

The Major Trumps

FIGURE 1-1 shows the attributions of the major trumps of Tarot to the letters of the Hebrew

alphabet, and to the elements, planets, and signs of the zodiac which are attributed to those letters in the Sepher Yetzirah, or Book of Formation. Readers of these pages who are familiar with astrology will at once see the connection between these astrological attributions and the divinatory meanings of the major trumps.

It should, perhaps, be said that although Uranus, Neptune and Pluto were unknown to ancient astronomy within the historical period, there is evidence that these planets were known in prehistoric times. The Tarot Keys which correspond to them are plainly symbolic representations of the particular planets to which they correspond. Furthermore, Uranus is predominantly a planet of the airy quality, and AIR is the element attributed to Aleph, first of the three mother letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Neptune, which corresponds to the letter Mem, to which the element of **Water** is assigned in the **Book of Formation**, is predominantly watery in its astrological significance. Pluto, the most recently discovered planet in our system, is little understood astrologically, but as time goes on, it seems probable that its influence will be found to be closely analogous to that of the fiery element depicted in Tarot by Key 20, The Judgement, the true correspondence to the letter Shin.

0, The Fool

The design for this Key is perhaps the least happy in its symbolism of all the cards in the Knapp Tarot. In the old eighteenth century exoteric packs the Fool was not blindfolded, nor was he the altogether idiotic figure shown in the Tarot which was drawn by Oswald Wirth in 1880. The oldest name for this Key was Le MAT, and this word MAT is the clue to the whole mystery of the card. For MAT is the transposition of the Hebrew word AMT, or Ameth, signifying **truth**. The crocodile in this picture was a suggestion of Eliphas Levi, and it does not appear in any exoteric Tarot prior to his time. It is, however, fairly good symbolism, because the crocodile is the Egyptian god

regarded as the Vehicle of Horus, and as Horus himself. Thus the Fool, about to fall into the mouth of the crocodile, is a symbol of the power which is to be incarnate as Horus, and that power is the pure spirit of Truth or the **sky-power**, for which the Greek name is OURANOS, or Heaven. Thus, when the New Testament speaks of the “kingdom of heaven” the same word “Ouranos” is used, and this is the original of our English Uranus. Curiously, in drawing this design, Mr. Knapp has (unintentionally, he tells me) introduced a very obvious Uranian symbol. The notched ornaments of the Fool’s dress are so disposed that they bear a close resemblance to the familiar symbol of the sign Aquarius, ruled by Uranus. This is an example of the way in which the Tarot designs have been, so to say, protected through all their variations. For when an artist sits down with the intention of drawing a Tarot Key forces play upon him of which he may have no conscious knowledge.

Meanings

Much depends upon the position of this Key in relation to others in the layout.

In spiritual matters

Originality, audacity, a tendency to iconoclasm, venturesome quest of higher truth. Uranus upsets fixed conceptions. He disturbs habits, breaks up customary modes of expression, forces readjustments. Thus, whenever the Zero card appears in a Tarot layout it signifies sudden readjustment, and often indicates the unexpected onset of chaotic conditions. In spiritual matters this is all to the good.

In material matters

Folly, eccentricity, sudden action without sufficient consideration or forethought, stupidity, or even insanity.

1, Le Bateleur

“Bateleur” means “juggler,” or prestidigitator.” Thus the name given to this trump in the exoteric Tarot refers to the lower aspects of Mercury. Here is a symbol of manual dexterity, like that suggested by the rulership of Mercury in Gemini. The mountebank who surprises yokels by his sleight-of hand, the trickster in the commercial world, the subtle deceiver—these are the lower meanings of the card. That Manly Hall accepts the attribution of this

Key to Mercury is sufficiently clear from his having had the caduceus, or wand of Mercury, put in the Juggler's left hand. The sceptre, cup, sword and coins on the table are the emblems of the Tarot suits, the things which the Juggler plays with. And if we remember that the minor trumps of the Tarot are all related to definite time-periods, we shall understand something of importance here. For Mercury is also the personification of the self-conscious mind. He is the Thoth of the Egyptians, and in Egyptian symbolism he was sometimes represented as a dog. Thus the Juggler is the dog who bites the Fool's leg in the preceding Key. He feeds on the movement, or motive power of the Spirit, on the motion principle of the sky. The secret of his magic power is that he can make suitable combinations of time elements.

Well-dignified

Skill, adaptation, constructive power, initiative, subtlety.

Ill-dignified

Craft, the power of sense-illusion, lying, deception, cunning.

2, La Papesse

The keys in the Knapp version repeat Oswald Wirth's variation from the older symbolism. They do not belong properly to this card. The lunar crescent surmounting her crown identifies La Papesse as the Tarot symbol of the Moon. The symbol of Mercury on her breast suggests that she reflects the power of the preceding Key, just as the subconscious mind, whose principal power is memory, is responsive and reflective in all its activities, which are controlled from the Mercurial, or self-conscious, level.

Meanings

The divinatory meanings are the same as those of the Moon in astrology: Fluctuation, reaction, change, alternation, increase and decrease, instability, secrets, things hidden, the unrevealed future, Whether these meanings are good or evil depends altogether upon the dignity of the card in the divinatory layout.

3, L'Imperatrice

Even Papus, who was led astray by the mistaken attribution of the major trumps to the Hebrew alphabet, perceived that L'Imperatrice is a symbol of Venus.

Well-dignified

The divinatory meanings of the card all correspond to the astrological significance of that lovely planet. They include: Fruitfulness, Beauty, luxury, pleasure, success and happiness.

Ill-dignified

But if the card is very badly placed in the layout it is like the afflicted Venus in astrology, and then signifies Dissipation, lust, waste of time and substance in pleasure, laziness and sensuality.

4, L'Empereur

This card, corresponding to the letter Heh, first of the 12 simple letters, is related to the Martian sign, Aries. As Mars represents the basic force in Aries, we can see why the card corresponding to this sign bears a title which implies that its central figure is the consort of L'Imperatrice. For in mythology and in astrology, Venus and Mars are closely related, even as imagination (Venus) and action (Mars), act and react upon each other. Furthermore, in the astrological signs, Aries, the home of Mars, directly follows Pisces, the sign in which Venus is exalted.

Well-dignified

Mental energy; foresight, supervision, oversight, control; reason, persistence, determination; ambition, leadership, enthusiasm.

Ill-dignified

Strife, anger, tendency to go to extremes; over-active; lack of discretion.

5, Le Pape

This card corresponds to the letter Vau, and to the sign Taurus, the attribution being that given in the **Book of Formation**. In this connection it may be of interest to note that the name of the first Pope was Simon, or Simeon, which in Hebrew means "hearing." Hearing is also attributed to the letter Vau in Qabalah, and Taurus, according to astrology,

rules the neck, throat and ears, so that this sign is directly connected with those parts of the human body which establish communication by means of speech. “LE PAPE” means literally “The Father,” and in the technical language of the Qabalah the name “Father” is particularly associated with the idea of Wisdom.

Meanings

Thus the divinatory meanings of this Key correspond to these fundamental notions: Divine Wisdom; intuition; explanation, teaching. It is also a symbol of occult force voluntarily invoked. Of this the symbol of the pentagram is a reminder.

6, L'Amoureux

This card represents the letter Zain, and the Mercurial sign Gemini. In accordance with an old misunderstanding the picture in the Knapp design shows an initiate hesitating at the parting of the ways, with Vice on his left hand and Virtue on his right. None of the ancient Tarot cards, not even the exoteric versions, justify this interpretation, and the consequent change of symbolism. In some old Tarots this card is called **Marriage**, and such is one of its meanings, although the deeper significance is that of the sign Gemini, namely, **polarity**.

Meanings

Attraction, beauty, love, sympathy. Balance of forces, and reciprocal activity. Particularly, agreement in things of the mind, symbolized by the six-pointed star, or hexagram. It is a card of harmony between the inner and outer life.

7, Le Chariot

This Key stands for the letter Cheth and the sign Cancer. In astrology, Cancer is connected with the fourth house, and so with home, and with the conclusion of a matter in a horary reading. The picture shows a victorious chieftain, resting. The sphinxes, however, in the divinatory aspect of this card, may be understood to indicate some secret relating to the Querant. In general the divinatory aspect of this card, may be understood to indicate some secret relating to the Querant.

Meanings

Triumph, victory, the successful outcome of a matter. It is also a card of possessions, particularly of lands and houses, and the financial security resulting from such possessions.

11, La Force

(See Lesson 1, concerning the number of this Key and its relation to the sign Leo). This card corresponds to the Hebrew letter Teth, and thus to the zodiacal sign Leo. It refers, in the magical side of occultism, to the law which is the basis of all human control of occult forces.

Meanings

Ill-dignified, it may signify ostentation, obstinacy, and the like. often, in material questions, it relates to risky speculation, dangerous adventures, and sometimes to clandestine love-affairs. Much depends upon the dignity of the card in the layout.

9, L'Ermite

Corresponds to Yod and the sign Virgo. In its deeper occult meaning this card is closely connected with alchemical symbolism, through the rulership of Mercury in Virgo.

Well-dignified

Light and guidance from higher realms. Aid from superiors and inferiors. Good for Health.

Ill-dignified

The Querant will suffer from misunderstanding and isolation; may expect active opposition from superiors and inferiors; may have to engage in unpleasant or menial occupations; and will be in danger of illness.

10, La Roue de Fortune

Corresponds to Kaph and the planet Jupiter, the Greater Fortune. Its influence is expansive, helpful, temperate.

Well-dignified

Good fortune, a turn for the better, happiness. In questions where the Querant is beset by doubts and uncertainties, the solution of those

difficulties.

Ill-dignified

Pride, arrogance, formalism; success turns the head of the person to whom the card particularly applies in the reading. “Pride goeth before a fall” is the clue to the Ill-dignified 10th Key.

8. La Justice

(See No. 11, above). Corresponds to the letter Lamed, and to the zodiacal sign Libra.

Well-dignified

Balance, equilibrium, especially emotional stability; good Karma. Is often an indication of successful dealings with the public, and if Well-dignified is favorable in all questions involving legal matters, partnership, or marriage.

Ill-dignified

It indicates unfavorable relations with partners (marriage or business), trouble in court, emotional instability; sudden changes of plans; bad Karma.

12. Le Pendu

The letter corresponding to this card is Mem, to which are attributed the element of **Water** and the planet **Neptune**.

Meanings

In divination, much depends on the nature of the question whenever this card appears in a layout. If the question is concerned with spiritual matters, the Hanged Man represents wisdom, but a wisdom that is just the reverse of what the world commonly accepts. The card also stands for surrender to the inevitable, but in spiritual things this is surrender to the spiritual perception of universal laws, while in material affairs it is involuntary submission to the force of circumstances. In ordinary material affairs Key 12 is a symbol of reverses and losses, of suffering and sacrifice. But much depends upon its position in a layout, and upon whether or not it is well or ill-dignified.

13, La Mort

Corresponds, through the letter Nun, to the zodiacal sign Scorpio. Thus it is more or less related to the matters which astrology connects with the eighth house of a horoscope, such as death, legacies, the affairs of the dead, and so on. Sometimes it has definite relation to necromancy and spiritualism.

Meanings

Time, age. Sudden change, wholly unexpected. (For good or ill, according to the dignity of the card in a layout). In material matters, as a rule, it is a symbol of death, either the death of persons, or the failure of a project.

14, La Temperance

Connects, through the letter Samekh, with the zodiacal sign Sagittarius. The symbolism of the card is in close relation to many of the divinatory meanings.

Meanings

Combinations; success in difficult and protracted enterprises; dealings with persons at some distance, or long journeys which will work out for good and ill, according to the placing of the card. A card of management, adaptation and economy.

15, Le Diable

Corresponds, through the letter Ayin, with Capricorn. In all but the highest spiritual questions, where the Querant is definitely and consciously on the occult path, this card is of evil significance. In its most general meanings, it signifies Mammon, and thus big business, the conventions of society, the injustice and cruelty of a social order in which money takes the place of God, in which humanity is bestialized, in which war is engineered by greed masquerading as patriotism, in which fear is dominant. Students of astrology will have no difficulty in seeing how this corresponds to Capricorn, the sign of big business, and the sign of worldly fame. Not that Capricorn is evil, but that its lower and negative expression is what has just been mentioned.

Meanings

Bondage, materiality, force (especially the force of convention and public opinion), fate, necessity.

16, Le Feu du Ciel

Corresponds, through the letter Peh, to Mars. The symbolism, which has, for a long time, been connected with the story of the Tower of Babel, has a direct bearing upon the divinatory meanings.

Meanings

These meanings correspond also to the influence of Mars in astrology. As a rule an evil card, although in spiritual matters it may be understood as symbolizing the overthrow of mistaken conceptions, or the defeat of activities opposed to the Querant's spiritual development. In material affairs it signifies ambition, unforeseen catastrophes, fighting, grave dangers, the ruin of the Querant's plans, the defeat of his hopes.

17, Les Etoiles

Corresponds, through the letter Tzaddi, to the sign Aquarius. It is a card which always intimates that the truth of the matter which interests the Querant is to be made manifest. It usually indicates assistance from friends.

Well-dignified

It promises unexpected help, and the realization of hopes and wishes.

Ill-dignified

Unreliable friends, a tendency to impracticality or dreaminess on the part of the Querant, loss through acquaintances.

18, La Lune

Although this card is named "The Moon," it is really related to the zodiacal sign Pisces, through the letter Qoph, which corresponds to that sign. Its meanings are, in divination, clearly traceable to the 12th house influence of the sign Pisces. This card is very sensitive to the influence of other cards around it in a layout.

Well-dignified

Voluntary change, advance into a wider field of activity, but an advance made primarily because the Querant is unhappy in, or dissatisfied with his present position. There is always an element of uncertainty in matters represented by this card.

Ill-dignified

It stands for error, lying, deception; for limitations resulting from the Querant's own lack of judgement or his want of self-control; for difficulties brought about by the machinations of hidden enemies.

19, Le Soleil

Corresponds to the Sun, through the letter Resh. In its higher meanings it is a card of liberation, signifying release from the bondage of lower planes.

Meanings

In material questions it is usually good, signifying gain, glory, or riches. In general it corresponds to the solar influence in astrology. But if surrounded by very evil cards it may mean vanity, arrogance, prodigality, ostentatious display, and a tendency to intrigue.

20, Le Jugement

Corresponds, through the letter Shin, with the element of Fire. Is probably also related to the planet Pluto, and here it may be noted that in certain relations of Tarot symbolism and combination, this Key is definitely associated with the sign Scorpio, which, some astrologers believe, may be the sign ruled by Pluto.

Meanings

In divination this card often represents the operation of under-currents of force not easily determinable, or the appearance of unexpected elements bearing upon the Querant's problem.

Well-dignified

A favorable outcome to the matter concerning which the operation is made. Often the renewal of hopes and wishes, or the betterment of conditions after a period of depression.

Ill-dignified

Especially in legal matters, the decision goes against the Querant, and the outcome is beyond his power to change. Sometimes a card of inheritance.

21, Le Monde

Corresponds, through the letter Tau, to the planet Saturn. Its meaning in a divinatory layout depends much on the position of the cards which surround it and their general meaning. Usually it refers to the matter concerning which the question is made.

Meanings

Well-dignified it signifies success, a favorable issue to the circumstances. Sometimes change of place.

Summary

In considering the major trumps, much depends upon their position and dignity. In the method of divination you have been practicing up to this point, the zodiacal keys often indicate the time when some event occurs. Whether in the past or in the future depends, of course, on which of the three heaps of cards the Key is located in. Practice is the only thing that will enable you to judge these cards well, but the better you understand their symbols and particularly the fundamental meaning of the planets and signs of the zodiac, the easier will it be to divine.

In the next lesson we shall begin explaining a more definite system of divination, which should always be resorted to for the solution of really important questions. In the meantime, continue your practice with the method already explained. When you apply this to the discovery of the general trend of a day's events, ignore the time-values of the cards representing the signs and decans of the zodiac, and consider only the general significance of those cards.

Remember, too, that the pile of cards containing the significator is the only one to be read. In the "morning, afternoon, evening" method, the location of the significator shows which part of the day will be most important for the Querant, but after this is determined, the cards of the pile containing the Significator are to be shuffled, cut once, and then dealt into three heaps, from right to left, of which the first, or right-hand heap is "evening."

The same principle is to be adhered to when the three original piles are called "past, present and future," but in this case the time-values of the cards should be considered.