

# CONFLUENCE OF THE THREE GREAT SYSTEMS

by Christine Payne-Towler

In this essay we will examine the most esoteric, interior architecture that connects Tarot to the historical stream of Mystery School teachings passed down and grafted together from most ancient times. We will compare and contrast the details of the most ancient Babylonian astrology model, the Hebrew Mysteries of Kabbalah, its Pythagorean adaptation in Greece, the Ari redaction of the Sephir Yetzirah (which changed the form of the paths and settled the Planetary Governors upon the Sephiroth), and Athanasius Kircher's resulting efforts to redefine the paths and the letters upon them. So this "confluence" to which I am referring is the result of three thousand years of ancient lore, refined in the fires of the European Renaissance.



WHEEL OF FORTUNE

For those of you not conversant with occultism, I recommend that you read the essays on the Minor Arcana, the Kabbalah and the Gnostics before you start into this essay. It also would help to know enough about astrology to follow a discussion about relations between the planets and the signs.

Nevertheless, I urge all interested parties to read this anyway, whether you understand it or not, and keep coming back to it until you can

follow right along. This essay contains the key to it all.

Once we can grasp the idea that the Arcana of Tarot have been organized around a blend of Hebrew Kabbalist astro-number theory and Pythagorean sacred geometry, we can appreciate what the Renaissance Rosicrucians might have seen in the Tarot-- flash cards for drilling on the curriculum of a Hermetic University course of study.



X. THE SPHINX  
WHEEL OF FORTUNE  
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No such university could exist in public by Kircher's lifetime, which spanned much of the 1600s. The Church had forbidden the universities from teaching the subject of astrology, the last trace of the ancient Mysteries, by the fourteenth century. Only the Secret Societies were keeping the ancient lore alive, and in some generations, there were only a few isolated scholars to pass it along. Luckily for us all, among them were a few truly enlightened members of the clergy, who used their privileged positions, excellent educations, and access to Church archives to study and illuminate the teachings of the ancients. Athanasius Kircher was one of those (for more on Kircher, see the essay "Kabbalah/Cabbalah").



The Tarot, like all esoteric paradigms before it, outlines the Grand Plan, an overview of life at every level, with all its related mystical arts and sciences. As it has come down to us from history, we can see clearly how Tarot embodies the confluence of astrology/ Kabbalah/ number mysteries of antiquity. The goal of these schools was to redeem the soul of humanity after its fall from grace into eros, returning us to our primordial wholeness and immortality. Therefore we should expect to see a healthy trace of the Mystery School agenda still shining through the Tarot, despite its many superficial permutations in the last few centuries. Given what we now know about history, it would be more surprising if such values could not be found in the Tarot than if they could!

The Major Arcana, these twenty-two sophisticated and multileveled symbolic packages, have more often than not been presented in an order that parallels the numerical values of the Hebrew alphabet. Tables found in the first chapter of Stuart Kaplan's *Encyclopedia of Tarot* (Volume 1) confirm that since at least the mid-18th century, the Major Arcana have been publicly associated with the Hebrew alphanumeric system on a card-for-letter basis. Few people realize that this body of correspondences carries within it several other symbolic formations that would be familiar to a Renaissance Hermetic syncretist. These secondary internal structures link the Arcana to the Hebrew Kabbalah, the Seven Planetary Governors, the Hermetic Caduceus, Pythagoras' Tetractys and the Astronomical Wheel of the Year. In the essay on the Minor Arcana, some of those themes were taken up to explain the internal structure of the suit cards. In this essay, we will take on related

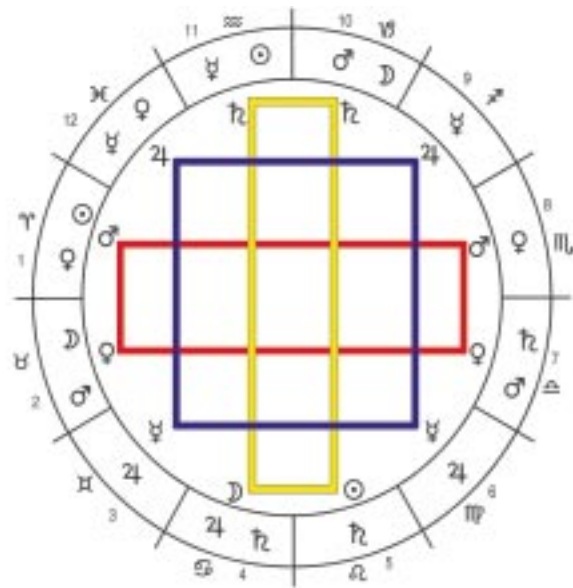
themes to be found within the Major Arcana.

## Internalized Structures of Tarot

### • *Astrological Correspondences*

The first internal configuration to examine is the ancient astrological underpinning which serves as the foundation for Hebrew Kabbalah, Pythagorean Numerology and Christian Cabbalah of the Renaissance, much less the relatively recent Tarot. If you were a Renaissance magus, you would have this model internalized at the foundation of your learning.

To see how astrology relates to the Minor Arcana, see "The Minor Arcana" essay. The Hebrew letters link astrology to the Major Arcana, which then assume the role of pathways between the Sephiroth of the Kabbalah/ Cabbalah Tree. We will see these correlations further investigated when we return to discussing the Tree later in this essay.



Wheel of the Zodiac



First, witness the ancient figure of the Planetary Rulerships of the Signs, showing the Seven Planetary Governors apportioned around the Wheel of the Zodiac. The essentially Gnostic character of this diagram is revealed by the fact that starting from Aquarius and working sunwise to Cancer you see illustrated the descent of the soul from heaven to earth, picking up the “planetary metals” from the Archons as it sinks to physical Earth. (This corresponds directly with the descending motion on the left-hand side of the Wheel of Fortune in most Tarots.) Then starting with Leo at the bottom and working sunwise back up to Capricorn, you see the regeneration of man, the soul's repayment of his debt to the Archons, who then liberate him to return to eternity on the rising motion of the right side of the Wheel. When lined up thus, we see the “Ladder of Lights” formed by the planets stacking up around the Sun. (Remember, when this diagram was created it was thought that the sun, moon and the other planets all revolved around the earth. Nowadays we can see this as a psychological model, where each ego thinks that the rest of life is revolving around it.)

These sign/planet correspondences have been in place since the time of Babylon (2200 BC). The fact that the axis of the diagram puts the midheaven/nadir axis on the cusps of Aquarius and Leo could indicate it was composed in the "Platonic month of Leo," 10800 BC to 8000 BC, as the vernal equinox precessed.

A friend with whom I have enjoyed sharing metaphysical speculations pointed out to me that in this rulership diagram, you can see not only the rulerships themselves, but also along the left diagonal bias you can see the pattern of "exaltations," while along the right diagonal

you see the pattern of "falls," as named in the ancient rulership relations. (Connecting the "detriments" makes a beautiful star in the center of the diagram.) I would never have seen this pattern if he had not mentioned it, because I don't use exaltations, detriments or falls in my astrological practice. He added that those same diagonal patterns prevail in astrological homeopathy as well, where the "exaltations" are thought of as the "sympathies" and the "falls" are seen as "antipathies," both to be used as remedies depending upon whether you want to strengthen a condition or disrupt it. C.C. Zain in the Brotherhood of Light teachings discusses this in his volume on medical astrology.

- *The Septenary*

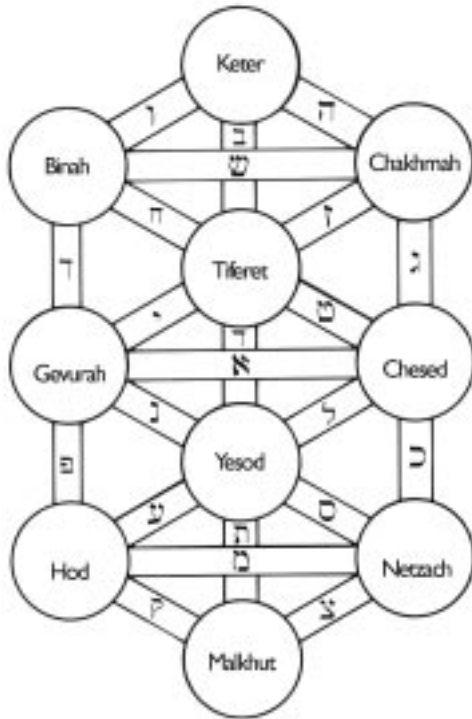
Another of these internal formations within the cards is the 7 by 3 division of the Major Arcana that expresses the three worlds paradigm within which the human soul must seek initiation to return to its original estate (see the essay on Gnosticism). Different modern Tarot teachers have highlighted this "three sevens" approach in which one sets aside the Fool card and arranges the rest in three horizontal rows of Arcana numbered 1-7, then 8-14, then 15-21. Since Papus's tome *The Tarot of the Bohemians* emerged, in which a great deal of space is given to this topic, and despite the fact that modern teachers may disagree on what values to attribute to these three septenaries (or seven triplicities), this internal symmetry is too compelling to ignore.

- *Numbers: The Decave*

Another internal esoteric structure to be found within the Major Arcana is the embedding of the ancient Mystery of the Decave into both the Major and the Minor Arcana (see the essay on the Minor Arcana as well). The divinity of







GRA TREE

A glance at page 30 of Aryeh Kaplan's great work *The Sephir Yetzirah* will illustrate the original ordering which the ancient Hebrews kept among themselves from ancient times, and which was recently reaffirmed in the 18th century by the Gra, also known as Rabbi Eliahu, Gaon of Vilna. This pattern is dictated very specifically in the *Sephir Yetzirah* text, with careful attention to detail.

We seldom see this form in modern occult literature or on Tarots of the last five centuries, however. This is because, from the 10th century AD forward, differing variants slowly crept into the tradition, some of which Kaplan suggests were released with deliberate errors to befuddle the ignorant.

In Kaplan's own words, "Since the Gra Version was considered the most authentic by the Kabbalists, this is the one that we have cho-

sen. . ." (p. xxiv). Because in this CD we are focusing intently upon the ancient tradition in relation to Tarot, we stand with Kaplan in taking this pattern as our baseline from which other patterns diverged over time.

Two modern decks have taken up the correspondences as outlined in Aryeh Kaplan's *The Sephir Yetzirah*. The first is El Gran Tarot Esoterico from Spain, and the second is the Tarot of the Ages, published in America. The Esoterico has the distinction of having been commissioned by cardmaker Fournier on the six hundredth anniversary of Tarot in Europe and has the look of an old Marseilles Tarot "with a twist." The Tarot of the Ages has Alexandrian-looking Major Arcana and fully illustrated Minors. They seem to have appeared unbeknownst to each other, the first in 1977, the second in 1988. One can think of these as our two truly Hebrew Tarots (see "The Spanish School").

More research is needed to "type" the details on the Marseilles-based Major Arcana of El Gran Tarot Esoterico, although they are intensely suggestive of the ancient Hebrew Goddess mythos as chronicled in Raphael Patai's wonderful book by that name. Both this deck's pedigree, and its exact correspondence to the ancient Hebrew astro-alphanumeric infrastructure, cement El Gran Tarot Esoterico in the Tarot canon as an authentic representative of the Hebrew Gnostic Tarot tradition, parallel in importance to the Alexandrian/Hermetic stream, the Etteilla decks or the Marseilles Tarots.

- *Christian Cabbalah: A New Set of Correspondences*

When the Ari (title of the Rabbi Isaac Luria, late 1500s) set out to make sense of the Zohar in light of the older, idealized Gra format, he



was attempting to explain to his followers how we humans had become trapped in our bodies, alienated from heaven and our original selves. This is the point when the planetary attributions of the Sephiroth become concrete, in response to the belief that the human soul is now caught in the karmic web woven around us by the planets. Now that the abyss has opened at Da'at, it is nearly impossible for the fallen and divided soul to return to the primordial state of the supernal triangle.

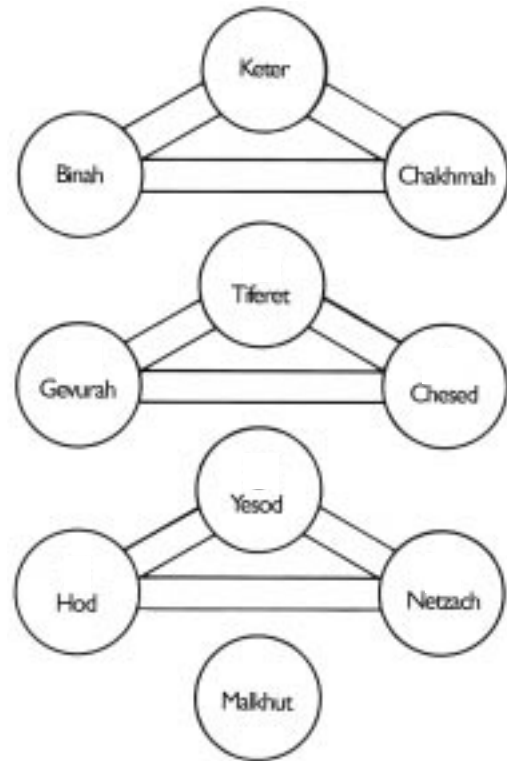
As Rabbi Luria speculated and studied the versions and explanations available to him, he was inspired to alter the paths on the Tree to reflect the whole creation's tragic "fall from grace" after the sin of Adam as detailed in Genesis. From his time forward, various asymmetries can be seen in the Tree diagram, as the later Hebrew philosophers grappled with the consequences of living in this imperfect world. They were also attempting to deal with considerations raised by the Zohar, a thirteenth century addition to the Kabbalah canon, which forced extensive adjustments to the original Sephir Yetzirah pattern (see the essay "Kabbalah/Cabbalah"). This new pattern was eventually responsible for the creation of Christian Cabbalah through the esoteric insight of Athanasius Kircher.

### Linking the Systems

In the following comparison of crucial Hermetic diagrams, we shall see how that shift on the Tree made possible the late Renaissance synthesis by Kircher. This was then handed down through the Secret Societies, appearing more visibly on the Tarot cards after the persecutions of the Church died down in the 18th century.

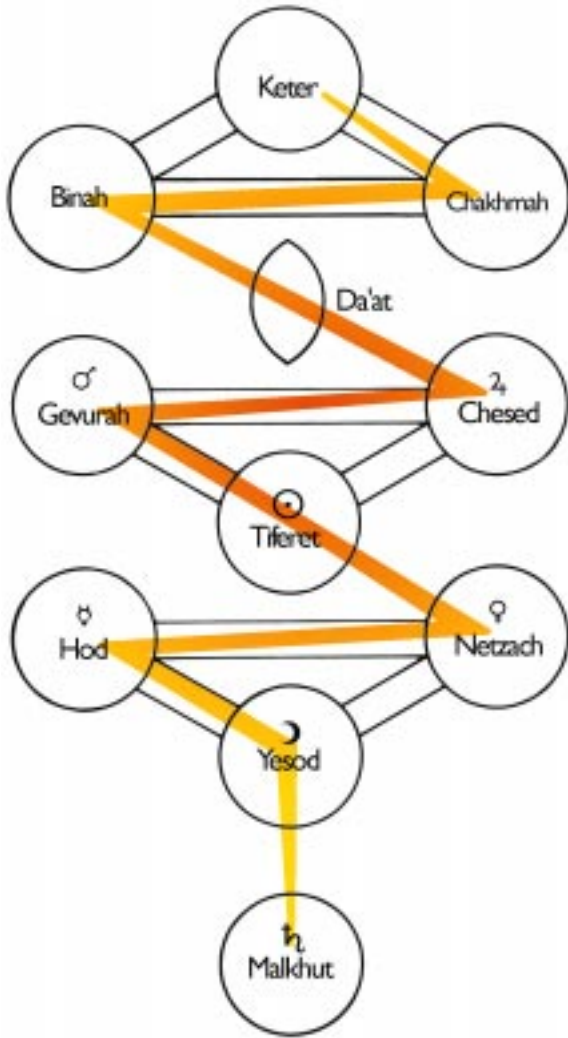
We know from the Gnostic myth (see essay on

Gnostics) that when the Shekhina is displaced from her original seat (at the heart spot in the Gra pattern), the upright heart and pelvic triangles turn downward, and Malkuth is shoved out on its own, below the others. In other words, the Shekhina takes residence in The World, Malkuth, and dwells with her creatures instead of the Creator. From the myth of the Matronit, we know that the depar



The Unfallen Human





Lightening Struck Tree

ture of the Divine Consort makes Jehovah cranky, and leads to difficult times for the people. The Hebrew nation had been celebrating the Sacred Marriage every Shabbat for thousands of years to assist in the reunification of the Goddess and the God, but the world was not mended yet.

No doubt mystics who contemplated this situation were looking for teachings and techniques to begin the process of mending

the breach. The problem mythologized by the fall of the Shekhina away from the Supernal Triangle corresponds to an ancient Creation moment when matter was externalized from spirit and the link between them was broken. A discontinuity broke the order of the emanations (the Sefhira), creating a hole called "Da'at" in the pattern of the Tree and dropping the Goddess out of heaven. How would a Renaissance Magi construct the solution?

### Piecing It Together

Compare and contrast the Wheel of the Year diagram with the Kircher Christian Cabbalah Tree diagram. They have a central theme in common, which is the ancient rulership pattern that links the Planets to the Signs in the Zodiac, as detailed above.

By looking back and forth between this rulership of the zodiac figure and the Kircher Christian Cabbalah Tree, you can see that the Tree diagram holds within it a wheel of Planetary Sefhira ranged around the Sun at Tifareth. Drawing a spoke between Venus and the Sun, and another from the Sun to Mars, links the same planetary pairs that are joined in the rulership diagram. (Mars and Venus together cover the rectangle of Aries/Scorpio/Taurus/Libra.) A similar spoke exists between Jupiter, Sun and Mercury on the Kaballah Tree (Jupiter and Mercury rule the Mutable Square in the rulership diagram).

The only unmatched correspondence between the Astrological Wheel and the Tifareth wheel is the fact that Saturn has been placed upon Binah in the Supernal Triangle instead of on the Middle Pillar, where it would complete the pattern. If it were placed either at Malkuth or at the throat station, you would then have Moon, Sun and Saturn all connected along the



Middle Pillar, just like they are up the center of the astro-rulership diagram. I submit that the post-Ari Kabbalah/Cabbalah stations of the Middle Ages Tree are constructed to reflect this ancient rulership diagram.

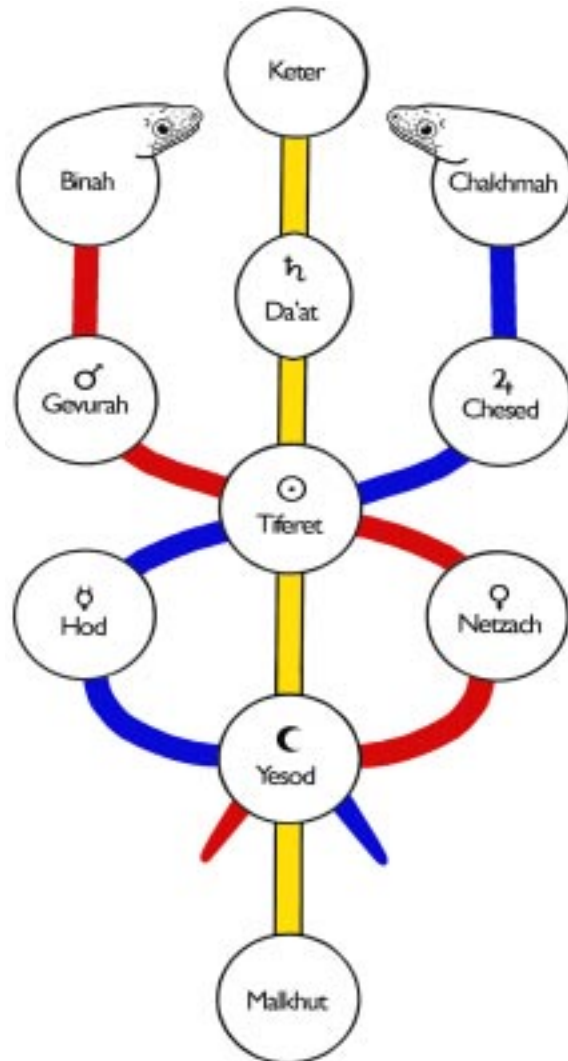
In light of the Hebrew tradition that precedes the appearance of the Renaissance magi, it seems obvious that the placement of Saturn on Binah is in error. Frances R. Yates, in her masterful tome *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (p. 100, footnote 3), indicates that this misattribution was made by Pico della Mirandola in the late 1400s, and it has apparently stood uncorrected since. (Following the logic of the Hebrew Kabbalists on this matter, we would find Saturn with the fallen Matronit at Malkuth, where she awaits redemption and restoration through a rise to Da'at—see "Kabbalah/Cabbalah").

### The Wand of Hermes

The relationship between the Tree and the Planets becomes even clearer when you then look at the Kabbalah Tree's links to the Wand of Hermes. This image, also known as the caduceus, is usually portrayed as a straight rod with two snakes twining around it. Occasionally the snakes are winged. This is yet another symbol, like the Tetractys, that served as an organizing principle in the ancient philosophers' thoughts. Looking at the caduceus with the Kabbalah Tree overlaid, we see Moses' rod and serpents with the serpents' bodies crossing at Tifareth, dividing the Tree into the Macroprosopus and the Microprosopus, the "upper face" and "lower face" of Deity, as developed by the Hebrews.

The Tifareth wheel, seen in purely Hebrew terms, shows a rotary movement just like that

on the Wheel of Fortune Arcanum due to the Mother Pillar's downward attraction toward Malkuth, the Earth, balanced by the Father Pillar's upward longing for Kether, the Unmanifest. But when the caduceus is overlaid, one sees a new and more sophisticated kind of movement, more suitable to express the interplay of yin and yang around the center



HERMETIC CADEUCEUS ON THE TREE OF LIFE



pole of androgyny (again, made up of Malkuth, Moon, Sun, Saturn and Kether). The two complimentary energies do not remain separated, each on their own pillar, but intertwine across the hub of Tifareth. The top of the Father Pillar is the head of the yang serpent, whose tail wraps around Hod to end in Malkuth, while the top of the Mother is the head of the yin serpent, who wraps around Netzach to end at Malkuth.

Each serpent is unique in its Supernal Triangle origins, but they each show seemingly opposite characteristics in their material extension at the bottom of the Tree. This pattern portrays the inverse reflection between "above" and "below," the mirror-image effect that happens when the soul falls "through the looking glass" from supernal or eternal reality into the material or reflected world, or inversely, rises up to transcend the ego and merges with Higher Self. The caduceus, symbol of the Hermetic Gnosis, comes from the same tradition as the Rulership Diagram showing the ascent and descent of souls on the Ladder of Lights. The Kabbalah molecule, the Wheel of the Year and the caduceus are all that same Ladder, and we can only wonder at the marvelous minds who were able to design this interlocking mystical puzzle.

### Flash Cards of the Mysteries

Now that we have investigated the layers of the Mysteries in relation to each other, we can see the place of the various "schools" of Tarot in the transmission of those Mysteries. The El Gran Tarot Esoterico relates the Arcana to the pre-fall state of the Original Human, so it and the Tarot of the Ages give us instructions from the point of view of our immortal origins. One could most properly use them with the path-pattern on the cover of Aryeh Kaplan's *The*

*Sephir Yetzirah*, as that pattern was proposed by the Gra at the same time as he restored the letter-to-planet correspondences. The unique feature of this Tree is that it closes the gap at Da'at without drawing Malkuth back up into the diagram (see "Kabbalah/Cabbalah").

The entire Continental group of Tarots, from the reformed Marseilles of the 1600s through Etteilla, Levi, Papus, Wirth and all others who follow either the "old Alexandrian" correspondences or Levi's subtle adjustment, are designed for the work of the Christian Cabbalists, who would be basing their theurgic rituals on the model inherited from the Renaissance magi (see Kabbalah/Cabbalah essay) and codified by Kircher. These are the Tarots that partake in the confluence I have detailed in this essay.

Tarots that have departed from this order or were never created in respect of it, cannot be used esoterically with the fullness of the decks created between 1660 and the late 1800s. For whatever reason, they lack the interior architecture we have explored above. Because of this, modern "esoteric" Tarots have had to work extra hard to justify their "corrected" systems. They have parted company with the Renaissance magi who gave us esoteric Tarot.

### Now You Have Eyes To See

Whenever I examine a new esoteric Tarot, these are the kinds of tests I put its correspondences through. I look to see if the creator is in touch with these bedrock alignments which are built into the interior structure of the Hebrew alphabet, the Kabbalah molecule, the numerals, the astrological rulership pattern and the Arcana. I hope to see that all the internal linkages hold up—that if the deck shows Hebrew (or Greek) letters linked to



signs and planets on the Major Arcana, then this symmetry between systems is held sacred. Of the Tarots available today, only those of the Continental Esoteric Schools (including the decks mirroring the *Fratres Lucis* manuscript) and the (unscrambled) Etteilla Arcana pass this test, although most of the very earliest handmade and woodblock Tarots can be used as if they were aware of these connections. Certainly since the "reform" of the 1660s (see "The Continental Tarots"), Tarot has been an esoteric document with a developed body of correspondences, and quite likely this has been true since its beginning.

For better or for worse, the modern Tarots with their reinterpreted correspondences are not representing historical Tarot, other than just the history of the twentieth century. I include here the Spanish decks taking off from Maxwell, the Golden Dawn group of Tarots, the BOTA Tarot, the Egypcios Kier and my very first real deck, the Church of Light Tarot.

These decks or "schools" of decks have all moved on from the Renaissance paradigm of Christian Cabbalah, much less the older tradition of Hebrew Kabbalah. In all cases, the "corrections" to the ancient interlocking system undermine the position of Arcana within this family of related paradigms. This will be true of every other New Age attempt to reinvent the alphanumeric-astrologic connections of old, unless it is grounded in a thorough knowledge of the longstanding tradition Tarot rests upon. There are only a few ways one can adjust the correspondences without shattering the system, as we have seen.

**This chapter is excerpted from Christine Payne-Towler's forthcoming book, *The Underground Stream: Esoteric Tarot Revealed*. To order copies of her book, or to reach Christine for private consultation call 1-800-981-3582.**

