popularly imagined to have been the hieroglyphic writings of Thoth disguised as an innocent deck of playing cards. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn actively courted this fantasy, and Egyptian motifs were incorporated into the Rider-Waite-Smith deck for this reason. Perhaps, therefore, it is only in proper keeping with the Spirit of Tarot that I embrace the identities of these two cards as being those of Osiris and Isis. It is quite simply too fortuitous and enticing of a match to pass up.

**Figure 12. Osiris with Ram's Horns. A 26th Dynasty stone representation Of the awakening of Osiris, in the Egyptian Museum at Cairo.**



Let us set aside Egyptomania for a moment, though, to take a more realistic and historical look at these two cards. If it was a Jew who first implanted the Elemental, Planetary, and Zodiacal symbolism of *Sefer Yetzirah* into the Tarot, the Pope card would have almost certainly symbolized the High Priest of the Temple at Jerusalem, and would only have been veiled in the trappings of Catholicism as a means to avoid persecution. It is of note that the Tarot seems to contain no overtly religious teachings or figures, aside from the Resurrection of the dead depicted on the Judgement card, a concept also present in Judaism. Lacking are the images of the Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints which one would expect from a deck loaded with Catholic symbolism. It is this absence which I think gives the Jewish Kabbalistic theory grounds for consideration.

The presence of a Popess card is puzzling, as there is no such position in Catholicism. There is a legend of a Pope Joan who reigned for a few years during the Middle Ages, a

story which dates to the 13th century and was widely spread throughout Europe. There were also no females appointed to the Priesthood during the Temple period.

It is through mystical texts such as the *Sefer Yetzirah* and the *Zohar* that the concept of a Divine Feminine, represented in the Sephirot of Binah and Malkuth, regained a place in Jewish thought. In this way, the Popess card seems strangely appropriate to the Kabbalistic theory of the Tarot. One might speculate that perhaps these two cards were once intended to represent Isaac and Rebekah, and the Solar Twins, to represent Jacob and Esau, but without any better evidence, and for the sake of whimsy, I choose to keep Osiris and Isis.

We have now arrived at the complete Rectified Tarot, given in Table 6, along with my proposed updates to card names. I offer this system to be used, further developed or illustrated by anyone who wishes to adopt or criticize it.

**Table 6. The Day Rectified Tarot. (Traditional names are given in parenthesis for clarity.)**

A	1 - The Performer (Magician)	<b>AIR</b>	L	30 - Justice	<i>Libra</i>
B	2 - The Old Man / Prudence	<b>Saturn</b>	M	40 - The World	<b>WATER</b>
G	3 - The Lightning-Struck Tower	<b>Jupiter</b>	N	50 - Death	<i>Scorpio</i>
D	4 - The Emperor	<b>Mars</b>	S	60 - Temptation (The Lovers)	<i>Sagittarius</i>
H	5 - Osiris, High Priest (Pope)	<i>Aries</i>	O	70 - The Devil	<i>Capricorn</i>
V	6 - Isis, High Priestess (Popess)	<i>Taurus</i>	P	80 - The Empress	<b>Venus</b>
Z	7 - Solar Twins (The Sun)	<i>Gemini</i>	TZ	90 - The Star	<i>Aquarius</i>
CH	8 - High Tide (The Moon)	<i>Cancer</i>	Q	100 - The Chariot	<i>Pisces</i>
T	9 - Fortitude (Strength)	<i>Leo</i>	R	200 - The Fool	<b>Mercury</b>
I	10 - Fortune (The Wheel)	<i>Virgo</i>	SH	300 - The Trumpet	<b>FIRE</b>
K	20 - The Hanged-Man	<b>Sun</b>	TH	400 - Temperance	<b>Moon</b>

*This concludes Part I.*

*Look for: Part II - The Wheels.*

*Please see [zebby.org/tarot](http://zebby.org/tarot) for further information about the Rectified Tarot.*

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