

Tarot Card Meanings with Benebell

Part XIII: The Tens

Video Transcript: <https://youtu.be/8L3XjHupplc>



INTRODUCTION

The Ten of Wands in tarot carries the weight of responsibility, the burden of sovereignty, and the force of The Establishment is oppressive. Malefic Saturn stamps out the best and brightest of Sagittarius.

The Ten of Cups is a dream satisfied, and while for all intents and purposes, this is a positive omen for happiness and joy, it hints at becoming complacent. Things are good for you right now. You don't want to stir up the waters of trouble.

The Ten of Swords warns of what happens if you fight politics and ideologies with too much dogma or prejudice— it ruins all. Yet the glimmer of golden light in the distance portends a new world order to be built upon the ashes of the old.

The Ten of Pentacles, Ten of Disks in the Thoth, is about accumulated wealth and prosperity, which certainly sounds good enough, but there is a cautionary tale here: do not let your assets go inert, or else you will lose it.

Now let's begin our lecture on the tarot Tens in this installment of Tarot Card Meanings with Benebell, where you'll learn tarot card by card and contemporaneously master the Marseille, Rider-Waite-Smith, and Thoth all in one go. We'll also showcase cards from the SKT Revelation.

REVIEWING THE TREE OF LIFE & BA GUA TRIGRAMS

After this lecture, we will have touched point in all ten sephiroth on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, passing through Da'at, a concealed spiritual united state where Divine Light remains unseen by humans, even upon ascent, Divine Knowledge that remains unknowable to humans. These Paths of Light illuminated upon the descent is the supernal light of the Flaming Sword.

We've covered the dark and light, the feminine and masculine Pillars, the left hand Pillar of Severity and the right hand Pillar of Mercy.

We talked about the Middle Pillar, the integration and the balance between Severity and Mercy. Where we are now, Malkuth, is the base of that Middle Pillar.

The diagram of the Tree of Life with the Ba Gua Trigrams from the I Ching way over on the left shows Crowley's correspondences. Malkuth corresponds with the trigram Earth, and so per this system of correspondences, all Tens in the tarot pips of the Minor Arcana correspond with the trigram Earth.

In the SKT, the system of correspondences assigns one of the eight trigrams to every card tied to the card's elemental dignity.

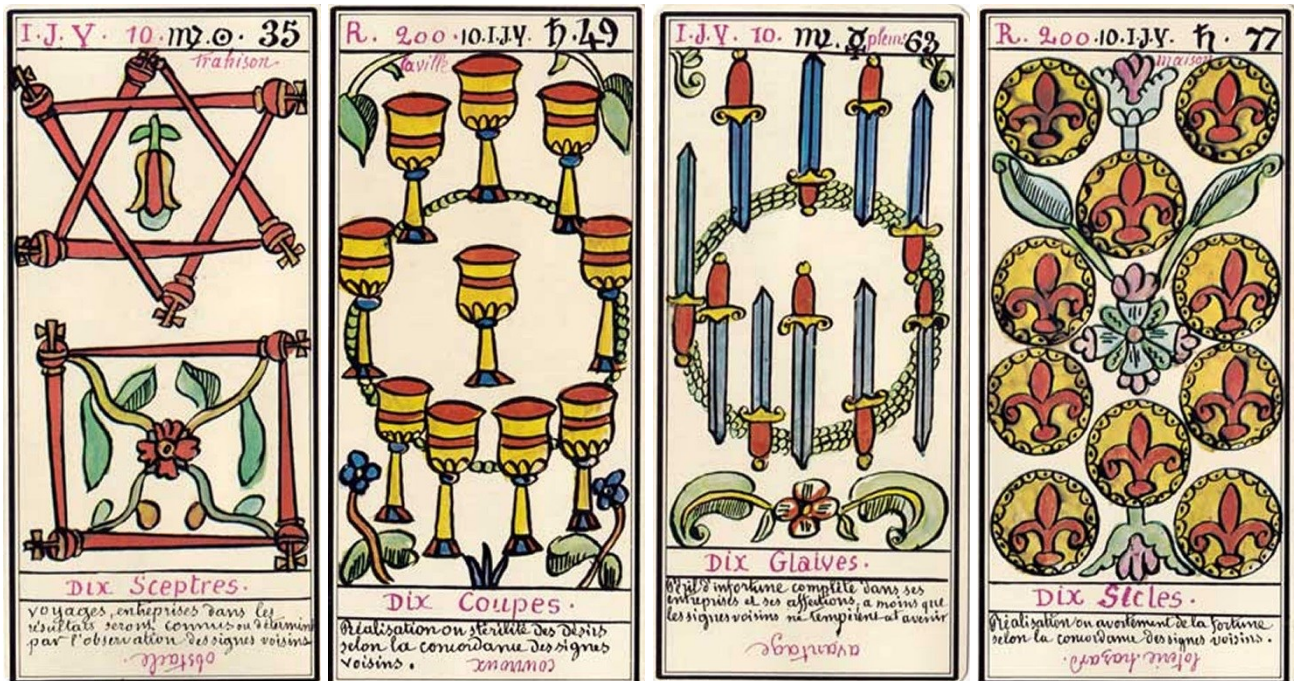
MALKUTH: KINGDOM (QUEENDOM)

Malkuth is the lowest sephiroth on the Tree of Life, where the four elements converge. It's commonly translated to Kingdom, though it's feminine plural, so perhaps it's better here to say Queendom. (Please forgive me for pronouncing it Mahl-koot from now on.)

Malkuth is the cosmos, which perhaps you can liken to the popular medieval engravings of the cosmos as spheres beyond earth at the center, because it's the Middle Ages. The Kingdom, or Queendom, is also associated with the Immanence of Shekinah, the dwelling and settling of the divine presence. When you study Torah, the Shekinah is present. When ten are gathered for prayer, there is Shekinah. In Gnostic doctrine, the Shekinah is a divine feminine emanation of the one True God.

Malkuth is the physical world we dwell upon, manifesting because we receive divine energy from above, the upper sephira Kether. Malkuth contains within it Kether, and Kether, the Crown, contains within it the potential of Malkuth.

Here is the actualized and definite form of all emanations from the sephiroth above. The Tens in tarot, therefore, are the materialized artistic and constructive expressions of divine inspiration, sharing this sephira with the tarot Pages, the messengers from the Divine, our Muses.



ON “MARSEILLE” DECKS: NARRATIVE vs. NON-NARRATIVE PIPS; RWS vs. THOTH

Let's address something that maybe we should have addressed right from the start. When we say Tarot de Marseille, what do we even mean? Well, in one sense, we're referring to the continental European tarot, a term coined by Christine Payne-Towler, and typically we're referring to an iteration of the tarot cards that feature non-narrative pips, or the numbered cards from the Minor Arcana.

But we're also still referring to the occult or esoteric tarot in some of the early French traditions. Like Le Grand Tarot Belline by Magus Edmond Billaudot, where you're not getting scenic illustrated pips like you would in the Rider-Waite-Smith, meaning Pamela Colman Smith's compositions tell a story. They heavily feature people, or convey human-like qualities. That's what we mean by “narrative pips.”

There was a bit of an evolution to the ordering of the Major Arcana or trump cards before we get to the order of Majors we're so familiar with today.

The tarot is first documented in Milan, among the aristocracy in the 1440s. Then enters France around the 1500s. Between 1570 and 1850, tarot achieves its greatest success outside of Italy, namely in Marseilles, France, but also in regions like Germany and Switzerland.

Around this time we have at least four different trump orders associated with the tarot pack. The earlier Bolognese order of the tarot pack consisted of 62 cards. The card called The Angel, which we now refer to as the Judgement card, was above The World card, so it's a different order from what we use today.

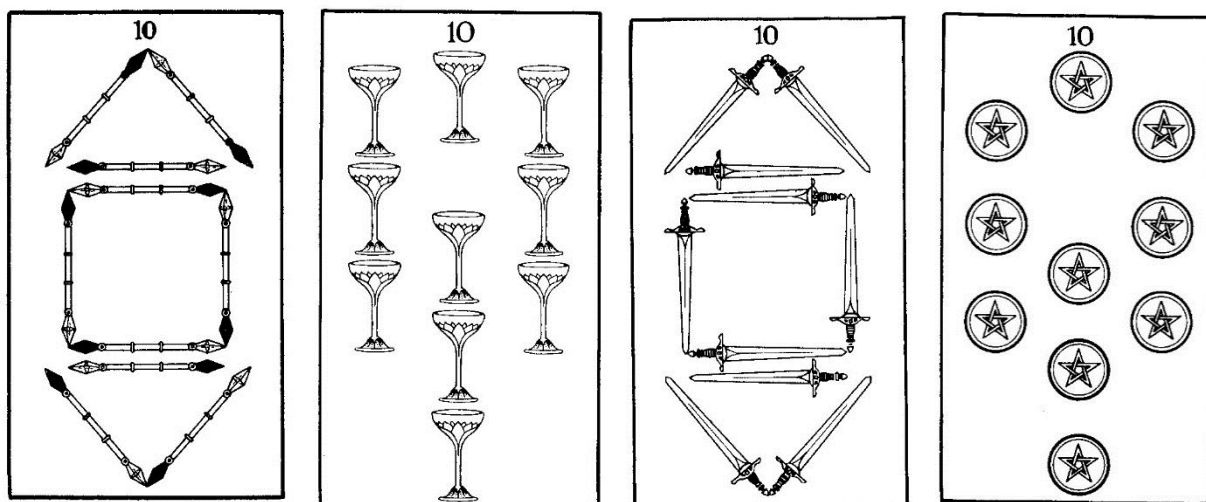
The Florentine tarot had different numbering for the Chariot, Lovers, and for the virtues. Virtues were also more prominently depicted. The Ferrarese tarot had different numbering for Justice, Temperance, and Strength. And the Lombardy order, the closest to the Marseille, now has the World card as the highest trump and The Angel card, which we now call Judgement, immediately below. We also see now Key 13 Death, 14 Temperance, and 15 Devil, bringing us to the Marseille order, which is what we're calling the Tarot de Marseille system. These descend from the Tarot of Jean Noblet, circa around 1650s, the Dodal tarot realized in Paris, France, and the Nicolas Conver, realized in Marseille. The version of the Marseille you're seeing throughout this course series is the Conver.

It isn't until the late 19th century and onward that you start to see occultism, freemasonry, and also a trending Egyptomania get infused into the tarot. Now we start to see the change from the Pope to the Hierophant and the Popess to the High Priestess.

So when we say Marseille, we're referring generally to the historical deck with the ordering inherited from the Noblet, Dodal, or Conver.

If you'd like a more in-depth examination of tarot history and its theories of origin, be sure to check out Video 9 from the Holistic Tarot learn tarot course series.

So in one over-simplified sense, when we say the Marseille system of tarot, we're referring almost generically, as an umbrella catch-all term, for tarot decks with non-narrative illustrated pips, where the Ten of Wands is just going to be ten wands, or scepters, in an ornamental arrangement, and the Ten of Cups is just ten cups floating around an abstract floral design.



Yet to confuse matters, you then have non-narrative illustrated pip cards in decks like the BOTA Tarot, Builders of the Adytum, from the school of Paul Foster Case, illustrations by Jessie Burns Parke, that were intended to be even more revealing of esoteric wisdom and occult knowledge than Waite's deck, to "remove the blinds" Waite had put on his.

The BOTA deck is essentially an RWS deck, where Key 8 is Strength and Key 11 is Justice.

We're getting a little ahead of ourselves here in the syllabus for the lecture series, but just for quick reference, in the Marseille you're going to find Justice as Key 8 and Strength or Fortitude as Key 11. Crowley and Harris kept with this arrangement and order for the Thoth as well, with the key titles renamed.

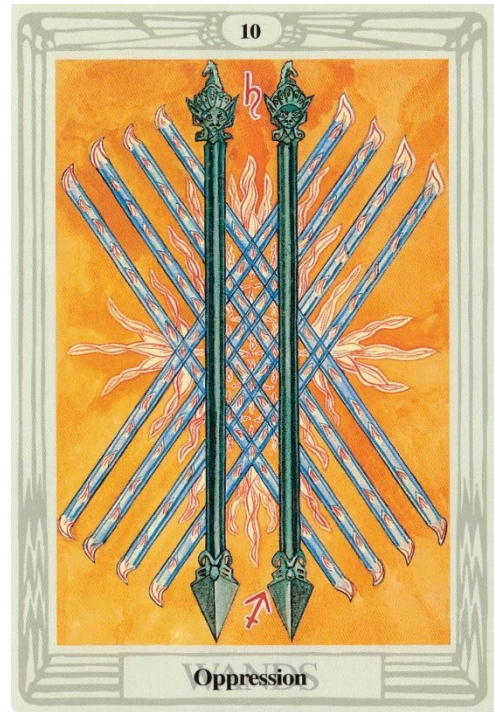
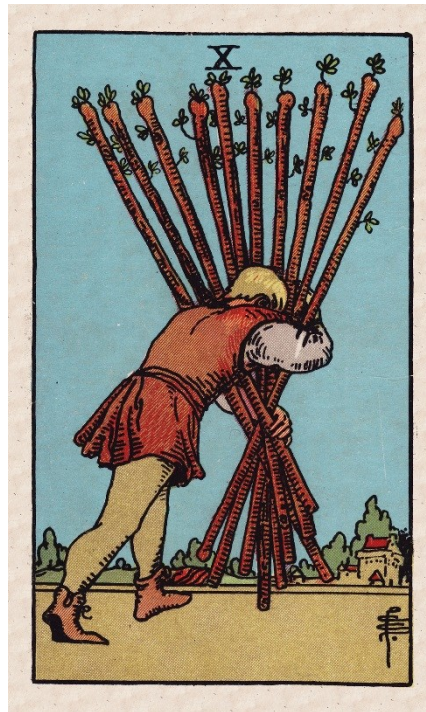
So which category, which pigeonhole box ought we put the BOTA Tarot in? Darned if I know. The point I hope to convey here is that these categorization systems are by design imperfect. Yet despite their imperfections, they can still be helpful.

Rider-Waite-Smith decks consist of this deck that you see on screen by Waite and Smith and all subsequent contemporary tarot decks based closely on this system, whether described as being RWS-based or as an RWS clone. Bar none the most popular system that contemporary decks are based on will be the RWS. On screen you're looking at an example of what in the deck publishing industry is referred to as a mass market RWS-based deck. When you want to work with the RWS system but the historical Waite and Smith deck first published by Rider doesn't appeal to you, then you're likely to get a deck like this.

A deck like what you now see on screen is independently published by the artist, which you'll hear referred to as an indie deck. This one is sold direct from the artist's studio, via Etsy. It's a really great beginner's deck, for those in their early stages of learning tarot. One of my favorite ways to study the tarot card by card is to pull out, for example, all four Tens from multiple tarot decks and study them while reading how various textbooks interpret the four Tens.

What I'm referring to as the Thoth system of tarot is going to be based on, well, Crowley and Harris's Thoth deck. The art style will likely be more abstract expressionist and Fauvist, featuring radical uses of color, and compositions that are deeply emotive.

A great contemporary Thoth deck that I recommend, if you don't want direct contact with Aleister Crowley's handiwork, is the Rosetta Tarot by Mel Meleen. Meleen is, without question, one of my absolute favorite tarot deck artists of all time.



TEN OF WANDS

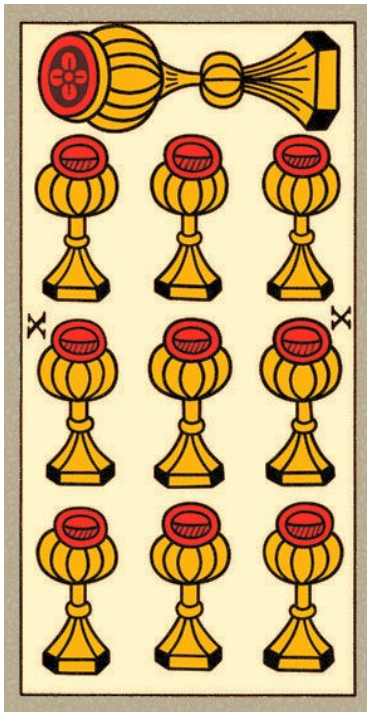
The historical Marseille interpretation for the Ten of Wands is that of success, confidence, honors bestowed, and good intentions. It indicates security. Nothing to worry about here.

But then, the Thoth Ten of Wands is the Lord of Oppression. That sounds very worrisome. Crowley describes this card as indicating excessive use of force. Malefic Saturn is bringing out the worst qualities of Sagittarius. This is the card of tyranny.

Waite also makes reference to oppression, describing that man as being oppressed by the weight of the ten staves. He's a middle ground between the two polarities, because he acknowledges both extreme ends of the card meaning for the Ten of Wands, saying this card can mean fortune and success, but it can also mean the oppression of these things. Maybe it's about doing your job too well, so well that you're given more work.

TEN OF CUPS

The Ten of Cups in the Marseille will indicate one's hometown, a homecoming, or being honored by your community. This is holding high esteem and good reputation in your family. But note that in reverse, the Ten of Cups is about strife, controversies, and arguments, emotional conflict. In general, upright the Ten of Cups is about being content. It portends a positive outcome and a sense of spiritual fulfillment.



In the Thoth, this card is about having fulfilled what one had most wanted to fulfill. However, Crowley implies an undertone of settling here. The Ten of Cups can also be the decision to settle. There's a fine line between contentment and settling.

In the RWS, pictured here, says Waite, is a husband and wife. The two dancing children seem happy, but they aren't witnessing the miracle of the rainbow that the parents are celebrating, and that's symbolic, implies Waite. In all, the Ten of Cups represents a state of perfection. In a reading, this card can also designate the querent's hometown.

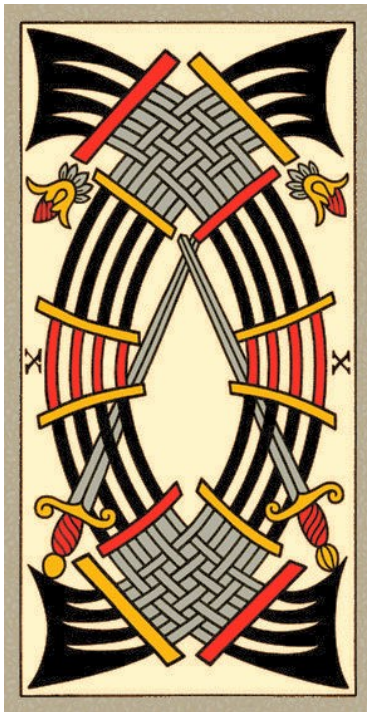
Reversed, this card means the opposite of what it is upright. Waite even goes so far as to say this card reversed portends violence. In the Marseille, the reversed Ten of Cups can predict a despot or tyrannical ruler.

TEN OF SWORDS

The Ten of Swords shows two well-armed, well-supported swords attacking each other, leaving both sides exhausted. This is a confrontation that is going to leave the querent feeling at a loss, exhausted and fatigued from the conflict. For those who read with reversals, there's some difference of opinion among texts on which way is upright and which way is reversed. I'll leave you to decide for yourself.

The Thoth Ten of Swords is the Lord of Ruin, bringing the geopolitical and military lesson that if you fight for too long, everything ends in destruction. So time is of the essence. You always need to strategize in a way that accounts for timing. Don't let anything go on for too long. The solar influence is the esoteric meaning here, whispering a secret of hope.

You see that solar influence in the horizon line of the RWS Ten of Swords, too. This is the card of affliction and sadness, but don't worry, says Waite, this isn't a card of violent death. Interestingly, reversed, the Ten of Swords is rather positive—portending profit, advantage over your adversary, and increase in power and authority.



Fun trivia. In a popular understanding of card meanings, we typically interpret the Ten of Swords as one of the worst cards in the deck, or at least comparatively, you would probably assume this card is much worse than the earlier Nine of Swords. Right? Well.

In an 1816 text by Mother Bridget, *The Universal Dream Book*, an article titled “The Art of Fortune-Telling by Cards” note that it isn’t the Ten of Swords, but the Nine of Swords or Nine of Spades that is “the worst card in the whole pack.” Whereas the Ten of Swords will just “rain on the positive parade” of any neighboring happy cards.

By the way, in the Thoth, notice the hilts on the swords. You have balancing scales, a reference to Justice. And two of the sword hilts features compasses, a geometer’s tool and a not insignificant symbol in freemasonry. That bottom-most hilt features what looks like a pentagram and a crescent moon. During the Ottoman Empire, and before that, 300 BC Greece, with origins in the Ancient Near East, this star and crescent, in this arrangement symbolizes the Morning Star. Above that, I’m not sure. If anyone knows, please chime in in the comments section. To me, it looks a bit like a crayfish.

TEN OF COINS/PENTACLES/DISKS

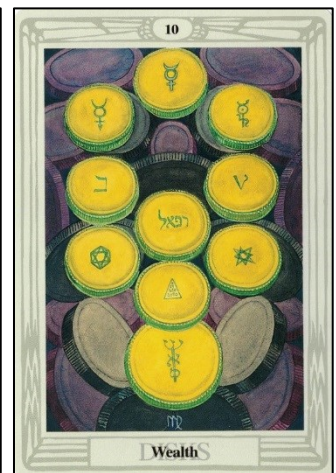
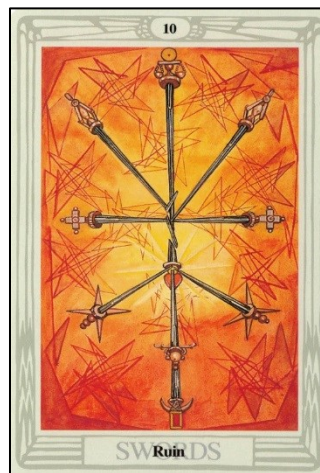
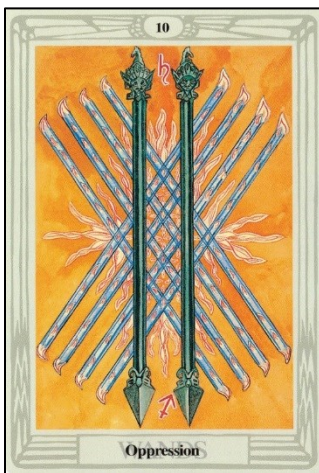
Kind of fascinating how the four Tens have a “home and dwelling place” interpretation while the sephira correspondence is Malkuth, kingdom or dominion. This is a good omen card, representing abundance and plenitude. This card portends financial stability but can also symbolize family matters.

The Ten of Disks is the Lord of Wealth, corresponding with the decanate, Mercury in Virgo. This is wealth accumulating to its brink, and at this point, it is at risk of going inert if the querent doesn’t do something meaningful with that wealth. Crowley notes that the Ten of Disks is the last of all the cards, and therefore represents the sum total of all the work that has been done from the beginning.



The Ten of Pentacles in the RWS shares a similar meaning. This is the house and the domain, with financial security to be inherited by the future progeny. We see gains, riches, and family matters. This is the abode of the family, writes Waite.

In all three of the cards, when ill-dignified or reversed, we see negative indications: loss, imbalance of financial resources, a downturn in the economy.



THE TENS IN THE THOTH

When you look at the Tens in the Thoth deck side by side, the first thing you'll notice is how the passive elemental suits, the Cups and Disks, unambiguously show arrangements of the Tree of Life.

The Ten of Swords somewhat implies it, and the Ten of Wands is the least in resemblance.

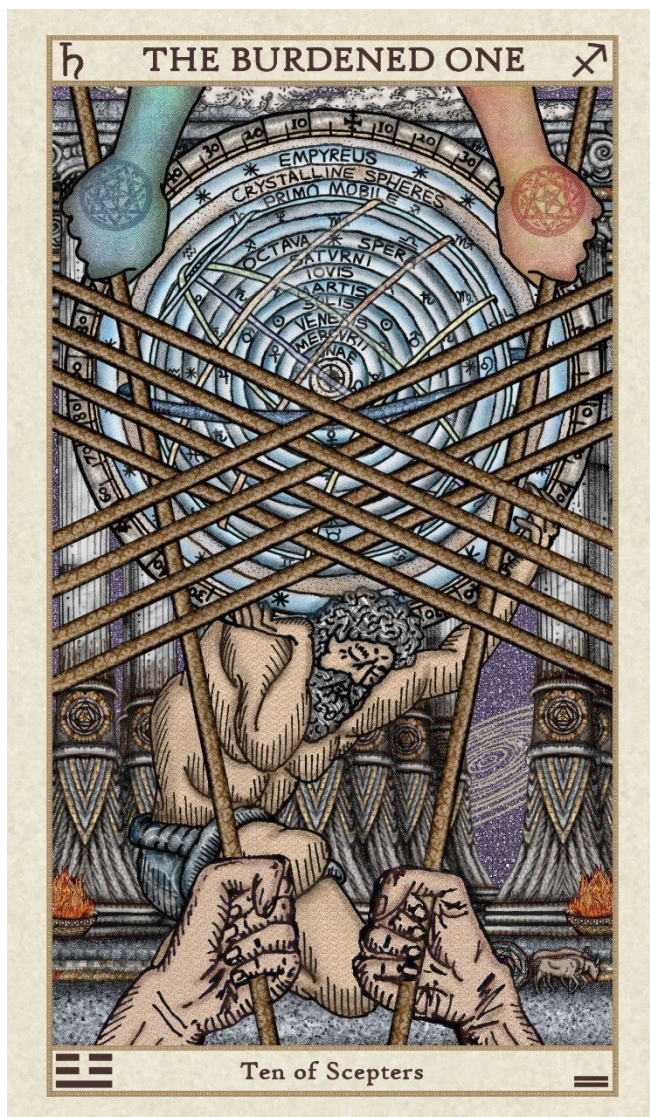
THE TENS IN THE SKT

I didn't deviate much in terms of card meanings for the SKT Tens. Here in The Burdened One, we see Atlas holding up the world. We've got the emotional composition of the RWS and the composition of the ten scepters arranged in a way inspired by the Thoth.

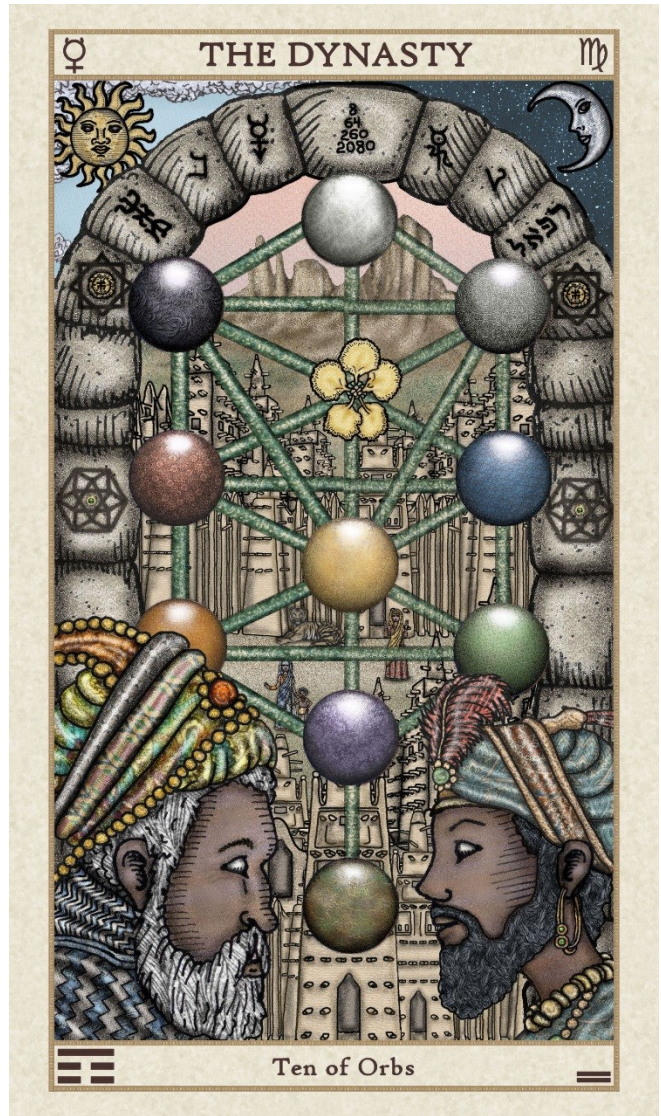
By the way I still to this day do not know whether it's pronounced "Thah-th" or "Thoe-th." How do you pronounce it?

Anyway, another subtle meaning specific to the SKT here is that of multiverses.

On The Joyous One, we see Matsu, the goddess of the South China Seas. She's venerated in Taiwan, the southern-most coastal regions of the mainland, and several of the island cultures in Southeast Asia. There's the rainbow and family from the RWS, and the reds from the Thoth.



See how the arrangement of swords in the Thoth Ten of Swords kind of looks like a many-armed goddess? Well, it did to me. So I fleshed out that personification and here you see an homage to Tengrist shamanism, the shamanistic traditions of North Asia.



See those symbols on the Thoth Ten of Disks? I've inscribed them onto the archway stones in The Dynasty, the Ten of Orbs, which features Timbuktu and the Mali Empire.

Hive mind: I haven't quite figured out what these two emblems indicate. Could I get some help? Please leave your notes in the comments section. Let's go on to what we *do* know.

The center keystone features the mystic pyramid of Mercury's numerology—8 for Hod, ruled by Mercury, 64 which reduces theosophically to 10, 260 to 8, and 2080 to 10.

There's the Hebrew letter Beth, corresponding to Key 1: The Magus for Mercury, and then John Dee's Enochian letter Pe, equivalent to Beth.

Encircled on screen is the Hebrew name for Archangel Raphael.

And what you're seeing now is a caduceus formed from the three Mother Letters, Aleph, Mem, and Shin.

CLOSING

Our next and final video on the Minor Arcana will be the Pages, or in the SKT, the Heralds. We are so close to completing the ten sephiroth and the tarot Minor Arcana. After the Minors, we'll move on the Major Arcana.

Thank you for watching! Until next time!

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A Video Lecture Series

P A S T L E C T U R E S

The Aces	20:02 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Twos	34:41 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Threes	22:15 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Kings/Knights	42:40 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Queens	53:26 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Fours	42:22 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Fives	31:27 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Sixes	38:40 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Sevens	30:21 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Eights	30:25 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Knights/Princes	30:14 minutes	Video	Blog Post
The Nines	36:25 minutes	Video	Blog Post

BENEBELL WEN is the author of *Holistic Tarot: An Integrative Approach to Using Tarot for Personal Growth* (North Atlantic Books, 2015). Learn more about her work and access free educational and business downloads at www.benebellwen.com.