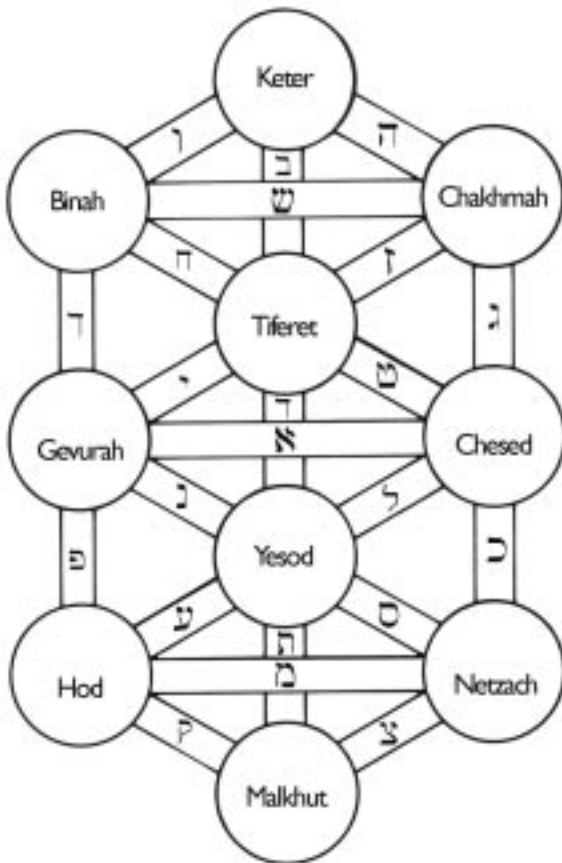


KABBALAH/CABBALAH

by Christine Payne-Towler

For the first three decades during which I was assimilating information about Tarot, I avoided the history of the Kaballah. Not only had it seemed too abstruse and foreign, but the teachings had apparently fragmented due to the many forced migrations imposed upon the Jews throughout their history. I did not relish the task of sorting out all the nuances, and I was intimidated by the volume of literature associated with this ancient study.



GRA TREE

My attitude was a microcosm of the American approach to Tarot: Why do we have to drag in this other set of correspondences when the cards already hold so much information, what with their pictures, numbers, titles and the astrological references that are often on the faces of the cards? Isn't that enough to learn already?

Well no, it is not. As a matter of fact, that attitude prevents an important piece that is required if one is to truly understand the core content of Tarot. The Hebrew alphabet and its associations with numbers, astrology, angels and a host of other correspondences provides the very skeletal structure upon which the cards have grown. Without the Hebrew astro-alphanumeric associations that were laid out so long ago by our ancient ancestors, the Tarot could never have taken its present shape. So even if we never learn how to pronounce the letters correctly or read any words in Hebrew, we must understand just what is going on with these twenty-two letters in order to truly deepen our understanding of Tarot.

In the Image of God

It is the position of the entire Western Mystery Tradition, the orthodoxy of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and the unorthodox fringe dwellers like alchemists, astrologers and Gnostics that the human species is the capstone of creation. Tradition has it that we carry the Grand Plan within our constitution. Inside each of us is hidden a "little world," seed and reflection of the "big world," the



cosmos. This is the sense in which humanity is “made in God’s image.” In the spirit of respect for the grand assignment which the human race is living out, the Hebrews developed their alphabet mysteries to try to articulate our place in the whole and to develop a method for utilizing our divinely inspired powers safely and morally.

The Hebrew nation, ancient tribe of sacred scholars, has been a force for literacy and spiritual cultivation in Western civilization throughout its stormy history. The Hebrew alphabet, derived from the Phoenician, became the prototype for all the Western languages. Hence the letters have accumulated myriad associations and correspondences through the eons. Research on each letter would disclose an encyclopedia’s worth of teachings in hundreds of languages spread across Western history. This treasure trove of spiritual knowledge is a large part of what the European Secret Societies have been pledged to protect throughout the generations.

While enslaved among the Babylonians prior to the turn of the second millennium BC, the Jews absorbed the excellent mathematical and astronomical skills of their captors. They brought away an understanding of how numbers unfold from one another, the inner mechanics of Sacred Geometry. Their passionately mystical national psyche, no doubt mixed with the unique discouragement that ensued from being a designated slave nation in the Middle East, caused them to turn their scrutiny inward to examine their relation to the Divine and how it could be expanded. Over time, the Hebrew nation unfolded their mysticism of numbers to illuminate how the physical and energetic constitution of humanity mirrors that of Moses’ God.

There is no way a short essay like this could be at all definitive, so it must be assumed that we are only skimming the tips of the icebergs of Kabbalah. Great help will be gained from turning to Aryeh Kaplan’s wonderful contribution, *The Sephir Yetzirah*. This extraordinary book catalogs and comments upon every version of the Hebrew astro-alphanumeric system from Abraham into the 20th century, and has been endlessly helpful to me. We Gentile occultists need this exact information so we can understand what the Hebrew people have been discussing among themselves, aside from the controversies that have played out in astrological, cartological or alchemical circles in the name of Christian Cabbalah. I shall be quoting Kaplan quite a bit as you read along; if your interest is piqued or if you care about these issues, you should own his book.

Origins of the Kabbalah

The first formal document to codify the alphabet teachings for posterity was called the Sephir Yetzirah. Tradition has it that it was taught by Shem (aka Melchizedek) to Abraham around 1800 BC. Abraham is known as the father of both the Hebrew and the Arab nations, as they were each dynasties founded by Abraham’s two sons—one by his wife’s servant (the Arabic tribes), and one by his wife (the Hebrews). His banishment of the servant and her son when his wife finally gave him a “legitimate” heir is the basis of the ancient grievance between these two immense and competing cultures.

Aryeh Kaplan explains that an eighteenth century BC dating for the Sephir Yetzirah “is not very surprising, since such mystical texts as the Vedic scriptures date from this period, and there is every reason to believe that the mystical tradition was further advanced in the



Middle East than it was in India at that time. Since Abraham was the greatest mystic and astrologer of his age, it is natural to assume that he was familiar with all the mysteries of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Abraham was born in Mesopotamia, and he also lived in Egypt” (p. xiv).

Scholars like to have more than legend to base their claims upon, so Kaplan looks further for proofs of the antiquity of the Sephir Yetzirah. Based on analysis of various historical strata within the text, he states that “the earliest parts of the book appear very ancient, possibly antedating the Talmudic era [first and second centuries AD]” (p. xxiii). The Hebrew content within the alphanumeric teachings of the neo-Pythagoreans in the first and second centuries AD also verifies for us an already complete system of correspondences (see next section).

Furthermore, according to Kaplan, “we find actual mention of Sephir Yetzirah in the Talmud [by 300 BC], and even though it is not absolutely certain that it is identical with our version, there is no real reason to doubt that they are one and the same” (p. xv). He also reminds us that “Sephir Yetzirah is one of the primary ancient astrological texts” which tells us that it is in harmony with the standard astrological paradigm used by both Hebrew and Gentile magi throughout the Western world.

The difficulty with dating this book’s origins is that it came down through ancient history as an oral tradition, and was not formally written down until 204 AD. What we possess of it in the earliest times is legend, or hearsay evidence, references to it rather than the text itself. But other alphanumeric references, in both Psalms and Exodus, add evidence that a

well known and nuanced philosophy existed for centuries in the ancient world before it ever was committed to writing.

The body of correspondences that Aryeh Kaplan is showcasing in his *The Sephir Yetzirah*, called the Gra pattern, is being given on highest Hebrew authority and validated by copious evidence as the original and extraordinarily ancient bedrock of Western Esoteric Tradition. The Gra is the baseline from which later developments, even competing versions, will be drawn. In it are defined the natural placements of the Sephiroth, the Paths, and their astro-alphanumeric correspondences. This pattern, taken altogether, is called the Gra Natural Array.

It should be noted that these correspondences are the ones we find on the illustrious Spanish Tarot, El Gran Tarot Esoterico, designed by Marixtu Guler and published by Fournier. These correspondences represent the tradition of Kabbalah, the ancient pure Hebrew stream of astro-alphanumeric mysteries. Remember, alphanumeric means numbers and letters, and when I add the prefix “astro,” I mean signs and planets are included too.

Parallel Influences of Hebrew and Greek Thought

Inconveniently, at the point in history where we can finally find these ideas in written form, we already find ourselves at a fork in the road. Kaplan indicates that the Sephir Yetzirah was as well-known outside Hebrew circles as within because of its astronomical and astrological content. So we should not be surprised if we see it being quoted or even assimilated by scholars of later centuries. This is exactly what happened in the ancient world.



Arcana #	English (Alpha)	Hebrew	Number Value	Greek	Pierre Probb, 1908 Dali Euskalherria	Gra Version of Sephir Yetzirah	Balbi	Marseilles (according to Joseph Maxwell)	Old Alexandrian/Etteilla (Falconnier)	Continental Tarots
1	A	א	1	α	⊙	△	⊙	⊙	△	△
2	B	ב	2	β	☾	☾	☾	☾	☾	☾
3	C	ג	3	γ	⊗	♁	♀	♀	♀	♀
4	D	ד	4	δ	♃	⊙	♃	♃	♃	♃
5	H	ה	5	ε	♀	♄	♄	♀	♄	♄
6	V	ו	6	ς	♄	♅	♄	♄	♅	♅
7	Z	ז	7	ζ	♁	♄	♄	♁	♄	♄
8	Ch	ח	8	η	♁	♄	♁	♁	♄	♄
9	T	ט	9	θ	▽	♁	▽	♁	♁	♁
10	I	י	10	ι	♄	♄	♄	♄	♄	♄
11	C	כ	20	κ	♁	♀	♁	♁	♁	♁
12	L	ל	30	λ	△	♁	♁	♄	♁	♁
13	M	מ	40	μ	♁	♁	♁	♁	▽	▽
14	N	נ	50	ν	≈	♄	≈	≈	♄	♄
15	S	ס	60	ξ	♁	♁	♁	▽	♁	♁
16	Ayn	ע	70	ο	♄	♄	♄	△	♄	♄
17	P	פ	80	π	♀	♀	♀	♅	♀	♀
18	Ts	צ	90	φ	♄	≈	♄	♄	≈	≈
19	Qk	ק	100	ρ	♄	♁	△	♄	♁	♁
20	R	ר	200	σ	♁	♁	♁	♄	♁	♁
21	Sch	ש	300	τ	♅	♃	△	♄	⊙ Fool	⊙ World
22	Th	ת	400	υ	♄	△	♄	△	△ World	△ Fool

TABLE OF CORRESPONDENCES FOR THE CONTINENTAL TAROTS



One such scholar was Pythagoras, whose life in the seventh century BC marks the inception of Hermetic philosophy and numerological mysticism among the Greeks. He traveled the world while still in his thirties and forties, studying with every priesthood and esoteric college he could reach and procuring the texts of those he couldn't physically visit. When he finally settled down to start his own school, he credited the Hebrew Kabbalists and Hindu Brahmins for enlightening him about their number mysteries in which his own teachings about the whole numbers and Sacred Geometry were grounded.

Pythagoras wrote many volumes, a good quantity of which still survive. But in the context of Tarot, what we are most interested in is his participation in the "reform" of the Greek alphabet, which happened in his lifetime. The objective was to bring the Greek alphabet back into harmony with the Hebrew, from which Greek had been derived. In the course of this scholarly labor, two pairs of planets were purposefully switched in relation to their respective letters.

This small shift created a second stream of authentic, ancient, esoteric correspondences that are no longer "pure" Hebrew. It is these Greek/Hermetic variants that came into European history from various sources. The magi of the Italian Renaissance passed them into the Secret Societies, where they were enshrined in the *Fratres Lucis* manuscript which Dr. Lewis Keizer suggests is the model for the earliest self admitted "esoteric" Tarots: Etteilla, Levi, de Gebelin, et al. (see "Esoteric Origins of Tarot").

The Tarots that use these correspondences have been grouped under the title The Conti-

mental Group and show two variants: those that were published before Eliphaz Levi and those that came after (see "The Continental Tarots" essay and various tables and graphs). The difference is subtle, which is why it has escaped the attention of Tarot scholars of this century until now.

The Holy Word: An Alphabet of Numbers

I want to insert a reminder for those who are not used to the idea that spoken letters have a correspondence with numbers. This may seem like a made-up connection which could be changed at will to serve the needs of a particular code or cipher. But in the ancient world, the numbers associated with the letters, whether Greek or Hebrew, were not changeable according to whim. In both these languages, the numbers were letters. By that I mean any mathematical value or calculation in numbers would be written out *in letters*. Each letter also represented a literal number, thus simultaneously having both a sound and a value.

This fact has profound implications which we moderns often fail to understand. We can easily grasp that a letter represents a sound; that's phonics as we learned it in grammar school. But a sound is also a vibration, a frequency resonating the eardrum in a mathematically specific pattern, a ratio or bell curve of ratios. So in that sense, a sound is a number. The ancients already knew from their own experience that sound works magic on the world, both on the human psyche and on the interior structure of matter. Rightly applied sound, the Holy Word of old, can work miracles. This is one reason why the names of angels, choirs of angels, Sephiroth and other divine names in Hebrew were considered so



powerful and sequestered so long from the Gentiles.

Hence it follows that any noun, verb, name or other part of speech activates energies along the pathways in this Natural Array, which represents the Body of God that humans share in. These words also can be converted to numbers, revealing the word's "true essence" or interior nature. In the Hebrew language, words that add up to the same or related numbers are considered to have a direct link in the energy-world, as if they were vibrating at octaves of the same frequency. Gematria is the ancient name for the study of words that have numerical or geometrical structure in common, and there are many and various techniques to employ in that study. Most of the magical codes and ciphers of the Western tradition are derived through one or another form of Gematria in either Greek or Hebrew.

Use of these and other magical techniques empowers a practitioner to achieve one's spiritual goals. A spiritual name or sacred number, written on a piece of paper with the right intention, can serve as a talisman for contact with that energy/entity. This is the key to an invisible but potent link-up with the Chain of Being whereby the operator can specify exactly which frequency s/he is trying to contact.

In Greek there were also preserved lists of ancient God-names from the Orphics, the Isis cult, the Serapis mysteries, traditional mythology, and dead languages from their antiquity. All these names would be analyzed and employed mathematically as well as mythically.

I cannot convey how important it is for Tarot esotericists to ground themselves in Greek and Hebrew number theory in order to fully appreciate the profundity of our (quite a bit more recent) Major Arcana. One perfect starting place would be to study David Fideler's *Jesus Christ, Sun of God*. Although to my knowledge Tarot is not mentioned once in the entire book, it is a thrilling immersion in the alphanumeric Mysteries of old.

So when the subject of the "ancient alphanumeric correspondences" comes up throughout this CD program, I am referring to a fixed body of beliefs whose values have not changed in three thousand years. A=1, B=2, and so on down the Hebrew and Greek alphabets. These correspondences are canonical, set in historical stone. Lists of correspondences abound that are used for various purposes, but "the ancient correspondences" are none other than either the Hebrew originals or the Greek variant, modified in 700 BC by Pythagoras.

Is It Hebrew or Is It Greek?

Contributing to the confusion among Tarot scholars about the relationship between the Hebrew and Greek alphanumeric is that, although Pythagoras credited the Hebrews for refining his understanding of the number-letters, later Kabbalists of the first and second centuries were using the writings of the neo-Pythagoreans to help them reassemble their tradition after the fall of the second Temple. So we have the Jews of the second century AD studying second century revivals of Pythagoras' writings from the seventh century BC, to find out what their Hebrew ancestors were doing in the eighteenth century BC! Is there any wonder we get confused?



It did not help that the words the second century Jews were using to explain their Kabbalah were drawn from the vocabulary of the Greek philosophers. In following up to see what I could find on this stage in the development of the Sefhir Yetzirah, I found this quote from Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*: "The combination of late Hellenistic, perhaps even late NeoPlatonic numerological mysticism with exquisitely Jewish ways of thought concerning the mystery of letters and language is fairly evident throughout. . . . Various peculiarities of the terminology employed in the book, including some curious neologisms which find no natural explanation in Hebrew phraseology, suggest a paraphrase of Greek terms. . ." (p. 76).

I take these hints to imply that earliest redaction of the Sefhir Yetzirah, which Scholem thought was assembled between the second and sixth centuries, was already cross-infected with the Hermetic/Alexandrian number mysticism which we now know first emerged with the Pythagorean school in the seventh century BC. So is it any wonder that the esoteric scholars of the Renaissance seized upon the Greek form of these correspondences rather than the older and much more obscure but original Hebrew ones? From the European point of view, even that of a Europeanized Jew, the Greek version was not only more accessible but culturally more familiar than the older correspondences, with their roots so far away in the Middle East.

Remember, there is no difference between the Hebrew and the Pythagorean correspondences in the case of the letters that represent signs of the zodiac. The only difference was between two pairs of planets, the pair Jupiter/Sun and

the pair Venus/Mars. One pattern represents the Semitic origins of the alphanumeric pattern and the other is a Greek "reform" undertaken in the sixth century BC. We could see them as the eastern and western forks of the ancient alphanumeric Gnosis.

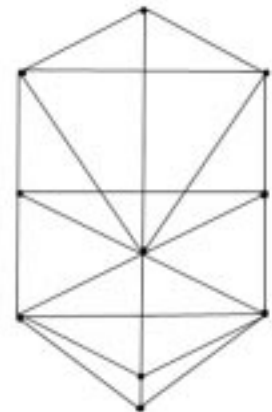
Variant Kabbalah Trees Among the Hebrews

Aryeh Kaplan, in his *The Sefhir Yetzira*, briefly mentions

several variations that were employed when applying the Paths on the Tree. The first is an offshoot of the Gra Natural Array, which he explains this way:

"In practice, for reasons dealing with the basic nature of the Sefirot, they are not arranged in this natural order, but have the middle line

lowered somewhat" (p. 32). Kaplan seems to refer to the outcome of "the fall," graphically illustrating that the "heart of creation" has fallen out of contact with the Supernal Triangle and into alignment with earthly life. Now that the Sephiroth have become base, they don't sit the same way in the Tree that they did before. This pattern still conforms to the canon of three horizontals, seven verticals and twelve diagonals, so it can't really be called a different system. It is the old Natural Array with a kink, the distortion of our fall away from the Creator. This pattern can rightly be called "ancient" because it came down with the oral tradition from Biblical times.

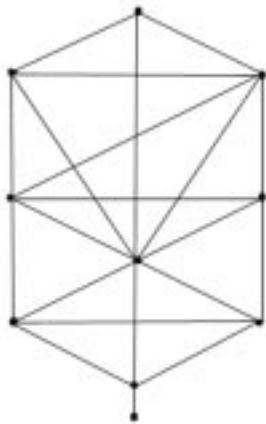


GRA WITH
DROPPED TIFARET



The Kabbalah Gets Mixed Up

By the tenth century AD, however, laments began appearing in Kabbalistic writings about the many versions of Sefhir Yetzirah. Aryeh Kaplan spends several pages discussing how the “literally dozens of different variants” may have appeared (p. xxiv-xxv). Since there were Secret Societies among the Jews just as they existed among the Gentiles, alternate versions became “traditional” in separated communities. Transcription errors were deadly in these short, tightly worded texts, as were errors caused by oral transmission. Commentaries and margin notes from earlier versions got incorporated into later copies. Also, and probably most troublesome for historians, spurious versions were knowingly promulgated, disseminated to confuse the uninitiated. When all is said and done, Kaplan names two main versions, the Short and the Long, as



TREE FROM SAFED SCHOOL

being widely disseminated enough to be relevant to his discussion of Hebrew Kabbalah. Only the Short version enters into our discussion on Tarot. The other, “older” version that Kaplan gives us for the paths on the Tree (p. 28) represents the Safed School, which is based on the *Zohar*, a small book of essays which is the mystical embodiment of thirteenth century AD Spanish Kabbalism. This pattern is a consequence of errors slipping into the transmission of the

Kabbalah as mentioned above, and shows that the Gra version became altered by later developments.

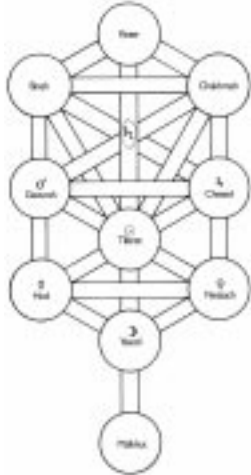
In the *Zohar*, the Sefhir Yetzirah is extensively quoted, but in this case it is the Short Version of the Raavad (also from the 13th century) that is being referred to. In this version, the planets have become disarranged from the letters as given in the Gra. This obscure little text connects the Sephiroth and the Tree with the cosmos, tying the higher and lower worlds together with hierarchies of angels and spheres and paths that are interrelated through the letters of the alphabet into a theosophical system of the universe. The mysticism it inspired left a lasting impression in Kabbalism.

At this point, the path-pattern which the thirteenth and fourteenth century Kabbalists were trying to reconcile with the *Zohar* and the Short Form can be seen to contain an asymmetry that begs for resolution. In it, the two lowest Paths on either side of Malkuth are removed, and one hugely long one is added to connect Chokma to Geburah. This strengthens and emphasizes the “Lightning Bolt” formation that later Kabbalists/Cabbalists love so much, but it leaves the image short one diagonal, and looks lopsided. Kaplan does not tell us exactly how the letters are arranged upon the paths in this version. It is this pattern that Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (1534-72), affectionately dubbed “the Ari,” studied as he strove to rebalance the Tree in light of the *Zohar*.

The Implications of the Ari Version on Tarot Development

The Ari version of the Sefhir Yetzirah set a benchmark for the public Kabbalist schools of





ARI TREE WITH
SATURN AT DA'AT

the 1600s. It utterly departed from the hidden Gra form, either the Natural Array or the “fallen” form for practical application. Because of the great reverence given the *Zohar*, which had become tradition by the Ari’s time and which had accumulated significant differing versions, Rabbi Luria worked with the Short

Form of the Sephir Yetzirah from 1562 and the lopsided Tree of the Safed School to create his synthesis. However, Rabbi Luria’s contribution to the unfolding of Kabbalistic teachings was immense but so controversial that its effect was to call into question the monotheistic character of Hebrew religion.

In the context of the tenor of these times, Luria’s ideas represent a brilliant and remarkably optimistic response to the miserable conditions his people were experiencing in Europe. There is no room in this essay to expound upon the various details of his teachings (see *Kabbalah* by Gershom Scholem), but essentially in the process of detailing how this world came to be imperfect, he elaborated a whole new structure for the Tree of Life and rearranged the letter/path correspondences.

His was not an effort to prove any other versions wrong (he apparently did not know about the Gra version), but only an account of the difference between Eden at the time of creation and the present world with which we must now contend. Unfortunately, in the process of unveiling his wonderful Hebrew-

Gnostic synthesis, he resorted to arguments and illustrations which veered, for many, dangerously close to Gnostic dualism.

There is no doubt that Luria was reflecting themes that saturated intellectual circles during his lifetime. The Albigensian crusades were already over, and in the course of attempting to suppress the Gnostic heresies, the Catholic Church had unwittingly strengthened and promoted the Gnostic core belief, proving through their viciousness that the mundane world was under the control of a cruel and demented shadow of the One True God. So Luria unfolded an explanation of what had happened to precipitate the “fall from grace” and how it might be repaired. In so doing, he laid out a scenario that paralleled the Gnostic and Hermetic cosmogonies also circulating at the time.

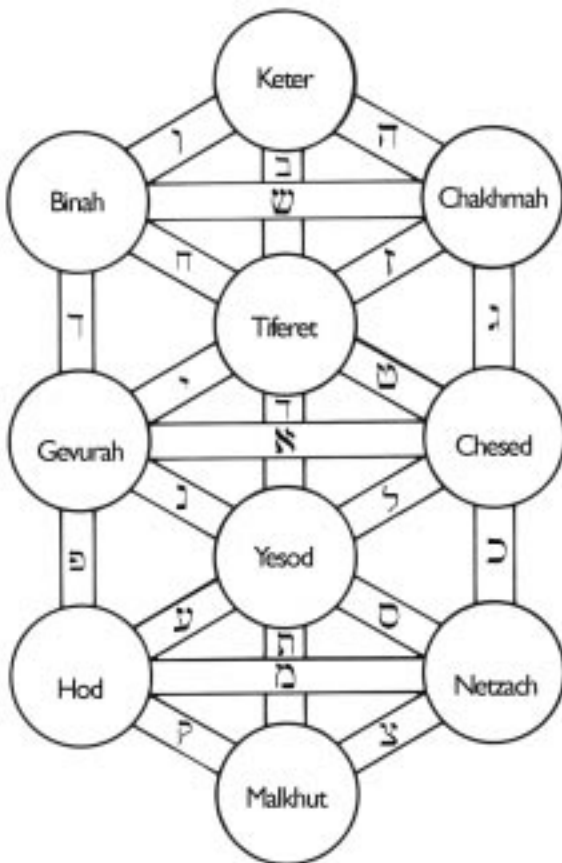
Rabbi Luria did not mean to create another dualist heresy, and even if he did so unintentionally, many people innately identified with his exposition. Intertwined as it was with themes of exile and redemption, Luria’s doctrines had emotional resonance with the current life situation of being Jewish in Christian Europe. People also found a basis for hope in Luria’s view of the future, when the effects of the fall were to be reversed by the restoration of the world through the spiritual labors of the Hebrew nation.

Before the Fall

To make what Rabbi Luria taught tangible, we have to look at the Kabbalah Tree in the ancient Gra form, and then we have to contrast that to the Tree as given in the Ari form from the 1500s. Looking at them back to back makes the issues very clear.



In the Natural Array as dictated in the Gra version, the archetypal human energy-body is shown as a tidy, symmetrical geometric figure that embodies the 3x7x12 structure of the Hebrew alphabet perfectly. This is the structure of human design which links us with higher worlds. In this pattern, the three “mother” letters are corresponded to the horizontal bars of the diagram, the seven planetary letters are the verticals, and the twelve zodiacal letters are the diagonals. Thus the twenty-two letters, as symbols of our inner spiritual energies, weave together the limbs and organs of our bodies with their heavenly correspondents above.



GRA TREE

Both the ancient Hebrew alphanumeric system and the Greek Pythagorean alphanumeric system conform to the 3x7x12 rule that places the letters so specifically on the paths. Wherever diagonal paths converge, there is a power-center called a Sefhira (plural, the Sefhiroth). These centers each had their own names and attributes from the earliest versions, but the greater practical emphasis had originally been placed upon the paths between the centers, along with practical methods for accessing and circulating these energies so we can use them to heal ourselves and change the world.

Imagine the alphabetical pathways that connect the Sefhiroth as if they were veins and arteries in the body conducting energies hither and yon to create connections, feed functions and balance polarities. Much of the earliest strata of the Hebrew Kabbalah mysticism was tied up in chanting and meditating to activate consciousness along those internal pathways. One could easily compare this type of practice to a theurgical form of yoga, employing a combination of postures, chants, geometrical visualizations and meditations on the essential nature of reality. The implications are all laid out in detail in Aryeh Kaplan’s amazing book.

After the Fall

In comparison, in the diagram of the paths as defined by the Ari, we see humanity in a condition of mortality after “the fall from grace.” We have seen attempts to quantify the damage from the fall among even the earliest Kabbalist philosophers, but these variants were not considered dogma, only attempts to talk about what might have happened. But with the Ari version, due to Rabbi Luria’s



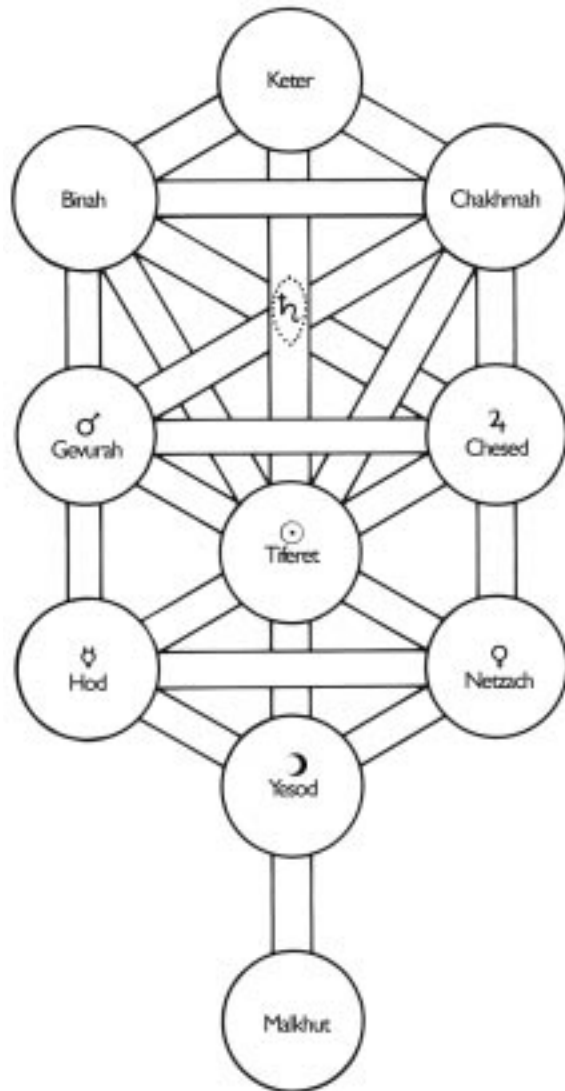
genius and reputation, this pattern became the pattern, both among future European Jews and among the Gentiles of the era.

In the Ari pattern, we see the full tragedy of the fall. Where Tifareth used to stand (the heart center, associated with the feminine part of God, the Shekhina), a hole has opened, now called Da'at. The energy that had filled that place has fallen and has descended to Malkuth (the world of time and space), which is now hanging off the bottom of the diagram like an orphan. Something that was once very elevated and close to the Source is now cast down and stands under all the other forces. From this point of view, "the fall" is not just the loss of Eden but the degradation of the Goddess, who no longer occupies the heart of the creation. She now embodies the lowest world, that of matter, time and space. This is the world we find ourselves in now, according to Rabbi Luria, and we are challenged to find the path back to our former estate.

When we investigate the nature of Da'at, the "new" Sefhira, it seems to correspond to the Hindu throat chakra, the power of the Holy Word to create by fiat. So this creative capability, the Word, which used to flow effortlessly from Tifareth, the heart, is now something that has to be earned through effort and striving, by aligning the lower nodes and directing will toward overcoming the distractions of the left and right pillars. Da'at signifies a power-center that a person has to build up to activate, although it exists in potential in all of us born after the fall. This work is necessary to lift ourselves back to our original nature.

The consequence of the fall is chaos in the path structure below the Supernal Triangle (Kether, Chokmah, Binah). The 3x7x12

pattern, dictated by the Sefhir Yetzirah, is destroyed, because now the heart triangle (Tifareth, Chesed and Geburah) and the pelvic triangle (Yesod, Netzach and Hod) point downward. Malkuth, "the World," is cast down into a position that didn't even exist in the old system; it now acts like an anchor on



ARI TREE WITH SATURN AT DA'AT



the soul instead of like a throne or a wonderful garden from which to draw nourishment.

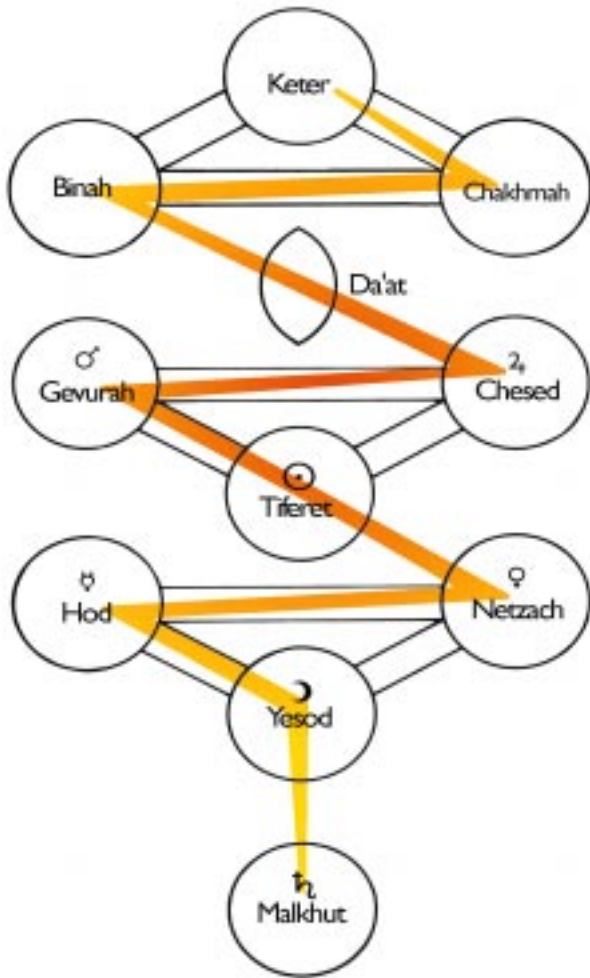
In the post-fall human, the centers below the Supernal Triangle become increasingly dense and crystallized, and for the first time, they represent the planets of the solar system. Malkuth is Earth, Yesod is Moon, Hod is Mercury, Netzach is Venus, Tifareth is the Sun, Geburah is Mars, Chesed is Jupiter and Da'at is (at least potentially) Saturn. The pathways are no longer arranged in their pristine pattern from Genesis, which allows for alternative allotments for the planets and

paths, increasing controversy between Kabbalistic schools.

Saturn, who has fallen to Malkuth but in potential could “rise” to the “new” throat center, is the last visible planet in the solar system, therefore the symbol of limits, discipline, examinations and natural consequences. It is Saturn who occasionally makes us eat our words. He is also the one who sentences us to live out our most frequently repeated fears and pessimisms. He is the lord of the bottom line, the have-to’s that no one can escape. The ancients used to say that Saturn was the final judge of whether we reincarnated again and again or whether we could pass on from this world into a higher state. This natural association of Saturn with Da’at fits in well with Luria’s reincarnational themes, marking another resemblance to Gnostic ideas circulating in his times.

Rabbi Luria, in reaching for a way to explain humanity’s fall from grace into the wretchedness of this life, reconceptualized the way the paths connect the Sephiroth on the Tree. He was not attempting to displace the Gra pattern because he did not know it existed. He was looking at the *Zohar* and the skewed Tree of the 1400s, hoping to patch the confusing welter of versions back together.

Luria was simply trying to create a format by which humanity could reconstitute itself and bring the world back to its pristine condition. His philosophy had certain consequences on the Tree of Life diagram, because “the fall” was seen as having changed our primal symmetry, which is to say, having upset the energy grid of our bodies. So the Ari version is a map of the problem awaiting solution, a damage report, like a medical x-ray the doctor views



LIGHTNING-STRUCK TREE



before surgery. This is true for every version that has fallen away from the Gra Natural Array. We are not supposed to enshrine this pattern as a way to live, but instead use it as a game plan for self repair. Luria was actually trying to give his people much-needed hope in troubled times, but his approach ultimately generated more confusion than it was able to heal.

Because the Ari pattern of “after the fall” attributions was offensive to old-school rabbis around Europe, a good deal of what one finds on the subject is negatively biased. Much ink is spent bemoaning the way in which Luria unwittingly exposed the monotheist core of Judaism to accusations of harboring the Gnostic dualism (see “The Gnostic Tarot”), a charge that undercuts the Hebrew claim of being the original chosen people of the One True God.

It looked to the skeptical as if he were positing two worlds with two separate administrations, the unfallen “upper face” of the Supernal Triangle (Kether, Chokma and Binah), where the energies are still balanced, contrasted with the “Lower Face” of the planetary Sefira resting on Malkuth, the fallen and chaotic World. This is the dualism that was so loudly disclaimed by traditionalists of the sixteenth century, even though it explained in very convincing terms the reality of the Jewish experience in Europe.

Rabbi Luria was offering a plan for the steps that Kabbalists could take to cultivate themselves and right the balance of Nature upset by “the fall.” Unfortunately, it seems that the traditionalists of Luria’s day could not get past the appearance of dualism to hear the call. Meanwhile, the literalists among his followers

forgot that he was proposing a provisional map, not the final goal.

And Now, Back To The Tarot

To summarize what we have covered so far, history has preserved for us two “core versions” of the ancient connections between the astrological signs and planets and the letters-which-are-numbers. These interlocking Mysteries dictate the structure of Tarot as we know it.

The first connection between number/letters and astrology was the version “received” by Abraham (according to legend), which is now called “the Gra” after the Rabbi whose scholarship revived it in the late 1800s. This is the version presented by Aryeh Kaplan in his definitive work, *The Sephir Yetzirah*, and represented on the deck El Gran Tarot Esoterico (see “The Spanish School”).

The second set of number/letter/astrology correspondences is a product of the Greek alphabet reforms undertaken in 600 BC with the help of Pythagoras, father of Hermetic number mysticism and harmonic theory. This version represents an Alexandrian synthesis and became part of the Greco-Roman cultural legacy in Europe. The difference between this version and the original Sephir Yetzirah is that two planetary pairs have switched places (see “Graphs and Tables”). We have called this the Hermetic/Alexandrian version or the Pythagorean correspondences throughout this manuscript, because the term “Greek Kabbalah” creates a false impression.

Whatever it is called, this is the pattern well-known in Europe by the appearance of the first esoteric Tarots, and this is the pattern of correspondences being used by any Secret Society member from the Renaissance to the



late nineteenth century. Whenever you read about Cabbalah (the form the Christians and Gnostics worked with) as opposed to Kabbalah (the Hebrew form, unchanged from its Middle Eastern inception), you can be sure that it's the Pythagorean correspondences that are being referred to. Remember, in both variants, A always equals 1, B always equals 2 and so forth, as given in the tables.

The Non-Hebrew Kabbalah, called Cabbalah

History shows us that some Gentile scholars interested in Hebrew themes picked up this Ari pattern and built it into their worldview. Gathering momentum in the century prior to the first Tarots, a reawakening of classical wisdom was dawning upon Europe from both the Arab world and the eastern Mediterranean. Then, in 1492, the Spanish throne declared its nation Catholic, exiling all Moslems, Jews, Gypsies and whoever else would not profess the faith. This great loss to the culture of Spain produced more stimulation for the cultures of continental Europe. And in the middle of it all, the first fourteen treatises of the Corpus Hermeticum were found, a momentous event in European scholarship.

Simultaneously, and as a result of this wonderful return of the ancient wisdom to Europe, the Secret Societies began to reemerge into visibility, producing the "Rosicrucian Manifesto" in the early 1600s. The subsequent publishing revolution embraced sacred literature from all the traditions of antiquity. The Masonic societies appeared, who over several generations constructed a Hermetic synthesis of the Western Mystery Tradition and eventually cast that construction into the form of playing cards.

Some Context for the Renaissance

Frances Yates states, in her chapter "Pico della Mirandola and Cabalist Magic" from her wonderful book *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, "names of angels, names of God in Hebrew, Hebrew letters and signs, are a feature of gnostic magic in which pagan and Jewish sources are inextricably mixed. . . .thus both the Renaissance Magia and its Cabala could be regarded as reformed revivals of magics ultimately derivable from pagan and Jewish gnosticism" (p. 108). So even though the ideas of the Alexandrian synthesis had not been current in Europe for over a thousand years at that point, they were embraced with great spiritual enthusiasm upon their reemergence and taken to heart by the most talented and visionary intellectuals of the day.

Although the return of learning to Europe was gradual, certain themes remained perennially of interest. Greco-Roman culture was physically engraved in the landscape around the southern Europeans, and the tradition of Hermes had a persistent hold upon the imagination of learned Europeans. The Jews and Gypsies were feared, romanticized and depended upon for their many "exotic" skills. Medicine especially was still largely magical and depended upon non-Christian (pagan) methods, some of which were nasty and disgusting or alternately, merely ritualistic, the true meanings often lost in time or corrupted in the transmission. Losses to superstition-induced illnesses and occasional bouts of plague provoked intelligent people to keep searching for better information, even if it came from non-Christian sources.

As part of the gradual shift that replaced the Middle Ages with the Renaissance, the quality of magic and mysticism, therefore the entire



culture, became more refined. As more of the classics of antiquity were rediscovered and people had the luxury of using their brains for more than survival again, we see a new optimism, a sense of spiritual and intellectual empowerment and a return of the syncretist urges stamped out by earlier Christianity. As history's mystics and sacred philosophers became available to European intellectuals, their narrow-mindedness and superstitiousness began to evaporate, replaced by awe and reverence for the intelligence and understanding of antiquity.

The Renaissance Magi and Tarot

Around 1460, the aging Lorenzo de Medici of Florence received a Greek manuscript from Macedonia that contained a nearly complete copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. He had a “pet scholar” whose work he especially valued: Marcilio Ficino, who had been assigned to the translation of the Plato manuscripts. De Medici was afraid of dying before he had an opportunity to read the books of Hermes, so they were brought to Ficino to translate posthaste.

What Ficino found in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and developed throughout the rest of his career was the first Renaissance statement of NeoPlatonism, an amplification of the Alexandrian synthesis of the first and second centuries. Through his agency, the entire astro-alphanumeric structure of the ancient Mysteries came pouring into the magical imaginations of these inspired and brilliant linguists.

Due to Ficino's regard for the Church, the whole synthesis was explained and experienced from a Christian outlook. He was careful to explain that he was using only the God-given “natural sympathies” that exist

between visible and invisible things in the great chain of being. He attested to be merely connecting the upper and lower worlds through their innate lines of relationship, so the Church ought not to feel threatened. As this Christian, Gnostic-leaning antiquarian encountered the Alexandrian synthesis of Greek and Hebrew mysteries, a movement was born.

In particular, Ficino brought talismanic and theurgical practices back to Christian mysticism under the aegis of Hermes, mythical author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. He felt that by strengthening the affinities between higher and lower things, he could help annul the effects of “the fall,” permeating time and space with divine energies channeled by his astronomical talismans. To quote again Dame Frances Yates, “When Hermes Trismegistus entered the Church, the history of magic become[s] involved with the history of religion in the Renaissance.”

Ficino's younger friend and colleague, Pico della Mirandola, wittingly or unwittingly contributed another huge boost to the impetus toward the Tarot. Pico added Cabbalist magic to Ficino's Christian NeoPlatonism, opening a fertile field both for study and for controversy. He extolled the virtues of the magical signs, sigils, numbers, images and other devices inherited from Hebrew antiquity and that form the literal link between celestial and terrestrial things. He asserted, quite firmly, that by bringing in the Hebrew mysteries, especially the seventy-two angels who connect the earthly realms to the zodiac (which we eventually see on the Minor Arcana), we can empower the natural symbolistic magic of Ficino with the extra charge of genuine Biblical tradition.



All these new correspondences emerged from close reading of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and related studies, and they produced a tremendous mystical surge not only in della Mirandola but in his whole milieu. Della Mirandola continuously reminded his readers/listeners that this was Christian Magic, not only because it was meant to be used toward and dedicated to the Trinity, but because it came from the Hebrew/Alexandrian synthesis within which Christianity is grounded. History shows us, however, that Pico della Mirandola was not as well-received as he would have liked; he suffered regular persecutions and detractors because of how closely he skirted the line between scholarship and religion as defined by the Church.

Without straying too far from the topic of Tarot, let me emphasize that Pico della Mirandola also imprinted the Renaissance imagination with the idea of the magus as an agent of the Sacred Marriage, uniting the heavenly and earthly realms through theurgical workings. Using focused consciousness, the Holy Word, sacred sound and the powerful Hebrew talismans that della Mirandola taught that embody the formulae for cosmic values, the world can be impregnated with celestial energies much more efficiently than with Ficino's natural magic alone.

It is also della Mirandola who first articulated the concept of Silent Invocations composed from Hebrew names, letters, signs and sigils, and through this concept, the numbered suit cards received another layer of meaning. To this day, on the esoteric Tarots of the French School from Ettiella forward (and in some of the later English decks), one can see the sigils of the zodiacal angels progressing on the numbered suit cards. (Eliphas Levi called

these angels the "Shemhameforesh," a bad transliteration of the Hebrew but a brilliant idea for making Tarot into Silent Invocations.) Tavaglione's *Stairs of Gold Tarot* details all these angels in the back of its booklet, all aligned with their various degrees of the zodiac for your magical convenience.

To sum up the contribution of this extraordinary person, we should look at the grand design of his mystical conception. For the Gentiles, Pico della Mirandola explained how what he called the "Twelve Punishments of Matter"—the signs of the zodiac—are driven out (actually, harnessed to the Paths) by the "Ten Good Forces" of the Sephiroth. In other words, if the domination of the astrological universe (fate and destiny) over the soul of humanity could be broken, then the Tree can grow back up the Sephiroth (chakras). In this way, the mortal soul is secured, the Ogdoad (eighth sphere, Da'at) comes together, and "the powers sing in the soul the 'ogdoadic hymn' of regeneration." When the Tree conquers the pagan zodiac in the soul, the soul becomes immortal. It is here that we see the unifying thought that binds della Mirandola to the Christian Cabbalah above all other teachings and makes him the enemy of the astrologers of his time. His was a system that a person could use with free will and determination, undaunted by the stars or the elements of earth.

Pico della Mirandola and his philosophical peers (Marcilio Ficino, Cornelius Agrippa, John Dee, Paracelcus, Francesco Giorgio, Giordano Bruno, Johann Reuchlin and others) were at the crest of the Renaissance wave, fusing their scholarship with their art and their religion. They made it their business to investigate the philosophies and practices used by our multicultural ancestors. (It is a mystical



experience just to read about these people in Yates’s meticulously researched tomes.) They were deeply devout Christian, Gnostic and Hebrew scholars, passionately writing volumes and debating about ancient philosophy, filling folios with art and imagery and practicing theurgical rituals designed to put the soul in contact with our higher Source. It is too bad that the Church eventually felt too threatened to let this wonderful flowering carry on. But while it lasted, we all benefited, because in the sweep of the expansion the Tarot appeared, and on the momentum of the Renaissance, Tarot soared into the esoteric empyrean.

As a matter of fact, it is from the notebooks of the last Renaissance magi, a German Jesuit named Athanasius Kircher, that I believe the images which brought overt esotericism into Tarot were eventually drawn. Kircher is discussed in the essay “The Continental Tarots” as well, but for this chapter, we must acknowledge his contribution to the Christian Cabbalah content of Tarot.

Kircher’s Christian Cabbalah

When we left the Hebrew Kabbalah to look in on the Renaissance magi, we had brought the Tree and the Paths up to the reforms of the Ari. His version of the Tree was an attempt to synthesize the Path attributions of the Short Version he had in his hands with the awkward Tree of the Zoharic Kabbalists of the 1300s.

We saw that in the Renaissance, Christian applications of the Kabbalah were being discovered and synthesized from new translations of ancient manuscripts, and the Gentile world was getting a history lesson. (They did still think that Hermes predated Moses, however, causing them to promote the Alexandrian Mysteries even more than the Hebrew. It took more scholarship yet to

untie that intellectual knot!)

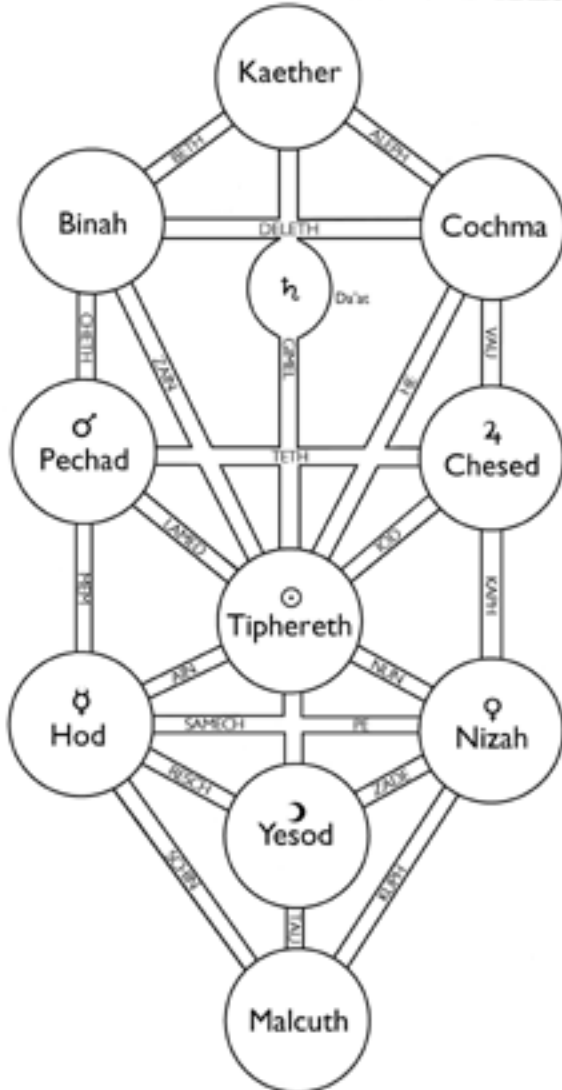
Athanasius Kircher was born in 1602 and lived until 1680; his was a long and productive life. As a priest, he was not engaging in his studies with the aim of practicing magic or reviving the Mysteries, but his combination of scientific interest and spiritual respect for the ancients caused him to treat all his subjects respectfully, keeping in mind their best attributes. He was an artist, a linguist and a Cabbalist and had many other areas of expertise. I have no doubt his voracious intellect and voluminous writings and images influenced Tarot profoundly.

With all the sincerity of his Christian training and the scholarship that made him the last Renaissance polymath (he created the first Coptic grammar), Kircher “reformed” the Kabbalah Tree into the renamed Christian Cabbalah pattern. We see this pattern now throughout Tarot, alchemical and magical literature. It is he who decided to count out the alphabet along the paths in top-down order, an approach that has nearly completely supplanted the 3x7x12 ordering of the Sephir Yetzirah as reported in Aryeh Kaplan’s master work.

Kircher’s is also the final and loudest voice in the Renaissance chorus that attributed the wisdom of antiquity to Egyptian culture. He had no way of knowing the truth in the way that we do now, in our age of scientific archeology and linguistic analysis, but the force of his conviction, that Egypt is the source of all the oldest magic, continued to reverberate through the Mystery Schools for several more centuries, stimulating the Rosicrucians and later Masons—Etteilla most notably—to incorporate Christian NeoPlatonist Cabbalah into the Silent Invocations that Tarot embodies.



HORIZON OF Sefirot ETERNITY First
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KIRCHER'S TREE CORRECTED

In the sequence of Renaissance magi from Ficino to Kircher (and through many fascinating characters whom I regrettably cannot mention here), we see the force that drives Tarot into expression. The ancient Mysteries

were already in place, although episodically forgotten and re-remembered with the cycles of history. The rediscovery of the bone structure of the Mysteries at the cusp of the publishing revolution made the creation of Silent Invocations in card form possible for the masses. How could Tarot not emerge as the “flash cards of the Mysteries”? It was the next logical step!

Conclusion

In this brief and incomplete scan of this fascinating stream of Kabbalah/Cabbalah knowledge, I have tried to keep the focus upon the details relevant to the formation of Tarot. This approach cannot help but leave some readers annoyed at what I left out, while others will wonder why I dragged so much detail in. My only defense is that I have learned to find it fascinating, and I hope you will too.

Tracing the ins and outs of the evolution of the letters/numbers, astrology and paths on the Tree of the Kabbalah is a life's work in itself. I have presented some of the results of my research in order to assist in untangling the riddles that have arisen around Tarot and its number/letter associations through the centuries. I hope that this material rewards with a few insights and evokes input from other scholars who have found these topics as compelling as I have.

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.

