



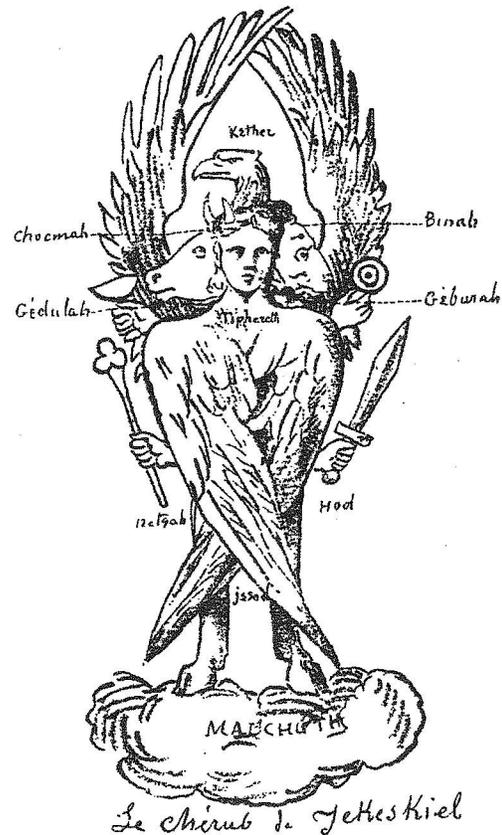
The Occult Revival and Tarot

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw an occult revival. Many of the associations made with the tarot at this time have influenced modern thinking on the card meanings.

It started with French esotericist Antoine Court de Gebelin claiming that the tarot was actually an ancient Egyptian book containing secret wisdom; the Book of Thoth. Egyptomania was high at this time due to artifacts from Egyptian tombs and temples found their way to Europe.

In the mid 1800's Eliphas Levi who was a French Rosicrucian developed the possible link between the Major Arcana and qabalah based on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. He also drew an image of a cherub based on the prophet Ezekiel but included the heads of an eagle, lion, and bull alongside the cherubs head. Each of these also holds an emblem representing the 4 suits in the minor arcana. We see this correlate with the World card in the RWS.

Mystical Orders also say their heyday during this time. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is a well-known example which was founded in 1888. It was they who wove together the Qabalistic, astrological and Egyptian tarot associations. This group was started by William Wynn Westcott and William Robert Woodman (both doctors) and MacGregor Mathers who were also all Freemasons. Their method of associations with the elements and planetary (& luminary) influences is nowadays the most generally accepted. This order also developed the divinatory meanings of the minor arcana and presented them each as fully illustrated cards rather than the suit repeated a number of times (ex 9 of Pentacles with 9 pentacles pictured).



ABOVE: Eliphas Lévi's *Le Cherub de L'Ekeskiel* (Cherubin of Ezekiel), from his work *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (Transcendental Magic), 1854.



SAGE WIND TAROT CIRCLE ... NOV 2022

Arthur E Waite's deck illustrated by Pamela Coleman Smith, was published in 1909 before the demise of the Golden Dawn in 1914. The "traditional symbolism" or system we think of was incorporated into the RWS deck based on the Golden Dawn's work.

Aleister Crowley is another well-known name in the occult. He had joined the Golden Dawn in 1889 but his deck; Thoth tarot (illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris) didn't appear until 1944 (3 years before his death). Crowley left the Golden Dawn and by 1907 had founded the Argentium Astrum or Order of the Silver Star. He wrote The Book of the Law while in this order and combined his interest in sexual magic and rituals he had taken from the Golden Dawn.

Paul Foster Case (born in 1884) was also very influenced by the Golden Dawn and the RWS deck. He created the Builders of the Adytum (BOTA) which is an international tarot organization in LA. They created their own tarot deck based on the RWS design and illustrated by Jesse Burns Parke. This deck is black and white but can be coloured in based on the BOTA teachings. The BOTA teach about Hermetic Qabalah, astrology & tarot.

Recommended Reading:

Understanding Tarot – Liz Dean

The Tarot: A Key to the Wisdom of the Ages – Paul Foster Case

The Book of the Law – Aleister Crowley

777 – Aleister Crowley

An introduction to the Golden Dawn Tarot – R Wang

The Magickal Tarot of the Golden Dawn - Chris Zalewski & Pat Zalewski

The Tarot – MacGregor Mathers

The Doctrine & Ritual of High Magick – Eliphas Levi

Decks:

Rider Waite Smith Tarot

BOTA Tarot

Thoth Tarot

Hermetic Tarot