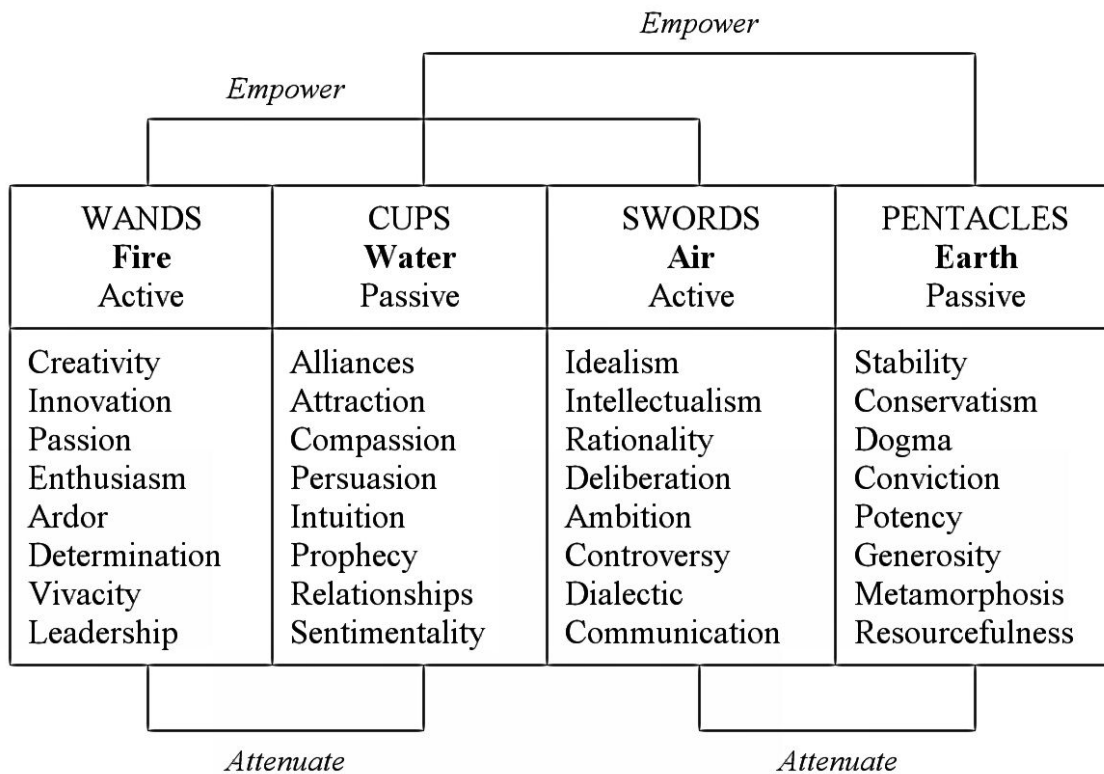


ELEMENTAL DIGNITIES IN TAROT

Applying elemental dignities analysis to a tarot reading helps identify the precise points of imbalances in a Seeker’s life or situation. The various energies and traits of a person (or even a situation) per Western theosophy can be categorized as Fire, Water, Air, or Earth in essence. For harmony in one’s life, there should be a balance of the four elements within. When two elements seem to vie for dominance and those elements are also in opposition, there will be flux, uncertainties, a sense of instability and insecurity. When active elements dominate, there may be a lack of peace, and instead, too much competition, battling, conflict, and strife. When passive elements dominate, there may be little progress, feeling overwhelmed, and controlled rather than in control. **Interpreting a tarot reading by the card meanings help the Seeker understand what is going on; interpreting elemental dignities enhances that understanding by explaining why.**



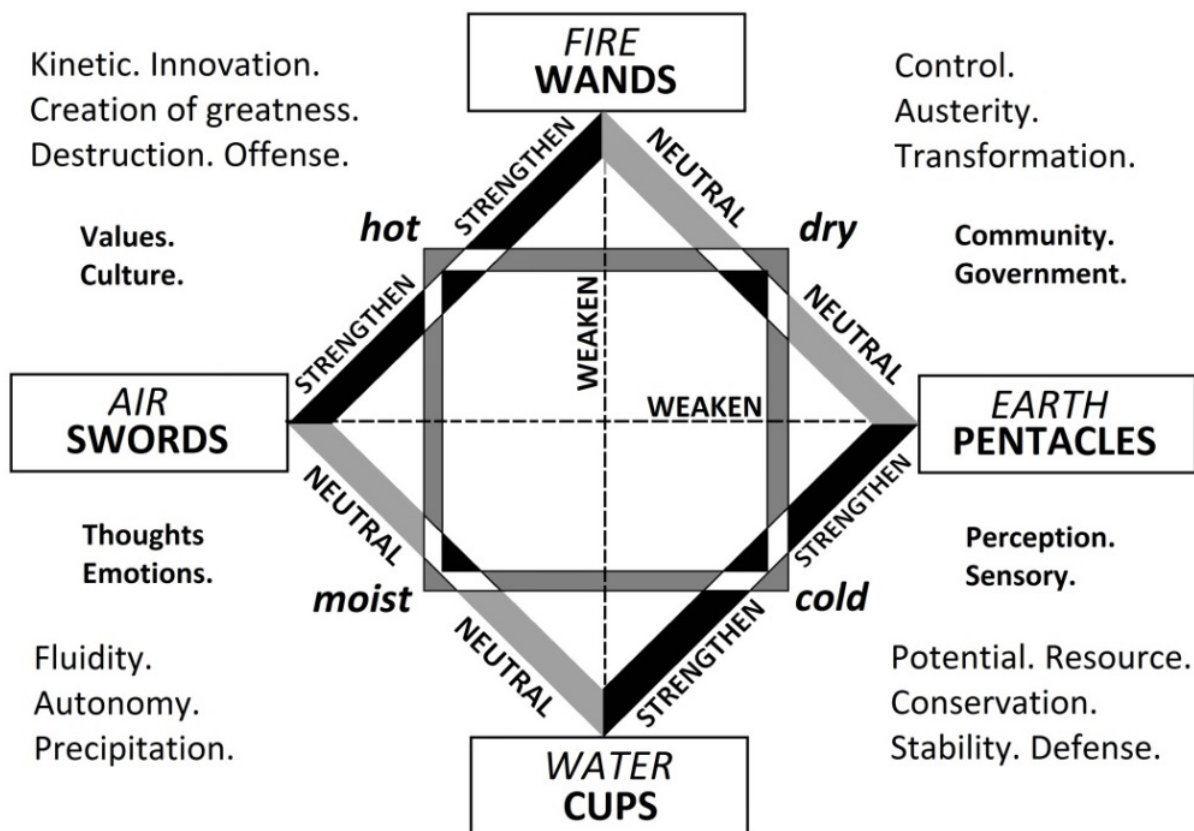
Dignity as used in this context is defined as external manifestation of the card’s innate properties. It is the state of being activated with the full potential of its essence.

An **Elemental Dignity** describes that state with more specificity—it is the external manifestation of a tarot card’s innate elemental essence, given that each card is governed innately by one of the four elements, Fire, Water, Air, or Earth, and thus has the potential of fully embodying the traits associated with that element. (Note however that the card’s energies would further be modified by the numerological correspondence and other factors.)

When a card from the suit of Wands is said to be **dignified**, it means it is fully charged and activated with the energies of its corresponding element. A dignified Ace of Wands is the Ace of Wands appearing upright in a tarot spread during a reading (as opposed to its non-activated state in the deck on a table, not in use). When the Ace of Wands appears upright in a tarot reading, it is charged and activated with all the corresponding energies and traits we associate with the Ace of Wands. Thus, it is dignified.

If, say, that Ace of Wands appears in reverse in a tarot spread during a reading (assuming reversals are read), then the reversal itself has changed the energies of that card in some way. The energy of the reversal is interacting in a particular way with the general energy of the Ace of Wands. That reversal is said to (1) weaken the essential state of the Ace of Wands, (2) invert the essential state, (3) negate the essential state, or (4) delay the manifestation of the essential state (the WIND mnemonic from Chapter 15). Which of the four possibilities applies will of course depend on the reading itself, on a case by case basis. As a result of that adjustment, the card is now said to be **ill-dignified**.

Now, back to understanding each card's elemental essence—



In the Minor Arcana, the suit of Wands is governed by Fire; Cups by Water; Swords by Air; and Pentacles by Earth. In the above diagram, the elements “facing off” (e.g., Swords vs. Pentacles, Wands vs. Cups) tend to weaken one another’s dignities when they appear in juxtaposition in a reading. The solid black diagonal bars illustrated in the diagram connecting Wands to Swords and Cups to Pentacles indicate elements that strengthen one another’s dignities when they appear in juxtaposition.

Also, the preceding diagram offers some general insights on the energies that manifest when two elements combine. When Swords and Cups meet in co-dominance, for example, the Seeker may be a free-thinking, free-spirited, progressive individual, likely a poet, writer, or philosopher. When Wands and Pentacles meet, there is thriving activity in the community, government, institutional work.

The Major Arcana cards also each have an elemental essence.

FIRE	WATER	AIR	EARTH
The Emperor Strength Wheel of Fortune Temperance The Tower The Sun	The High Priestess The Chariot The Hanged Man Death The Moon Judgement*	The Fool The Lovers Justice The Star	The Magician The Empress The Hierophant The Hermit The Devil The World

* Note that there is a sharp divide in opinion as to the elemental essence of Judgement. The rationale and source of traditions for both opinions is provided in detail in *Holistic Tarot*. For the purpose of this supplement, suffice it to say that one strong opinion is that Judgement is governed by Fire; another, which is the approach subscribed to by the author, is that it is governed by Water.

Analyzing elemental dignities in a tarot reading means that the practitioner will compare the elemental essences of two juxtaposed cards in a spread to determine whether, together, the cards provide a dignified or ill-dignified energy. Dignified energy means the two cards, due to their interaction, strengthen one another’s essences. Ill-dignified energy means the two cards, due to their interaction, weaken one another’s essences or modify the way that essence manifests in that particular Seeker’s situation.



■ ■ ■

The subsequent pages provide examples and explanations.

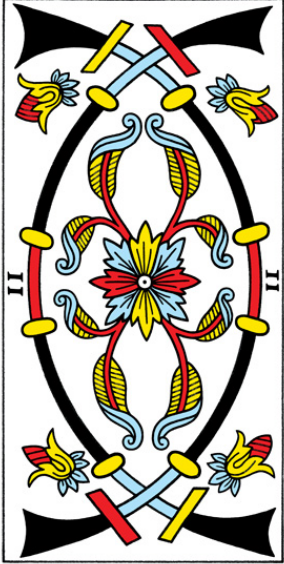
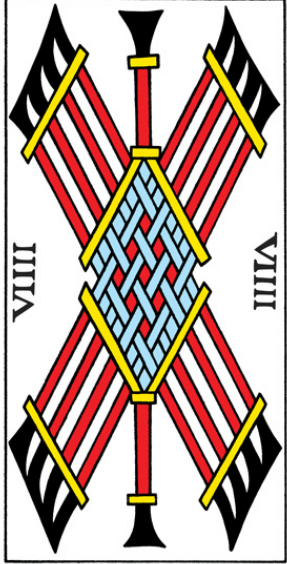
Credit: The following tarot card images are the product of the wonderful work of Dr. Yoav Ben-Dov and his Marseille-based tarot deck, the CBD Tarot de Marseille. Please visit www.cbdtarot.com for more information about Ben-Doav, the CBD Tarot de Marseille, and his book, *Tarot: The Open Reading* (CreateSpace, 2013).

Elemental Dignities: Examples & Explanations

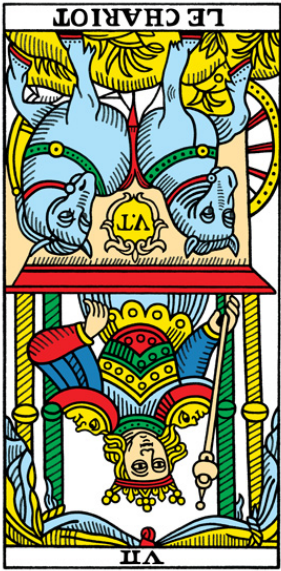
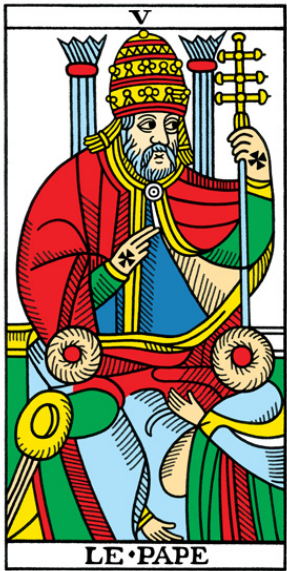
In the following five examples, only the elemental dignities analysis is given. How the cards would be interpreted in an in-depth reading is not provided. The primary purpose of the examples is to show how to identify the elemental dignities.

<p>Example 1</p>		
<p><i>Card Description</i></p>	<p>The Lovers</p>	<p>9 of Pentacles</p>
<p><i>Elemental Essence</i></p>	<p>Air</p>	<p>Earth</p>
<p><i>Innate Dignity</i></p>	<p>Dignified (<i>i.e., upright</i>)</p>	<p>Dignified (<i>i.e., upright</i>)</p>
<p><i>Interactive Dignity</i></p>	<p>Ill-Dignified (<i>i.e., Air and Earth weaken one another</i>)</p>	
<p><i>Elemental Dignities Analysis</i></p>	<p>When Air and Earth face off, they tend to weaken one another and thus the manifestation of the cards in a tarot reading will be ill-dignified, or changed. Here, the interpreted meaning of The Lovers card is going to be attenuated by the meaning of the 9 of Pentacles. However, note that the Air card is a Major while the Earth is a Minor. Majors tend to vibrate with stronger external forces than Minors, so in this case, what The Lovers card bodes will likely prevail over the challenge of the 9 of Pentacles.</p>	

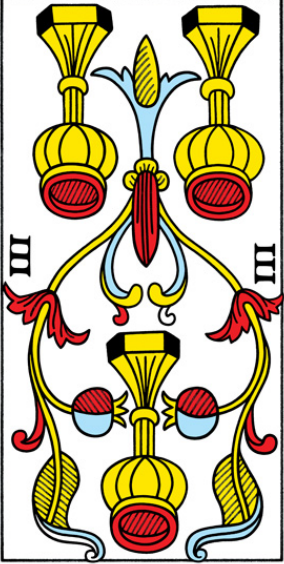

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<p>Example 2</p>		
<p><i>Card Description</i></p>	<p>2 of Swords</p>	<p>9 of Wands</p>
<p><i>Elemental Essence</i></p>	<p>Air</p>	<p>Fire</p>
<p><i>Innate Dignity</i></p>	<p>Dignified (<i>i.e., upright</i>)</p>	<p>Dignified (<i>i.e., upright</i>)</p>
<p><i>Interactive Dignity</i></p>	<p>Dignified (<i>i.e., Air and Fire strengthen one another</i>)</p>	
<p><i>Elemental Dignities Analysis</i></p>	<p>When Air and Fire meet, they empower one another and push higher the manifestation of one another's elemental essence. In this particular example, however, both cards tend to be more defensive. The Two of Swords indicates an intellectual choice, the weighing between two equal burdens in the Seeker's thought plane. The Nine of Wands suggests resistance, feeling overprotective of one's territory, yet lacking the motivation to expand further beyond one's present territory. The elemental dignities here suggest a Seeker heavily weighed down by inertia. Thus, in this particular example, while the elemental essences of the two cards dignify one another, that dignity results in further aggravation and aggression in the matter at hand.</p>	

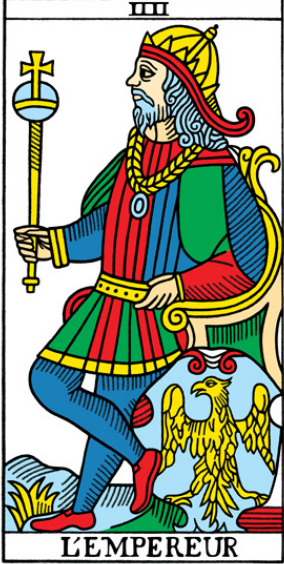
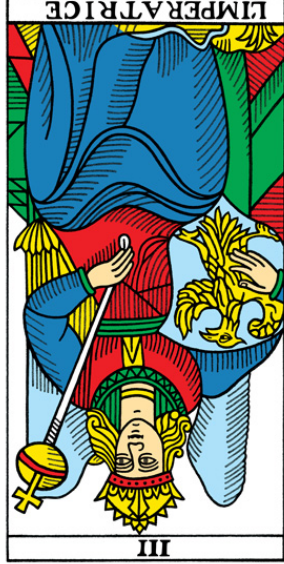
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<p>Example 3</p>		
<p><i>Card Description</i></p>	<p>The Chariot, Reversed</p>	<p>The Hierophant (Pope)</p>
<p><i>Elemental Essence</i></p>	<p>Water</p>	<p>Earth</p>
<p><i>Innate Dignity</i></p>	<p>Ill-Dignified (<i>i.e., reversal</i>)</p>	<p>Dignified (<i>i.e., upright</i>)</p>
<p><i>Interactive Dignity</i></p>	<p>Dignified (<i>i.e., Water and Earth strengthen one another</i>)</p>	
<p><i>Elemental Dignities Analysis</i></p>	<p>First to be noted to the Seeker is the strength of the reading from two juxtaposed Majors. Although The Chariot appears in reverse, rendering its innate dignity ill-dignified (the interpretation of the card should change slightly from what it would be otherwise upright), its interactive dignity with The Hierophant is dignified because Water and Earth strengthen one another. Thus, any weaknesses in The Chariot energy caused by it being ill-dignified from the reversal will be strengthened, supported, and supplemented by the energy of The Hierophant. The Hierophant assists The Chariot, reversed, and so it is more likely than not that the meaning of The Chariot upright, or dignified, will apply to the Seeker's future because of The Hierophant's support.</p>	

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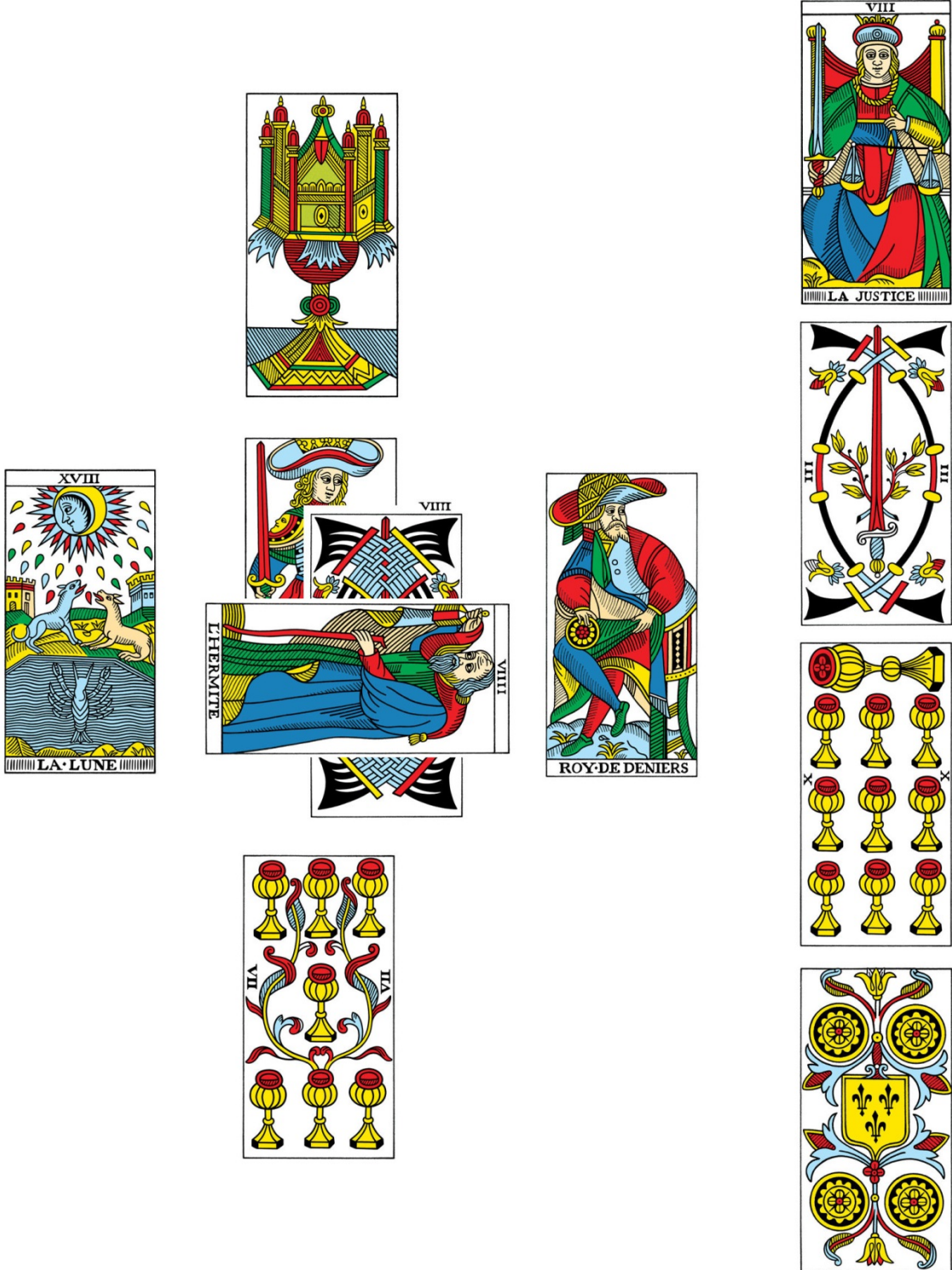
<p>Example 4</p>		
<p><i>Card Description</i></p>	<p>3 of Cups, Reversed</p>	<p>Ace of Wands, Reversed</p>
<p><i>Elemental Essence</i></p>	<p>Water</p>	<p>Fire</p>
<p><i>Innate Dignity</i></p>	<p>Ill-Dignified (<i>i.e., reversal</i>)</p>	<p>Ill-Dignified (<i>i.e., reversal</i>)</p>
<p><i>Interactive Dignity</i></p>	<p>Ill-Dignified (<i>i.e., Water and Fire weaken one another</i>)</p>	
<p><i>Elemental Dignities Analysis</i></p>	<p>Both cards appear in reverse, causing both cards to be ill-dignified. The meaning of the 3 of Cups will be modified, specifically weakened, inverted, negated, or delayed. Same with the Ace of Wands. The double reversals suggest a great deal of uncertainty ahead, but on the positive side, the interactive dignity weakens one another's ill-dignified energies, potentially with the future result of a positive outcome. Due to the fundamental weakening energies, by dumb luck both cards could likely become dignified for the Seeker at some future time. Had both cards been upright, or dignified, with the ill-dignified interactive energy (of Water and Fire in opposition), then it could suggest that the two are in conflict and will cause tension in the Seeker's situation. Since both cards are in reverse, or ill-dignified, the ill-dignified interactive energy of the ill-dignified cards could very well result in a desirable ending.</p>	

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<p>Example 5</p>		
<p><i>Card Description</i></p>	<p>The Emperor</p>	<p>The Empress, Reversed</p>
<p><i>Elemental Essence</i></p>	<p>Fire</p>	<p>Earth</p>
<p><i>Innate Dignity</i></p>	<p>Dignified (<i>i.e., upright</i>)</p>	<p>Ill-Dignified (<i>i.e., reversal</i>)</p>
<p><i>Interactive Dignity</i></p>	<p>Neutral Effect (<i>i.e., Fire and Earth are neutral together</i>)</p>	
<p><i>Elemental Dignities Analysis</i></p>	<p>When Fire and Earth meet, there is a neutral harmony. They neither strengthen nor weaken one another. They simply coexist. Here, The Emperor, the Fire energy, is dignified because he appears upright, while The Empress, the Earth energy, is ill-dignified because she appears in reverse. The reversal weakens the Earth energy somewhat, and so even though generally Fire and Earth are neutral, here in this specific example, the interpretive value of The Emperor will prevail over the interpretive value of The Empress, reversed, since her energy is going to be weakened, inverted, negated, or delayed by other forces, perhaps even by The Emperor himself. While the interactive dignity of the two cards is neutral, the meaning of The Emperor card as applied to the Seeker's inquiry will manifest itself more prominently in the Seeker's life than the meaning of The Empress card.</p>	

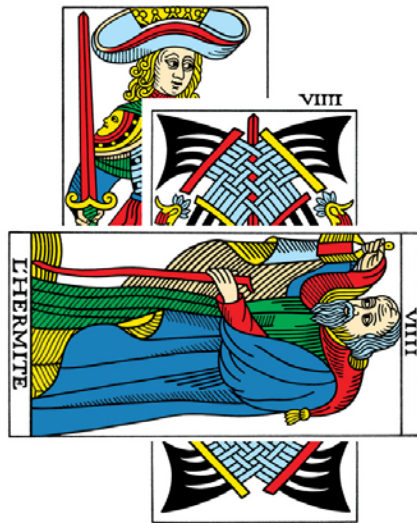
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Elemental Dignities Analysis in a Sample Celtic Cross

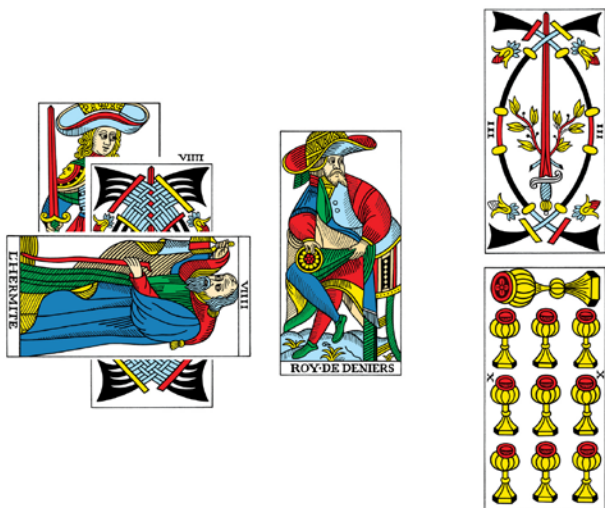


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Again, only the elemental dignities are analyzed here.



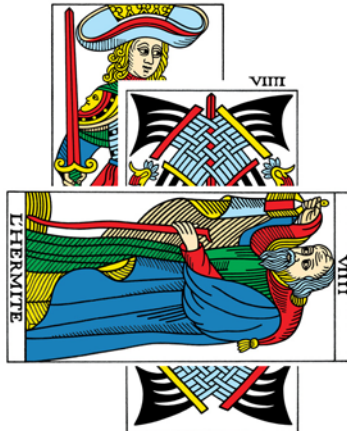
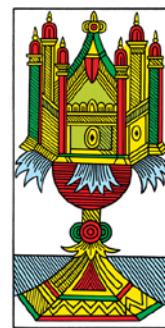
An obvious interactive elemental dignity to observe is the one between the crossed cards over the signifier card. Here, **The Hermit** crosses the **9 of Swords**, or Earth crosses and subdues or confronts the energy of Air. Air and Earth are in opposition and weaken one another. The Hermit's effect on the 9 of Swords is to cause the 9 of Swords to be ill-dignified. Thus, even though the 9 of Swords appears upright, the ill-dignified effect of Earth renders the meaning of the 9 of Swords weakened, inverted, negated, or delayed.



Note how both the signifier and the **King of Pentacles** from the spread seem to be looking directly at the **3 of Swords** and the **10 of Cups**. That directionality might lead a practitioner to consider analyzing the interactive elemental dignities of these pairings. The Air element of the King of Swords (the signifier) and the Earth of the King of Pentacles seem to be at a truce (when ordinarily they would be in opposition) due to the 2 of Swords, Air, and 10 of Cups, Water. Air and Water merge the thought plane and the emotional. The Seeker's present environment is favorable for success, but she nonetheless seems disabled by fear of failure. It's all in her mind, and not warranted based on tangible factors, because the elemental dignities here show neutrality. The two Kings facing these cards suggest the importance of the message to the Seeker.

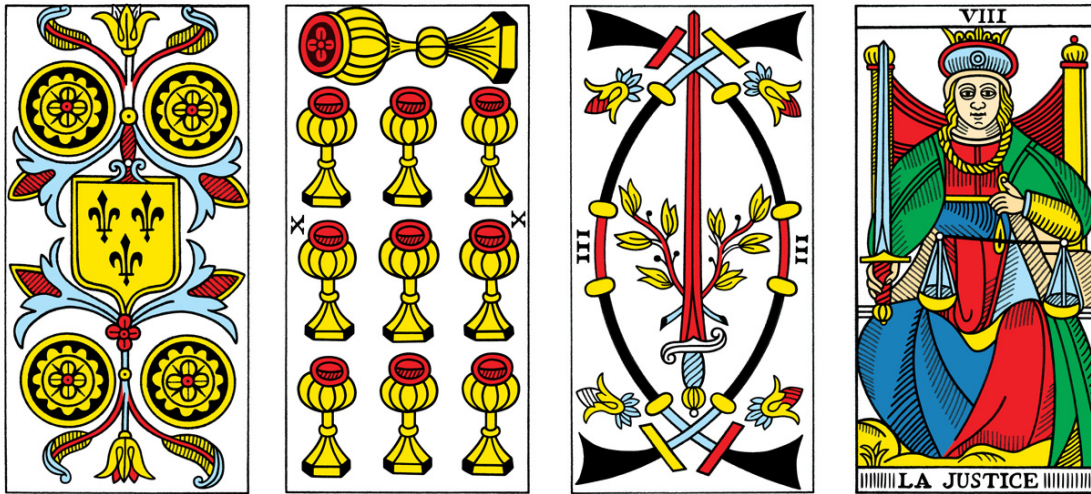


The cards in the linear chronology of past-present in the Cross also form an obvious pair. Here, the Water energy of **The Moon** and the Earth of the **King of Pentacles** suggests a passively-lived life, a person with imbalance between the external and internal spheres of the self. The interactive dignities here suggest a Seeker who has not lived up to her potential at all.



The Hermit faces and holds his lantern up toward the **Ace of Cups**, suggesting another pairing. Again, Earth and Water together suggests passivity, yielding to others, surrendering control to one's environment rather than taking control through willpower. Greater force, determination, and motivation are needed from this Seeker.

The vertical alignment of the **Ace of Cups** and the **7 of Cups** forms another pair to examine for interactive elemental dignities. Here, both are from the suit of Cups, indicating doubled or intensified Water energy. Seeker's love life, emotional plane, and interpersonal relationships form the spine of the matter at hand.



The four vertical cards of the Cross are also examined for interactive elemental dignities. Here, they are placed left to right, based on the order the cards were set down into the spread, for convenience. Air dominates among the four cards, again affirming the messages suggested earlier that this is a Seeker who exists primarily in the internal sphere, the thought plane specifically. The **Four of Pentacles** here does attenuate that Air dominance somewhat, though in this case, it may not arise to the level of causing an ill-dignified energy from the Air cards. Instead, the attenuation is indicating to the practitioner to take note of the meaning of the Four of Pentacles to the Seeker: it denotes a likely area of regression, delays in fruition, or obstacle to success.

■ ■ ■

Understanding elemental dignities is to understand the metaphysical chemistry of tarot. Each card is made up of a unique composition of properties and is activated when drawn into a tarot reading. Upright and surrounded by empowering elements, the activation is dignified. Reversed or surrounded by attenuating elements, the activation becomes ill-dignified, which does not necessarily mean negative, as the previous examples demonstrated. Simply put, the study of elemental dignities is the study of how the fundamental element in one card interacts with the elements of other cards.