Eremiados Course Lesson Seventeen

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Apostolic Guardian Church of Grace and Blessing
&
Templum de Octo Rosae Mysticus

The Tarocchi
A Brief History and Introduction

Origin of Playing Cards

Professor Michael Dummett, in his 1980 book, *The Game of Tarot*, shows conclusively from documented evidence that playing cards originated in China in the 9th century c.e. Packs of playing cards divided into number cards and court cards are known to have existed in China by the 11th century.

They were transported westwards to Persia over the Great Silk Route during the 13th century. Thence, they were carried east to India and west towards Europe. By that time, they were beginning to assume their modern structure of four suits, each divided into number cards and court cards.

Playing Cards in Europe

The earliest documented references to playing cards in Europe are all in 1377, from four different cities [Florence, Paris, Basle and Siene]. It seems clear that the first pack to be developed consisted of 52-cards in four suits, each with 10 number cards and 3 court cards, using a similar arrangement to those used in oriental cards. In Italy, the court cards were Kings, Knights and Knaves; in other countries, they were Kings, Queens and Knaves. The four suits at this time were Batons, Cups, Swords and Coins.

Triumphs

The earliest documented reference to the Tarocchi, but not by that name, is 1442. In the registers of two Italian cities for that year packs of *Trionfi* or Triumphs are mentioned.

The game of Trionfi was a trick-taking game, like whist or bridge. Trionfi was the first card game where some cards, the Triumphs, were more powerful than the suit cards and thus always able to take a trick when played.

The earliest Trionfi cards were hand-painted, often by well-known artists, for members of the aristocracy. There are modern reproductions of some of these very early packs, such as the Visconti-Sforza pack, which was painted for the Duke of Milan.

Within a few years of the invention of the game of Trionfi, block-printed, cheap Trionfi cards began to be produced for the use of commoners. The designs of early Italian block-printed cards, though different from the painted cards, do not vary significantly from those in the 18th century French printed cards called the Tarot of Marseilles.

The idea of triumphing spread very quickly throughout Europe. It was soon used in some trick-taking games played with the ordinary 52-card pack, one of the suits being declared *triumphs*. Very soon, the word *triumphs* was shortened to *trumps* in most languages.

Tarocchi

Because the term *triumph* or trump was being used in many card games played with ordinary 52-card packs, it no longer had any significance as the name of a distinctive game and pack. Some time in the 16th century, a new name emerged, *Tarocchi*.

The following extract from Dummett's book sums up the matter: "Although the Tarot pack originated in Italy in the 15th century, it did not originally bear that name. The word Tarot has become more or less naturalised as an English word, whereas it is in fact the French adaptation of the Italian

name of these cards, *Tarocchi*, in the singular *Tarocco*. In the earliest references, the French word is sometimes spelled *tarau* [plural: *taraux*], *tarault* or simply *Taro*. In every language but French, the hard K sound of the Italian has been retained, *Tarock* in German, *Tarokk* in Hungarian, *Taroky* in Czech, and so on."

In England, the normal spelling was *Taroc* before the 20th century, as can be verified by reference to the large Oxford English Dictionary.

The origin of the term Tarocco ?

It is customary to use the singular word *Tarocco* for the game and the plural *Tarocchi* for the pack of cards. There is no documented history for the word *Tarocco*. Nobody knows whence it came or how it originated.

The earliest recorded use of the word *Tarocchi* was in 1516. As early as 1550, an Italian poet, Lollio, wrote that no-one knew what was the origin of the words *Tarocco* and *Tarocchi*.

Some esoteric groups, including our own Order, derive the name *Tarocco* from either the Arabic word *Tariq* or the Hebrew word *Derek*. Both *Tariq* and *Derek* mean "the Way."

Both the Sufis, or Islamic mystics, and the Kabbalists, or Jewish mystics, had a considerable influence on Italian esoteric thinking during the Renaissance era.

Some esoteric groups therefore call the Tarocchi "The Way of the Great Work"

The Gypsies and the Tarocchi

There is no evidence whatsoever for some occultists' belief that the Tarocchi were invented in Egypt as a means of preserving ancient magical wisdom; and that they were brought to Europe by descendants of the ancient Egyptians, known as the gypsies. Firstly, the gypsies came from India, not Egypt; and secondly, they were did not arrive in Europe for at least a century after the Tarocchi were in use throughout Italy, France and Germany.

The gypsies certainly adopted the Tarocchi as a fortune-telling device, but they had found them already well known as a card-game.

Egypt and the Tarocchi

The idea that the Tarocchi first came from Egypt was originated by a French occultist author, Court de Gebelin, nearly 300 years after the game of Tarocco was devised in Italy. In one of his books, published in 1781, de Gebelin described the Tarocchi as "a work of the ancient Egyptians, composed of 77 or 78 sheets or pictures. This Egyptian book is all that remains of their superb libraries, saved from the flames and containing their purest wisdom."

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, all things Egyptian held enormous fascination for the people of France, which affected their clothing, art, architecture, philosophies and even their political decisions. Napoleon invaded Egypt, accompanied by hundreds of archeologists, artists and other scholars, largely to gain control over this source of wisdom.

However, no-one had any accurate knowledge of the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians before Champollion deciphered the Rosetta Stone in 1824. This monument had on it the same inscription in Greek, demotic [popular] Egyptian and the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt. Soon, most of the thousands of ancient Egyptian inscriptions and papyri which had survived had been translated into European languages. European scholars now knew more about ancient Egypt than the scholars of classical Greece and Rome,' who had lived as long after the ancient Egyptians as we live after the era of the Roman Empire.

It was soon discovered that the Egyptians were not the source of Jewish, Greek and

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Roman wisdom; and that there was no indication that they had ever used anything like Tarocchi cards.

Despite this, some occultists continue to believe in the Gipsy or Egyptian origins of the Tarocchi to this day, presumably influenced by such romantic books as *The Tarot of the Egyptians* written by the French occultist Papus and *The Book of Thoth* written by Aleister Crowley.

The Tarot of Marseilles

By the beginning of the 18th century, the commonest form of the Tarocchi was the Tarot of Marseilles. Various versions of this French pack were produced by printers from all over Europe. The significant thing about the Tarot of Marseilles packs is that they adhered closely to the original order and designs of the earliest printed packs of the Italians.

The Structure of the Tarocchi pack

The Italian game of Tarocco was played with a 78-card pack, with four suits of 14 cards each [10 number and 4 court cards, King, Queen, Knight and Knave or Maid] and 21 trick-taking Triumphs. In addition, there was a 22nd Triumph, *Il Matto* or *Il Misero*, The Fool, which had no trick-taking power but could be played to avoid wasting a more valuable card.

Major and Minor Arcana

Among occultists, the suit cards are often called Minor Arcana or Minor Keys and the Triumphs are known as the Major Arcana or Keys. *Arcanum* refers to occult knowledge known only to initiates. In our Order, we refer to them simply as Minors and Majors or Triumphs. In the traditional packs, the Triumphs had pictures on them. The suit cards had stylised court cards and only symbols on the number cards. While picture versions of the numbered cards, as in the modern Rider-Waite pack, might be attractive and useful for fortune-tellers, symbols are to be preferred from an esoteric point of view.

The Triumphs have always had a specific ranking, from the least to the most powerful, but the cards were not usually numbered before the 16th century. However, it has been ascertained from contemporary descriptions that the order of the Triumphs has varied little from that with which we are familiar today.

Modern Packs

The first radical departure from the traditional Tarocchi was the pack devised at the end of the 18th century by Alliete, a French barber/fortune teller who called himself Etteila. It is still in print, but is rarely used nowadays outside of France.

At the end of the 19th century, Papus included an Egyptianised version of the Tarocchi in his book, *The Divinatory Tarot*. He used the Court de Gebelin version of the Marseilles pack in another book, *The Tarot of the Bohemians*.

In 1910, the occult publishers, Rider & Co. issued a pack drawn by Pamela Coleman Smith using the designs of the English occultist Arthur Edward Waite, and under his supervision.

This pack is widely available and has had an enormous influence on hundreds of more recently designed packs. It is called the Rider-Waite pack. Its principal difference from earlier packs was the use of pictures on all 78 of the cards, thus blurring the esoteric distinction between the Triumphs and the Suit cards.

The esoterically most useful modern designs are those used for the Fez-Moroccan pack, which is well drawn and corrects most, but not all, of the errors and blinds inserted by Waite in his pack.

Note that the switch in numbering of Triumph VIII, Justice, and Triumph XI, Strength, made by Waite, and followed by

the Fez-Moroccan pack, cannot be justified, except on the most superficial grounds.

Furthermore, this change obscures some of the deeper meanings of these two cards.

Our Order prefers the Tarot of Marseilles for esoteric purposes. The Tarot of New Zion, currently available only within our Order, makes a number of small but significant changes to the traditional Marseilles designs.

The Tarocchi of Mantegna

In the renaissance era, sets of Images, such as those formed by the Triumphs of the Tarocchi, were not always part of a card game. Small books of religious and philosophical pictures called "Emblem books" were circulated in Italy among the illiterate common people to help them learn the teachings of the Church. A notable set of 50 Images, now usually misnamed *The Tarocchi of Mantegna*, included all the Images of a Renaissance philosophical system, called The Great Chain of Being, arranged in five groups, each of ten images. Some of the Images in the Mantegna set are the same as or similar to some of the Triumph Images. It is no surprise that some people began to use the Tarocchi Triumphs to teach their own philosophical system.

The 50 Mantegna Images

[A] The Conditions of Humankind

1	Beggar	6	Knight
2	Servant	7	Doge
3	Artisan	8	King
4	Merchant	9	Emperor
5	Gentleman	10	Pope

[B] Apollo and the Nine Muses;

11	Caliope	Epic Poetry
12	Urania	Astronomy
13	Terpsicore	Choirs and Dancers
14	Erato	Erotic Poetry
15	Polimnia	Inspired Hymns
16	Talia	Comedy
17	Melpomene	Tragedy
18	Euterpe	Lyric Poetry
19	Clio	History
20	Apollo	God of the Muses

[C] The Liberal Arts

21	Grammar	26	Music
22	Logic	27	Poetry
23	Rhetoric	28	Philosophy
24	Geometry	29	Astrology
25	Arithmetic	30	Theology

[D] Cosmic Principles and Virtues

31	Iliaco	36	Fortitude
32	Chronico	37	Justice
33	Cosmico	38	Charity
34	Temperance	39	Hope
35	Prudence	40	Faith

[E] The Spheres of the Heavens.

41	Moon	46	Jupiter
42	Mercury	47	Saturn
43	Venus	48	Fixed Stars
44	Sun	49	First Mover
45	Mars	50	First Cause

Assignments:

What sure you put this heading on your answer sheets:

Tiron Grade 1 - 7k [Tarocchi]

Try to answer these questions from memory. Then check your answers from the paper.

1. At about what date was the Game of Triumphs invented?

2. What are some of the suggested origins for the name Tarocchi?

3. Who first suggested an Egyptian origin for the Tarocchi? About when?

4. What is the name of the commonest traditional pack of Tarocchi cards?

5. Who designed the pack on which most modern Tarocchi packs are based?

6. How many cards are in a Tarocchi pack?

7. How many suits?

8. What are the court cards called?