



Figure 1

An Introduction to the Tarot

PREFACE:

I'd like to start with a few quotes from some fairly well known authors: ♦

Isaac Asimov: *"... an uninformed public tends to confuse scholarship with magicianry..."*

Leigh Brackett: *"Witchcraft to the ignorant, ... simple science to the learned"*

Arthur C. Clarke: *"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."*

Agatha Christie: *"The supernatural is only the natural of which the laws are not yet understood."*

All of these express the thought that what we currently consider Magic, Witchcraft, or the Supernatural are merely examples of misunderstood, or not yet learned science. Magic, Witchcraft, and Supernatural may seem terms out of place for a Freemason, but they are not, we just use other words like Hermeticism, Alchemy, and the Esoteric. ♦ If you are in any doubt of this correlation between magic and advanced science I would encourage you to check into a relatively recent example, the Cargo Cults of the Melanesia Islands during and after World War 2.



Figure 3

TAROT CARDS:

♦ Before I get into the details, let's start with a general description of what Tarot Cards are and where they came from. There are a number of different formats but by far the most common is in the form of a deck of cards, often similar in size and general shape to standard playing cards. That should be no surprise as it is thought that what we use today as "Playing Cards", for games like Poker, Black Jack, or Cribbage, are actually derived from the early Tarot decks. The biggest difference is that a Tarot deck has more cards than what we now think of as a standard deck of playing cards.



Figure 4

Where today's standard deck has 52 cards, a Tarot deck has 78 cards. The Tarot deck is also divided into two sections; a group of 22 consecutively numbered cards, called the Major, or Greater Arcana, and the remaining 56 cards called the Minor, or Lesser Arcana.



Figure 5

It is this last group, the Lesser Arcana, that are the origin of our playing cards. ♦ They are grouped into four suites called Wands, Cups, Swords, and Pentacles, which have become our well known Clubs, Hearts, Spades, and Diamonds respectively. But what about the difference between the 56 and 52 card counts? Each suit in the Tarot Deck consists of 14 cards, the usual Ace to 10 and then four Court cards, King, Queen, Knight, and Page. ♦ Standard playing cards have the same King and Queen but the Jack has taken the place of both the Knight and the Page. It may be of interest to note that in some of the European countries certain decks of playing cards do still have the same four Court cards as a Tarot deck and there is a game played with these cards called Tarot, which has been passed down from their original introduction into Europe.



Figure 6

Here is a quote from Albert Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry on the subject of Tarot Cards. *"The doctrine behind these symbols has many forms and meanings; veiled as it is by symbols, it speaks many languages, and its emblems convey a message to students of alchemy and astrology. As one writer upon the Subject says "it is full of meaning no matter by what path the student may have approached the truth which is at the head of the ancient mysteries, and though its symbolism expresses Universal ideas it also represents a particular version of sacred science, being a Symbolic alphabet of the occult philosophy of Israel."*

HISTORY:



Figure 7

♦ The exact origin and date of Tarot cards is unknown, but there are two main theories. The first is that they came into Europe from the Far East, in particular, India. The second puts their origin in the Middle East, ie., Persia or Egypt. In either case, the means of



Figure 8

propagation throughout Europe was by way of the Gypsies. ♦ Partial remains of Tarot decks have been dated to the 12th and 13th centuries. Manly P. Hall, in his book “*An Analysis of the Tarot Cards*”, goes as far as to suggest that the Gypsies are the remnants of a priesthood that left Egypt after the burning of the Library at Alexandria, concealing their esoteric knowledge in a book, each page of which is a Tarot card. Others also refer to the original Tarot as a book rather than a deck. Here is a quote from “*Tarot of the Bohemians*” by Papus:

“The Gypsies possess a Bible, which has proved their means of gaining a livelihood, for it enables them to tell fortunes; at the same time it has been a perpetual source of amusement, for it enables them to gamble.

Yes, the game of cards called the Tarot, which the Gypsies possess is the Bible of Bibles. It is the book of Thoth Hermes Trismegistus, the book of Adam, the book of primitive Revelation of ancient Civilizations.

Thus whilst the Freemason, an intelligent and virtuous man, has lost the tradition; whilst the priest, also intelligent and virtuous, has lost his esoterism; the Gypsy, although ignorant and vicious, has given us the key which enables us to explain all the symbolism of the ages.

We must admire the wisdom of the Initiates, who utilized vice and made it produce more beneficial results than virtue.”

Some of the earliest Tarot cards that can be found in museums are just that, individual cards, not complete decks. They came from the city states of what is now Italy, having been commissioned by the Dukes of Milan and Ferrara in the early to mid 1400’s. ♦ One of the earliest complete sets comes from Marseilles, France, and is dated to around 1760. Reproductions of this “Marseilles Deck” can be purchased today on Amazon.



Figure 9

The basic Tarot deck has remained relatively unchanged until the early 1900’s when Arthur Edward Waite switched the position of two of the Major Arcana cards, Strength



Figure 10

and Justice, in the numbering sequence. ♦ The deck that he created, with the help of artist Pamela Colman Smith, and known as the Rider-Waite Tarot, has become one of the most popular standard decks now available. The advent of “New Age” thinking has produced a seemingly unlimited number of themed decks such as Lord of the Rings decks, Arthurian Tarot decks, as well as those based on The Age of Aquarius, to name just a few. They range in style from historic, as reproductions of older decks like the Marseilles; pictorial, such as the Rider-Waite and Royal Fez Moroccan decks; and surrealistic, like the Tarot of the Witches which was used in the James Bond movie “Live and Let Die”.



Figure 11

The cards can be related to something that every Mason is quite familiar with ♦ – a Tracing Board. We all know the large boards or cloths used in the Explanatory for each degree, full of symbols which are used as memory aids and visual cues to the presenter. For the candidate they are a focus point as well as a visual representation of what is being explained. Each Tarot card acts like a mini-Tracing Board – it prompts and reminds the Reader of its meaning and it provides the Querent with a visual to add impact to the message being delivered.

PURPOSE:

As mentioned in a preceding quote, The Tarot are useful for three things:

1. As a means for amusement and gambling. From Author Edward Waite’s “*The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*” we have “*The purpose for which they were used is made tolerably evident by the fact that, in 1423, St. Bernardin of Sienna preached against playing cards and other forms of gambling. Forty years later the importation of cards into England was forbidden*”
2. As a means of fortune telling, or divination. This is currently their most popular use. Most “Fortune Tellers” today use Tarot cards to do “Readings” for the querent in order to answer his/her question.

3. As a means of communicating esoteric knowledge. Each card is full of symbols that, when interpreted properly, reveal their original secret meanings. From Eden Gray's *"A Complete Guide to the Tarot"* we get *"One of the most fascinating stories claiming that the Tarot originated in Egypt relates that after the great library at Alexandria was destroyed, the city of Fez (in what is now Morocco) became the intellectual capital of the world, to which wise men traveled from near and far. Needing to create a common tongue – for they spoke in many languages – they set about inventing a method of communication. To this end, they prepared a picture book abounding in mystic symbols. A key to the meanings of these signs was handed down by word of mouth from initiate to initiate. To preserve the secrecy of their messages, the symbols were later reproduced on seemingly innocuous cards that were used in games of chance by more frivolous men who could not possibly decipher their true significance"*.

THE MAJOR ARCANA:



Figure 12

- ♦ This set of 22 cards consists of a group of 21 cards, sequentially numbered from 1 to 21 and an additional card which is sometimes numbered Zero and in other decks left unnumbered. Each card is also named, with this special, zero, or unnumbered card being titled "The Fool". When numbered Zero, it is placed at the beginning of the set but when unnumbered it may be placed at the beginning, between cards number 20 and 21, or it can be at the end.

Each card is drawn depicting a scene with many esoteric symbols, at least some of which should be familiar to a Freemason, and is meant to convey a specific idea or message to the reader of the cards. Here is a very brief description with divinatory meaning as given in *"A Complete Guide to the Tarot"* by Eden Grey and using the Rider-Waite deck for illustration.



Figure 13

0. ♦ **The Fool** – A youth about to step off the edge of a precipice. He symbolizes the Life-power before it enters into manifestation. *Meaning: a dreamer, a mystic, the desire to accomplish a great goal. However, he must be careful to make the right choice.*

1. **The Magician** – He stands before a table on which are laid a Wand, a Cup, a Sword, and a Pentacle, representing the Minor Arcana and meaning Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. He is about to draw power from above to materialize his desires. *Meaning: Will, mastery, organizational skills, creative talents. The ability to take the power from above and direct it through desire into manifestation.*



Figure 14

2. ♦ **The High Priestess** – She is seated between two pillars from the Temple of Solomon – the black pillar of Boaz representing the negative life force and the white one, Jachin, the positive life force. *Meaning: Unrevealed future, hidden influences at work.*

3. **The Empress** – She is the Earth Mother, here seated in a blooming garden. A field of ripe wheat lies before her, sacred to the Egyptian goddess Isis; behind her is seen the stream of consciousness, flowing between cypress trees, sacred to Venus. *Meaning: Material wealth, marriage, fertility for would-be parents, for farmers, or for people in the creative arts.*

4. ♦ **The Emperor** – He is seated on a throne decorated with rams heads relating him to Mars. In his right hand he holds an Egyptian ankh and in his left hand the globe of dominion. *Meaning: Leadership, mental activity, domination, war-making power, authority.*

5. **The Hierophant** – Here again we have a figure seated between two pillars, repeating the theme of duality seen in the pillars behind the High Priestess. These are the pillars of the Tree of Life from the Kabbalah, one representing Mercy and the other Severity. *Meaning: Preference for the outer forms of religion, the ritual, the creed, the ceremony. The importance of social approval; the need to conform to society.*



Figure 15

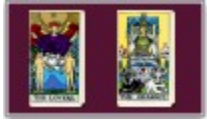


Figure 16

6. ♦ **The Lovers** – The angel Raphael personifying the superconscious pouring down cosmic benediction on the two figures below. *Meaning: Choice, temptation, attraction. The struggle between the sacred and the profane.*

7. **The Chariot** – This card signifies victory for the triumphant king who has conquered on all planes, particularly those of the mind, science, and growth. *Meaning: Triumph, success, control over the forces of nature.*



Figure 17

8. ♦ **Strength** – A woman garlanded with flowers is either closing or opening a lion's mouth. Above her head is the cosmic symbol of Eternal Life, indicating that she is in control, thanks to the spiritual power above her. *Meaning: Force of character, spiritual power overcoming material power, love over hate, the higher nature over carnal desires.*

9. **The Hermit** – He stands isolated on a snowy mountain peak, holding up a lantern to guide those below. This is the lighted Lamp of Truth, containing within it the six-pointed star, the Seal of Solomon. *Meaning: Silent counsel, prudence, discretion, receiving wisdom from above.*



Figure 18

10. ♦ **The Wheel of Fortune** – Here is the ever-turning wheel which carries men and their destinies up and down. This is the exoteric meaning of the card, but the many symbols it depicts give it much more profound and subtle significance. *Meaning: Success, unexpected turn of luck, change of fortune for the better.*

11. **Justice** – Justice is seated between the positive and negative forces, indicated by the pillars first seen in the High Priestess and again in the Hierophant. *Meaning: Justice will be done, balance is required. Demands the elimination of wrong ideas, useless forms of education.*



Figure 19

12. ♦ **The Hanged Man** – A youth suspended by one foot from a T-cross of living wood. His arms, folded behind his back, together with his head, form a triangle with the point downward; his legs form a cross. *Meaning: A pause in ones life, suspended decisions. In spiritual matters, wisdom, prophetic powers.*

13. Death – A skeleton in armor rides a white horse that tramples over a fallen king and draws near to a child and a woman, who turn from him in dread. *Meaning: Transformation, change, destruction followed by renewal.*



Figure 20

14. ♦ Temperance – The Archangel Michael, related to fire and the sun, pours the essence of life from the silver cup of subconscious into the golden cup of the conscious, from the unseen into the seen and then back again. *Meaning: Adaption, tempering, coordination, self-control, modification. Working in harmony with others.*

15. The Devil – He is the polar opposite of the Archangel Michael of the previous card. His horns are those of a goat, and his face is a goat's face; he has bat wings and donkey ears that suggest the obstinacy and stubbornness of materialism. *Meaning: Black magic, discontent, depression, illness. Wrong use of force, bondage to the material.*



Figure 21

16. ♦ The Tower – This is the Tower of Ambition built on false premises. It is made of the bricks of traditional race-thought and the wrong use of personal will. *Meaning: Change, conflict, catastrophe. Overthrow of existing ways of life. Disruption will bring enlightenment.*

17. The Star – A beautiful maiden kneels with one knee on the land and one foot on the water. The earth supports her weight but she balances herself on the water of the subconscious. *Meaning: Insight, inspiration, hope. Unselfish aid. Good health.*



Figure 22

18. ♦ The Moon – The Moon in three phases watches over the landscape. From the pool of Cosmic Mind a crayfish appears, symbolizing the early stages of conscious unfoldment. *Meaning: Intuition, imagination, deception. Opening of latent psychic powers. Unseen perils, secret foes.*

19. The Sun – A naked child rides a white horse and holds a red banner aloft. The horse is solar energy, which he now controls without saddle or bridle. He

represents perfect control between the conscious and the unconscious. *Meaning: Material happiness, success, attainment.*



Figure 23

20. ♦ Judgment – The angel Gabriel emerges from the heavens blowing his trumpet, its seven basic tones indicated by the seven lines radiating from it. This imperious blast is the creative Word that liberates Man from his terrestrial limitations. *Meaning: Awakening, renewal, a change of personal consciousness.*

21. The World – A dancer clad only in a scarf, an oval wreath frames her figure, symbolizing the mystery of creation. *Meaning: Completion, reward, success. Travel, a change of residence. Arrival at a state of cosmic consciousness.*

In addition to the meanings given, if a card ends up up-side-down in a reading then it has a different meaning, usually pretty much the opposite of the meaning listed. Some readers of the Tarot do not care about a card's orientation and always use only the "right-way-up" meaning.

I will be describing the drawings and meanings of several cards in much greater detail in a later section.

THE MINOR ARCANA

There are too many cards to list each separately so I will summarize by suit and give a few examples.



Figure 24

♦ There are four suits, Wands, Cups, Swords, and Pentacles. Note that the word is Pentacle, not pentangle. Again, I will be borrowing heavily from Gray's "*A Complete Guide to the Tarot*"

Wands – This suit indicates animation and enterprise, energy and growth. The wands depicted in the cards are always in leaf, suggesting the constant renewal of life and

growth. The associations are with the world of ideas, also with creation in all forms. *Associations:* Element – Fire; Animal – Salamander; Apocalypse Figure – Lion; Direction – South; Temperament – Optimistic; Profession – Labourer.

Cups – This suit generally implies love and happiness. The cups in the cards refer to water, a symbol of the subconscious mind, the instincts, and the emotions of love and pleasure, the good life, fertility, and beauty. *Associations:* Element – Water; Animal – the Undine (a female water spirit); Apocalypse Figure – the Water Carrier/Aquarius; Direction – West; Temperament – Unemotional; Profession – Priest.

Swords – The swords generally express aggression, strife, boldness, and courage. But sometimes they can mean hatred, battle, and enemies. This is the suit of misfortune and disaster. *Associations:* Element – Air; Animal – Sylph (an air elemental); Apocalypse Figure – Eagle; Direction – North; Temperament – Melancholy; Profession – Soldier.

Pentacles – The symbols on the cards are called pentacles, which in ancient times were metal disks inscribed with magic formulas. Here they are inscribed with the five-pointed star called the pentagram – a symbol of the magic arts and the five senses of man, the five elements of Nature, and the five extremities of the human body. They represent money, acquisition of fortune, and trade. *Associations:* Element – Earth; Animal – Gnome; Apocalypse Figure – Bull; Direction – East; Temperament – Bad-tempered; Profession – Merchant.

Some generalities concerning the Minor Arcana:

- The Aces typically mean new beginnings
- The Court Cards usually represent people
 - Wands – light coloured skin, light or blond hair

- Cups – fair coloured skin, light brown hair
- Swords – dull or ruddy complexion, dark brown hair
- Pentacles – dark skinned, black hair
- Kings and Queens represent older men and women
- Knights and Pages represent younger men and women



Figure 25

♦ The Nine and Ten of Cups are considered to be the two best cards to find in a reading. The Nine is also called the Wish card as it symbolizes that the querent will get his/her wish. It implies all good things material. The Ten is similar, but for the spiritual plane. Contentment, lasting happiness, but coming from “above” rather than from the physical.



Figure 26

♦ The Nine and Ten of Swords are the exact opposite, the worst cards in the deck, even worse than the Tower, the Devil, and even Death from the Major Arcana. The divinatory meaning for the Nine of Swords: *“Suffering, loss, misery. Burden, oppression. Doubt and desolation. Illness. May mean death of a loved one.”*

As if that wasn’t bad enough, here is what Grey says for the Ten of Swords. *“Though the Nine of Swords showed despair, the meaning here is even more serious. Ruin of plans and projects. Defeat in war. Disruption of home life. Tears will fall. Troubles will come in spite of riches and high position. Not a card of violent death. A suggestion to give charity freely to those in trouble.”*

READING THE CARDS



Figure 27

♦ The term used for getting information or answers from a deck of Tarot cards is called “reading the cards” or “doing a reading”. There are typically two styles of readings, the first, often classed as fortune telling, is to get a general impression of the future. The second is to get an answer to a specific question, this is usually known as divination. A reading can be anything as simple as selecting a single card from the deck to get a quick

general impression of the up-coming day, selecting three cards for a “past, present, future” generalization, or to laying out almost every card in the deck in some very complicated patterns for detailed analysis.



Figure 28

♦ My personal favourite layout is the “Celtic Cross”, sometimes called the Cross and Staff, or as Eden calls it, the “Ancient Keltic Method”, which is ideal for doing a divination style reading. The exact process has a few minor variations depending on the reader, here is it’s general form. It uses a card representing the person asking the question, also known as the Querent, which is usually a court card from the Minor Arcana representative of the physical attributes of the person. This card is placed in the center of the pattern, with ten additional cards covering or surrounding it. The process starts with the querent shuffling the Tarot deck while concentrating on the question being asked. Some readers feel that the question should not be made know to the Reader until after the reading is finished so as to not influence the interpretation of the cards by mundane knowledge of the situation in question. Once the Querent feels that the cards are in the correct order the deck is passed back to the Reader who will then start by placing the top ten cards into their assigned positions. Some readers like to place all of the cards face-up in order to get an overall impression before starting the reading, while others like to leave the cards face-down as they are dealt and only turn them over when needed to add an air of suspense to the reading.

Each card is placed in a very specific position which represents a certain aspect of the answer. As mentioned earlier, the card signifying the querent is placed at the center, then the other cards placed on or around it in this order:

1. ***This Covers Him*** – literally, it is placed directly on top of the Querent's card. *“The first card, in the center, represents the general atmosphere that surrounds the question asked and the influences at work around it.”*

2. ***This Crosses Him*** – and is placed crosswise on top of the Querent's card and the first card. *"It is always read right side up, and shows what the opposing forces may be for good or evil."*
3. ***This is Beneath Him*** – it is placed below the center pile of cards. *"the basis of the matter – something that has already become part of the subject's experience in the past."*
4. ***This is Behind Him*** – it is placed to the left of the central pile. *"This shows the influence that is just passing away."*
5. ***This Crowns Him*** – this card is placed above the center. *"Represents something that may happen in the future."*
6. ***This is Before Him*** – card 6 is placed to the right of center and completes the cross figure. *"Things that will come to pass in the near future – e.g., a meeting, an offer, a person, an influence."*
7. ***What the Querent Fears*** – this card starts a new pattern, the base of the staff. It is placed in the bottom right, at the level of card 3 and farther to the right than card 6. *"The negative feelings he has about the question asked."*
8. ***Family Opinion*** – it is placed above card 7. *"Represents Querent's environment, the opinions and influence of family and friends on the matter."*
9. ***Hopes*** – this continues building the staff and is placed above card 8. *"Represents the Querent's own hopes and ideals in the matter."*
10. ***Final Outcome*** – this completes the staff and is placed above card 9. *"This tenth and last card tells what the final outcome will be. It should include all that has been divined from the other cards on the table."*

If the last card seems inconclusive in its meaning then it can be used in place of the Querent's card and a second reading done to gain further insight to answer the question asked.

Tarot reading can be a funny business, sometimes the Cards want to tell the Querent something he/she needs to hear but has nothing to do with the question asked. That is another reason for the Reader to not know the question before hand – let the intended message come through without trying to force it into a preconceived direction.

A SAMPLE READING



Figure 29

♦ Here is the sample reading given by Eden Gray in his book “*A Complete Guide to the Tarot*”, it is based upon the Ancient Keltic Method as described above. This was an actual reading given for a young lady named Jane, who had twice gotten into trouble with the law, but was now past those activities. Because of her age and colouration, she chose the Page of Cups to represent herself. Her silent question was “*What will happen to me in the next 6 months?*” After shuffling the cards

“The first ten cards in the deck had been laid out, following the diagram, into the design of a cross and a staff. The first thing I did was to check whether there was a preponderance of Major Arcana or of any one particular suit. The cards were exceptionally evenly divided – two Wands, two Swords, two Cups, two Pentacles, and two of the Major Arcana. I carefully studied each card and tried to relate it to the meaning of its location on the board.



Figure 30

♦ **Position 1:** The Ten of Swords covered the Querent’s card. This position indicates the atmosphere that surrounds the question. The meaning of the Ten of Swords here is ruin, pain, affliction, tears. This meaning certainly was true for the past, for Jane had been expelled from boarding school and later had been arrested while in college. She, as well as her family, had experienced pain and tears during these trying times.



Figure 31

♦ **Position 2:** This is the card of the force opposing No. 1. Though this card is placed crosswise, it is always read as if it were right side up. In this instance, the card was the Ace of Cups. Aces always mean beginnings, and Cups would mean the beginnings of love and abundance.



Figure 32

♦ **Position 3:** Something that has already become part of Jane's experience. In this position was the Three of Pentacles, the card of the master craftsman. Jane was an excellent art student and at one time showed great promise as a painter.



Figure 33

♦ **Position 4:** Here is the influence just passing away. The Knight of Swords was in this position, and it has many meanings. It can indicate an impetuous young man, but after consideration I chose the meanings of conflict and destruction, which in this position, would indicate that they were going out of her life.



Figure 34

♦ **Position 5:** This position shows the influence that may come into Jane's life in the future. Here was The Fool, a truly wonderful card, opening up all sorts of possibilities. Remembering the influence of the Ace of Cups, I felt that the choice The Fool indicated was whether to accept the new beginning or reject it.



Figure 35

♦ **Position 6:** Shows the influence that will operate in the future. Here was the Two of Cups, also a card of new beginnings, perhaps a love affair, and surely a deep friendship with someone who would bring harmony into Jane's life.



Figure 36

♦ **Position 7 (the lowest card shown on the staff):** This is the position of the Querent's fears. Here was the Ace of Wands, the beginning of an enterprise, or creation. At first this seemed contradictory, but perhaps Jane was afraid that if

she attempted a creative enterprise she would fail. She might be timid about trying again and failing.



Figure 37

♦ **Position 8:** This position indicates what others think of the Querent in relation to the question asked – in this case, Jane's family and friends. Justice, reversed, meaning legal complications and excessive severity, was in Position 8. Certainly lawyers had been required to keep Jane out of jail, and she was still on probation at the time of the reading, she may have felt there was excessive severity in the restrictions imposed upon her.



Figure 38

♦ **Position 9:** This position tells us about the Querent's hopes. The card here was the Five of Pentacles, and I interpreted it to mean that in spite of good prognostications for her future, Jane did not dare to put too much hope in them and still looked upon the next few months as a time of loneliness and material trouble.



Figure 39

♦ **Position 10:** This is the final outcome – to which all the other cards have been leading. And here was the Nine of Wands, reversed, indicating obstacles and delay. These might possibly be the result of her negative attitude concerning her immediate future. The good cards in the layout were extremely good: two Aces showing new beginnings possible, a companion or sweetheart to plan and share with, and The Fool – a card of infinite possibilities.

My suggestions to Jane were to concentrate on the good aspects of the layout and to have more confidence in the good breaks that were coming her way. I advised her to be guided by the Fool, who cautions against unwise choices.

It can be seen that the interpretation of each card depends upon four factors:

- The meanings associated with the card itself.
- The position of the card within the layout.
- The other cards in the reading.
- The intuition and capabilities of the Reader.

THE MASONIC TAROT



Figure 40

♦ So far I have been focusing on the Rider-Waite deck because it is a very common deck, easy to get hold of, easy to find reference books and materials for, and easy to learn to read. Here is a much less common deck, but one with a direct connection to our Craft, the Masonic Tarot. It was created between 2010 and 2014 by Chilean artist and researcher Patricio Diaz Silva. Here is a short quote from it's accompanying information booklet:

“Based on his studies of Masonic symbolism and taking as models the arcana of the tarot, he imagined a synthesis to show the integration and interaction between the two systems of self-knowledge. The structure of the tarot organizes the deck in 22 Major Arcana cards and 56 Minor Arcana cards and is based on the four elements of alchemy: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air.

EARTH. *Represented by the mallet. A tool with which the Masons symbolize work on stone, which is the hard layer of the earth.*

WATER. *Represented by the chalice. It is the container of blood or wine and represents the world of emotions.*

FIRE. *Represented by gold. This metal reaches its beauty and purification by the action of fire.*

AIR. *Represented by the sword. It symbolizes thoughts and ideas.”*

Time does not allow a detailed analysis of all the cards in this special deck, but we will have a look at several of them, comparing and contrasting them to their Rider-Waite equivalents. The Masonic symbology in this deck should be easily apparent.



Figure 41

♦ **No. 1, The Magician** – *“The Magician appears in a dark suit and a top hat with the symbol of infinity. His clothing is that of a Master Mason: apron, collar, and cuffs. He stands in front of a table covered with a purple cloth – the colour of transmutation. On this, there is the mallet, the sword, and a cubical stone that symbolizes the perfection to which every Mason aspires. The product of their work is represented by the cornucopia filled with gold coins. He is running a spell to transfer the energy of ether to his compass and his other hand is attempting to magnetize the liquid in the chalice. The compass touches some branches of acacia, symbolizing immortality, wisdom, and the Earth element. On a wall there is a bottle containing a liquid as a symbol of the blood of the alchemists. The yellow background of the picture makes reference to gold and the sunset. Behind the figure is a ball of light with which the concept is symbolized to all. Above is the bright Sacred Delta with the all-seeing eye. Below is a garden with plants and flowers, including a four-leaf clover. The framework is composed of the two columns of the Masonic Lodge, marked with the letters B and J and supporting an arch showing the sun, moon, and stars, representing the cycles of time, day and night, the passage of hours.”*

When looking at The Magician from the Rider-Waite deck you can see many similarities; the infinity symbol above the head, implements on the table in front of him, he seems to be in the midst of casting a spell, plants and flowers, and the yellow background, to name a few. A few of the obvious differences are the Magician’s attire, the actual implements on the table, the left versus the right hand raised, the two pillars and the sun and the moon.

Here is a more detailed look at a couple of other cards from the Major Arcana. The next one is drawn with much greater differences from its equivalent in the Rider-Waite deck but is in turn much more Masonic.



Figure 42

♦ **No. 13, Death** – *“In the center we see a red fire niche containing a black coffin within which is a human skull. About this coffin fall acacia leaves. Above the window is the Sacred Delta – the place where the teacher hid the secrets of his sacred science. The grave is in the middle of a stone wall half-built and flanked by two columns. At the top of the hill, visible in the background, is the sprig of acacia. The night sky shows a star and moon. The card’s frame shows the chain, symbol of the fraternal union that represents the unity of all the brothers. When a Mason dies, he is said to have broken that iron chain; in one of the details at the bottom of the card, the cut link can be perceived.”*

You can easily see the connection with the Third Degree in this card. The Rider-Waite deck shows Death riding a pale horse, before whom all, king, pope, and commoner, must fall. In the background you can see the sun rising behind the two towers symbolizing the continuous cycle of death and renewal. Even though the imagery here is radically different between the two decks, the meaning of the two cards is similar; death, possibly physical (more so for the Masonic Tarot), but more likely the end, or completion of a cycle, moving on, leaving the past behind.



Figure 43

♦ **No. 19, The Sun** – *“In this card, we see a couple of young apprentices wearing the same white costume used for the initiation ceremony and the white apron. Their feet are shod with sandals. The two workers labor at the task of breaking rocks and use the most basic tools for that Masonic age. One holds the 24-inch gauge and the plummet, while the other holds the mallet. Below, along with some rocks, the chisel used to shape stone can be seen.”*

The environment shows a construction in its infancy. On the floor is installed the mosaic pavement and at the left stands a clean fluted column. Behind, a wall is being built. In the background is a river and beyond that a fertile field that extends to the snowy mountains.

In the sky a great astrological sun, citing the Tarot de Marseille, stands out, and along with its rays are projected twelve drops of gold on the young ones, for each month of the year and representing the blessings of heaven. Fortune is spilling over the brotherly couple.”

As can be seen in the Rider-Waite rendition, both cards emphasize youth and the blessings of heaven. They also share a radiant sun and a stone wall. While Waite’s deck uses control of the horse to imply mastery over energy and nature, the Masonic deck uses the shaping of stone for the same effect. The Masonic imagery in Silva’s Masonic deck are obvious and plentiful.



Figure 44

♦ Even though the Major Arcana of both decks are beautifully illustrated, the “pip” cards of the Minor Arcana in the Masonic Tarot, like most other decks, are not given unique images which symbolize their meanings. That is a special feature of the Rider-Waite Tarot, and a few other decks, that make interpreting their meaning during a reading much easier. This becomes very evident when we look at the meanings for these four cards:

3 of Cups – Success, abundance, good luck, victory, happy outcome of an undertaking.

5 of Cups – Disappointment, sorrow, disillusionment, loss of friendship, vain regret.

7 of Cups – Dreams, castles in the sky, illusionary success, deception.

9 of Cups – Material success, satisfaction, the good things in life, wish granted.

The booklet accompanying the Masonic Tarot deck also includes three suggested layouts for doing readings.



Figure 45

1. ♦ **The Apprentice Mason:** This uses three cards. The Querent shuffles the deck while concentrating on his question. He then divides it into three piles, the Reader then collects the three piles in such a way that the third pile ends up on top. The top three cards are then laid out beside each other as shown and read as follows:

1. The current state surrounding the situation.
2. Factors for or against the situation.
3. The most likely outcome if present circumstances remain unchanged.



Figure 46

2. ♦ **The Fellow Mason:** This uses five cards. The Querent shuffles the cards while concentrating on his question. He then cuts the deck into five piles and places the top card from each pile on the table in the pattern shown. Their meanings are given as follows:

1. **West: Portal of Lost Steps** – Represents the dark and profane world. It shows unfavourable elements contrary to a desirable outcome.
2. **North: Apprentice** – Representing innocence. It reflects the Querent and his question.
3. **South: Fellow** – Representing the value of fellowship. It shows the positive factors working towards a successful resolution to the question.
4. **East: Master** – Represents light and judgment. Shows the most likely outcome if the current path is followed.
5. **Center: Altar** – Representing the Council. It shows the way forward, the path to success in this matter.



Figure 47

3. ♦ **The Master Mason:** This uses seven cards. The Querent shuffles the deck while concentrating on his question and then returns it to the Reader who separates it into seven piles. These piles are brought together from left to right so that the last pile is on top. The Querent now draws seven cards from the deck and lays them out as shown.

1. **Card of the Initiate** – Represents the Querent and his question.

2. **Card from the Junior Warden** – Shows the energies and factors that are favourable for solving the problem.
3. **Card from the Senior Warden** – Representing the dark forces working against a satisfactory outcome.
4. **Card from the Speaker** – Gives advice that should be followed for a successful outcome.
5. **Card from the Secretary** – Represents the most recent factors affecting the Querent and the question.
6. **Card from the Worshipful Master** – It delivers judgment or answer to the Querent's question.
7. **Card from the Altar** – It reflects the energy in the environment.



Figure 48

♦ The next two slides show the 22 cards of the Major Arcana from this deck to highlight the beautiful artwork and Masonic symbolism included in this deck. I'll pause at this point to let you have a look at these cards and open the floor for some discussion on what you think about this Masonic deck. Please keep your discussion restricted to this deck for now, there will be a general discussion at the end, which isn't too far away. ♦



Figure 49

THE MASONIC CONNECTION

- Both Manly P. Hall and Arthur Edward Waite, from whose books I have been quoting, are prolific writers on esoteric and Freemasonry, and both are known Freemasons.
- Symbolism is used to convey esoteric messages so as to be hidden from the profane even though they are in plain sight.
- There is symbolism used in the Tarot cards that is the same and share the same meanings as that used by Freemasons.
- The concept of using a card, or board, with symbols as a teaching tool is the same as the tracing boards we use for the Explanatories of our three degrees.

- By studying the cards regularly they can be used as guides for improving ourselves through a better understanding of our own nature and subduing our discordant passions.
- There is a Tarot Deck specifically designed for Freemasons, called the Masonic Tarot, created by Chilean artist and researcher Patricio Diaz Silva. The symbols used are explicitly Masonic and the meanings of each card are fine tuned to have Masonic references.



THE READER

♦ Here may be the real meat of this subject – who, or what, makes a good Tarot reader? I am deliberately leaving this open-ended as I feel this can best be handled in an open discussion rather than in lecture format.

This is the end of my formal presentation and I would now like to open the floor for general discussion about the Tarot, and particularly about being a Reader of Tarot cards. Thank you for bearing with me to this point and I look forward to some lively discussion.

Bro. Hans Erdmann

Templum Phoenix No.57

December 14, 2020 (Zoom meeting)

My major reference sources:

- Albert Mackey – *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*
- Manly P. Hall – *An Analysis of the Tarot Cards*
- Papus (Dr. Gerard Encausse) – *Tarot of the Bohemians*
- Author Edward Waite – *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*
- Eden Gray – *A Complete Guide to the Tarot*
- Patricio Diaz Silva – *Masonic Tarot* (cards and booklet)