

The Tarot Reader

This is a taster of the Winter 2006 Edition of the Tarot Reader, the quarterly e-zine for TABI members. If you'd like to read more, please join us! We're a friendly Tarot community with lots to offer – and I'm always looking for contributions for the e-zine – from members and non-members. Please contact me using the details on our [Contacts page](#).

Confessions of a Tarot Addict

By Dianne Sandland



With my husband's refrain of "why do you need so many," ringing in my ears, I open my new Maat Tarot. I'm being rather more gentle than normal because, you see, this is a limited edition – no ripping at the cellophane this time. As I gently lift my treasure from its box, the smell of new print hits me. I love the smell of print, if there was a perfume called 'Libraries' I'd be first in what may be a very short queue.

When it comes to looking at the cards themselves, there is a ritual that must be performed; first I look at The Moon card, the card that I regard as 'my own' and the one I always turn to first in any new deck. I can spend many minutes just gazing at the symbolism used on this card. The next task is the initial swift flick through the deck, which gives me an overall impression of its character. This is then followed by a far more leisurely voyage through the Majors and minors; stopping to gaze in wonder at some of the cards and swiftly passing others that disappoint. I never admit to being disappointed, not even to myself, but invariably there is always one card in a deck that jars my aesthetic sensibilities. Then the deck is either put in its box and then onto the shelf to keep the other fifty-plus decks company or, more rarely, it is put into its box and kept within easy reach so that I can take it out and look at it often. I feel like a child let loose with my mother's trinket box, gazing with wonder at each new item I hold in my hands, not caring if its paste and imitation, in my eyes, each is a jewel worthy of treasuring and hoarding away from prying eyes.

But why am I so addicted to what, in reality, are only pieces of illustrated card? As my husband so rightly says, I can only read with one at a time. I am a generally acquisitive person and I have more books than is healthy for anybody who lives in an average-sized house but it's more than just the joy of acquisition. I think that, in a way, there is a parallel here with my book collecting. Most of my books are non-fiction because, having decided that I'm interested in something, I am obsessive in learning all I can about that subject and, I think, Tarot decks are much the same. Of course, I have a whole stack of Tarot books but most of my learning about Tarot has come from looking at different decks. Each deck gives another view, looks at things from another angle. My Glastonbury, for instance, is based on the Glastonbury legends with which I am very familiar and so the Ace of Staffs speaks far more clearly to me than the Ace of Wands in my trusty old RWS. The RWS Ace of Wands to me is a rather phallic symbol and so whilst, yes, it says something about creativity, power and new beginnings, my reaction is more cerebral than emotional.



I know the story of the Glastonbury Thorn very well and I have tied a few spell ribbons to it over the years. This hawthorn is reputed to have grown from the staff planted in the ground by Joseph of Arimathea as he landed on the Isle of Avalon and it flowers at Christmas as well as at the 'usual' time in May. When it flowers at Christmas, it is also in berry.

The Glastonbury Thorn symbolises enormous creative strength and regenerative power to me and its story helps me in my general understanding of the implication of the Ace of Wands in a reading.

If we look at the same ace in The Fairytale Tarot, we see that it's illustrated by the tale of Jack and the Beanstalk. So here we have another perception to bring to our understanding of this card. The beanstalk grew by accident really and once it started to grow it was the catalyst for Jack's growth in knowledge. He became, shall we say, streetwise. So from this we begin to understand that the power of the Ace of Wands is a power that, if harnessed and respected, can contribute to our personal growth. We might enter the phase an innocent but, depending on the other cards in the spread, we are likely to leave it having learned something that will be useful to us in the future.



In our final look at this card, we go to the Maat tarot where, because Julie Cuccia-Watts has aligned her cards with the seasons, the usual correspondence of Fire for this card has been transmuted to Air. At first this may seem a little difficult to grasp – until you think that renewal and new creativity tends to be linked with the powers of the mind. The symbols on the card, the Caduceus and the wings of Mercury, speak to us of healing, renewal, and increased mental agility. The final piece of the jigsaw given by this deck is that the card is linked to Winter; a time of coming out of the dark, when we tend to move and live more slowly, into the light when we are feeling more energetic and disposed to make things happen.

So, if I put together all of the differing concepts of the Ace of Wands that I've learned from just some of my decks, I can formulate my own, very personal meaning for this card. It goes something along the lines of a time of powerful learning and creativity from which may spring personal growth, renewal, or enlightenment. Of course, my understanding of this card is now far more than one short sentence can convey and this greater understanding of just one card will enhance the meaning of all the other cards laid alongside it in a reading.

If I were to answer my husband's impassioned plea to know why I need so many decks, I would try to convey the depth and breadth of knowledge I gain of my 'specialist' subject. I doubt that he would understand though, because he has not discovered the beauty and mystery that a small deck of cards can hold. He will continue to think that I am just being acquisitive – and, just sometimes, he may be right.

Shamanic Journey - Visit to Greece and Crete with Rachel Pollack and Nicki Scully

By Malcolm Muckle

Well, I blame TABI; there's no doubt about it, it's all TABI's fault.



If TABI hadn't had such a wonderful conference last year (2005) then Rachel wouldn't have been there. If Rachel hadn't've been there, I wouldn't have heard about a forthcoming visit to Greece and Crete. If I hadn't've gone to Greece and Crete then this little piggie wouldn't have jumped over the stile, and I wouldn't be here tonight. Writing this.

Why did I want to go on a Shamanic Journey? Why Greece and Crete? Well, as I know that I tend to "intellectualise" experiences, I wanted to try a more direct approach in the company of other similarly-minded folk, particularly if it was allied to the Tarot. Why Greece? - Since pre-teens I've enjoyed the Greek myths; I was last there about 30 years ago - well overdue for a return visit. Crete I had never visited... "the time is now."

For the visit we were asked to bring a Tarot deck, and any "objects" that were sacred to us. The reading-list to help us assimilate some of the background to the trip was a bit daunting, so I read just the two books; *Persephone Unveiled* by Charles Stein, and *The Body of the Goddess* by Rachel Pollack. These gave me a detailed background to both the journey we were making and the "colour of the glasses" we'd be looking through. Google also helped, and led to some unexpected links, as always.

"Mystai"¹ is a word that I hadn't heard before, until I looked for information concerning the visit and started googling around. The Golden Dawn Glossary² (compiled mainly by the Ciceros, but also contributed to by Mary Greer) has an entry under the heading Eleusinian Mysteries - "*The Eleusinian Mysteries were the most famous and secretive of the ancient mystery religions. The rites at Eleusis (near Athens) originated in the story of the goddess Demeter and her search for her daughter Persephone. The Eleusinian Mysteries began with the journey of the Mystai or initiates in a ceremonial procession from Athens to Eleusis to the Telesterion, or Hall of Initiation. The exact nature of the rites performed there remains unknown.*"

The exact, specific detailed nature of the rites may be unknown, but a great deal is known. The people who experienced the Greater Mysteries - the Mystai - were held to secrecy, and there are no descriptions of the exact nature of what they experienced. For a ritual that was practised for over a thousand years, (from about the 8th century BCE to the 4th century CE), by both Greeks and Romans, this is remarkable and can only be explained by the fact that the Mystai couldn't have described their experiences, even if they had wanted to.

At the heart of the Eleusinian Mysteries lies the "Homeric" Hymn to Demeter³ - the entire manuscript was discovered in the 15th century CE, in a stable in Moscow in 1777!).

To précis the story,... Demeter is the Goddess of grain and harvest, and her daughter - not named in the story until after her descent to the underworld - is abducted by Hades, the King of the Underworld. When Demeter discovers what has happened, and that Zeus himself was complicit to the abduction, she is more than mildly upset, and exacts revenge upon the gods by refusing to let the grain grow. The gods realise that humanity will starve and hence deprive them - the gods - of the gifts of sacrifice and worship that allows them to exist! This is not good news for the residents of Olympia, and eventually Hades is persuaded by the other gods to return Persephone to her mother. However, before he sends her back he plays a trick on Persephone; he secretly makes her eat a few pomegranate seeds, resulting in her being able to remain above ground for only two-thirds of each year, spending the rest of the time underground with Hades. Demeter, rejoicing at her daughter's return, makes the crops grow again and imparts the ritual of her Mysteries to the people of Eleusis.

The Hymn to Demeter is thematically complex. The major themes involved are the Death and Resurrection of the Dying Goddess, the Marriage of the Fertility Goddess (in the sense that the land is once again made fertile after a period of irreconcilability), the Withdrawal and Return of the Hero/ine, Wandering, the Epiphany of a God to a Mortal, and the Wrath of a Goddess. Other thematic elements are the coming into power through trial, the linked ideas of "eating" and "secrecy," and of "seeing" and "transgression."⁴ At one point in the story Demeter is sufficiently incensed by the stupidity of humans (one of whom interferes with Demeter's conferring of immortality on the Queen's son, the Queen having misconstrued Demeter's intent) to the extent that she withdraws from humanity as well as the Olympian gods, instructing humans to build her a suitable temple, or else....!

The Mystai had to undergo instruction and initiation in the Lesser Mysteries before participating in the Greater Mysteries, the whole process taking approximately a year. They would have been familiar with all the elements in the myth-story by the time they participated in the Greater Mysteries, which took place in the month of Boedromion, which began in mid-September, harvest-time, the same time as we took our nine-day Journey. (In many Greek states the month was called Demetrium after Demeter). The Mystai went through a time of preparation, of fasting - oops! ... we skipped that bit - of physical exertion (we climbed Parnassus), and then partook in the rite itself, the apotheosis being enhanced by the sharing of a potion called *Kykeon*, whose ingredients included water, barley meal, and pennyroyal. (There is debate about the ingredients of the *Kykeon*, but that was the formula given in the Hymn to Demeter. It seems likely that they also included a psychoactive ingredient in ergot, a fungus that grows on grain - there's also circumstantial evidence, in that Persephone's sisters who were close by when she was abducted all had names of plants with psychoactive properties).

The effect of participation in the Greater Mysteries upon the Mystai was that their worldview was changed for ever in how they viewed life, death, birth, rebirth, and their relationship to them. Their identification with the various elements in the story, and their apotheosis - exaltation of a person to the rank of a god - would leave them changed in their essence. The fact that we still use the Greek words, Apotheosis (apotheoun, to deify: apo-, change) and Epiphany (epiphainesthai, to appear: epi-, forth) show that they were familiar with the concepts of transformation of being.

A couple of weeks before we set out, on the first day of the Mysteries in the old calendar, Rachel emulated the rôle of the Herald and asked us each to draw a Tarot card for the Journey we were to experience, and to send it to her for comments. From the deck I chose, mine was the Nine of Pentacles - "Joy. Radiance. Abundance. Popularity. Success on all levels. Egolessness brings wealth of soul." A fruitful beginning.

So how did our Shamanic holiday relate to these Eleusinian Mysteries?

First, we assumed the rôle of being modern-times Mystai, of seeking to know something about ourselves, and to experience as best we could some of what the ancients experienced. We visited sites that the Mystai of old visited, and participated in rituals that, though far removed in content and time from those of the old Mystai, nevertheless affected us deeply and left us more in touch with ourselves, each other, and the landscape around us. Wherever possible, we conducted rituals at the same place that the original rites were conducted, sometimes almost surreptitiously, at others quite openly.

As well as honouring Demeter and Persephone, and all that this particular myth embodies, we also literally and symbolically went underground in various caves, and came again back into the light, having been empowered by our own experiences. Apollo was the first god that we invoked, asking that we be opened to a different vision, aided by Hermes and Persephone, and the serpent of Gaia... the original Pythia that was the oracle at Delphi.

All this with the in-depth knowledge of Greek myth and symbolism that Rachel brought to bear, and with the shamanic methods that Nicki Scully has practised and perfected over the years, plus Nicki's extensive knowledge of the Egyptian pantheon.

The journey was divided into two main parts, first in Greece, and then in Crete. In Greece, we began the journey by visiting the Acropolis and the Parthenon and conducted a simple ritual at the temple of Athena. The next day, at the sanctuary to Apollo at Delphi, and at the Athena Pronaia, we experienced the Opening to Apollo. Tarot cards were drawn at appropriate times.

At Parnassus, whose massive main ridge reaches some 8000ft at its highest point, the horizon of surrounding mountains revealed themselves around us as we climbed for an hour and a half ever higher and higher, to about 4500 ft... climbing in the heat of the day through prickly-oak and scrub, through wild hyacinth and drifts of yellow autumn-crocus, to the cave of Korykia. Here we honoured Gaia and drew four Tarot cards in response to the questions "How do we go down, how do we come up, what must we leave behind, and what must we take with us?" We returned once more, accompanied by the sound of goat-bells close at hand and sheep-bells in the valley below.

At Mycenae, we walked through the Lion-Gate, to the highest point within the site, and there conducted a ritual in honour of Artemis. At the nearby beehive-style tomb

of "Agamemnon", I speculated on how the ancients managed to place a single dressed piece of granite, over 200 tons in weight, over the main entrance...

The following day we visited Epidaurus; on entering that ancient centre for healing where Aesculapius had his sanctuary, we were immediately joined by two dogs (the dog and the snake being two of the symbols associated with Aesculapius) who played alongside us until we set up our altar once more to conduct a healing ritual. One dog seemed to stand guard, while the other lay its head in someone's lap and dozed off. We didn't see the snake...!

At Eleusis, an extraordinary site surrounded partly by an industrial estate and partly by the by modern Greek city-life, in front of the cave of the oracle, we again laid out an altar and conducted a ritual in honour of Demeter; at our feet lay a few rinds of pomegranate and some sprouting grain, scattered by other pilgrims to the site previous to us. It was there that we began to appreciate that there was a significant section of the Greek populace - some estimate 300,000 - who wish to honour and worship the ancient gods in a manner that they think appropriate. Recently, in 2006, after a long human-rights campaign, the courts in Greece upheld the rights of Greek citizens to worship in this way.

Eleusis was our last significant visit on mainland Greece, and after visiting we said farewell to the guide who had been so sympathetic to our reasons for being there. He had much enhanced our understanding of both modern and ancient Greek cultures, and we were sorry for him to leave us, though none of us begrudged him attending his son's 9th birthday party!

When on a magical holiday, magical things happen.

Our night-time departure for Crete from mainland Greece was accompanied by the best thunder-'n-lightnin' storm - first felt and heard approaching, and then directly overhead - that has ever soaked me! The land of Greece has a language that's as much felt as heard, speaking in poetry, through the elements and the landscape, in a way that Western education has carefully made unfamiliar to most of us. Ancient and modern sometimes come into strange contrasts, and it was difficult not to notice writing on the side of a travel-coach stating "www.zeus.gr" - the thought of Zeus - maybe the whole pantheon - having web-sites was a bit mind-bending, though full of strange and wonderful possibilities... god-blogs everywhere? ... "Thursday: Olympus. Apollo late again..."

We arrived at Heraklion on Crete early at 5.30 am., none the worse for wear after the overnight journey, went to the hotel for an early breakfast, and then, travel-gluttons that we were, set off for the cave of Agia Paraskevi at Skotino. This cave is a very important sacred cave in Crete and one of the deepest, with a depth of 160 metres and four levels. From parts of vases and Late Minoan bronze figurines dating from the Neolithic to Roman periods, it appears to have had religious importance from about 1900 BCE onward. In Roman times, it was turned into a Christian sanctuary, and today, following services held in the small church above the cave, members of the congregation often change out of their Sunday best, and perform a ritual of a different sort at the mouth of the cave, barbecue included!

After a prolonged study, Paul Faure⁵, a French archaeologist who has published extensively on topics related to Minoan Crete, came to the conclusion that this cave is actually the famous labyrinth of Knossos. Just as well we didn't stray far from the entrance....

On that first day in Crete⁶, Zeus – in his persona as The Emperor - gave a demonstration of what he could do, throwing up first one, then two... three .. four significant waterspouts not far from the shore, within the bay of Heraklion. This was impressive magical stuff, and wasn't something that had been seen in Crete before.

The next day we visited Knossos and marvelled at what had been. Three and a half thousand years ago, a civilisation flourished in Crete, eventually succumbing to two sets of earthquakes, with its ships mostly destroyed by the tsunamis. Their culture seems not to have evolved gender inequality, and some say both men and women participated in every occupation and trade available to men; for example, both men and women participated in bull-leaping. The priesthood was dominated by women, and it is thought that possibly there was a matriarchal lineage. Nowhere from this period in Crete have there been found any representations of male gods.⁶

The following day is one that I will remember very clearly. It began with a cleansing ritual on the beach, at sunrise. Like Aphrodite rising from the waves, I felt renewed, with a lot of "baggage" I'm fond of carrying around with me, dissolved or left behind to feed the fishes.

Later in the day Rachel gave a workshop on the Tarot, using her own *Shining Tribe*⁷ deck. Members of the group were familiar with Tarot in varying degrees, from very little to having designed their own deck, so this was a workshop that covered much ground, and gave insight through example. The *Shining Tribe* deck isn't one that I've worked with, but it was - as usual - impressive to see how the cards always, but always, are appropriate to the question asked. Nicki also gave an insight, again by example, into how she works with shamanic healing.

There was one full day left to us, and this was spent at Phaistos. The Palace of Phaistos lies on the East end of Kastri hill at the end of the Mesara plain in Central Southern Crete, and has magnificent views all round; the southern side of it is very steep, formed by a landslide which destroyed part of the site. On the day we visited, the wind brought a welcome coolness as we conducted our penultimate ritual, a Caduceus empowerment invoking Hermes, beneath the shade of an old pine. Finally, we visited the ancient sandstone caves overlooking Matala beach near Gortys. Though we couldn't see them, ruins of the ancient city-port are still visible on the seabed as the ancient city was sunk in the sea.

Despite the curiosity of other visitors, within one of the caves we re-enacted a ceremony embodying our and Persphone's return to the light from the darkness. At the end of the ritual, Rachel poured water symbolically to the East and to the West, as each Mystes of old did at the culmination of his or her initiation. The image I am reminded of is that of the Star in the classic Rider-Waite deck, the figure pouring water out from two vessels, one onto land, one into water... before approaching the

end of the Fool's Journey. As Rachel said, the final seven cards of the Major Arcana are all about the liberation of the light.

Throughout the journey, Rachel was drawing cards from her *Shining Tribe* deck, as were we from our own decks, sometimes for each other, sometimes for ourselves. The significance of the cards given was always completely synchronous and fully appropriate to the situation we were in and to the questions that were asked.

The holiday we were on was described as a "Shamanic Journey"; it began close to where the Mystai of old set forth, full of expectation and unknowing, as did we, so far removed in time. We travelled part of the same journey, perhaps re-vivifying with our practices the spirits of the places we visited. Then we reached further back in time, for the source of the Mysteries, in Crete. We learned to see and feel - to perceive - in a way unfamiliar to most of us, but one that the ancients would have fully understood in the way it left its mark on our being.

All of us returned with a deepening of the spirit, leaving something behind but taking with us ... as with an ear of corn ... the possibility of renewed growth. The Journey was experiential in a subjective, transformative way as much as it was in any outer sense. Or, to put it another way - as with Tarot, as with Shamanism - for us our Journey's unreality was as real as its physical reality.

On the last day, Rachel drew a card to represent the state we were at - the Three of Stones, which she described as representing "completed work." Something ended, something new begun.

Could one truly ask for more?

References:

1: Our word "Mystery" is of Greek origin. *Mystes* is the singular of *Mystai*, also related to *mystic*: *mysticus* < Gk *mystikós*, equiv. to *mýst(ēs)* an initiate into the mysteries.

2: Golden Dawn Glossary

"The GD Glossary and artwork is copyrighted © 1997 by The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Glossary entries provided by Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabatha Cicero.

3: - Hymn to Demeter, Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, published 1914, Loeb Classical Library.

4: The linked ideas of "eating" and "secrecy," and of "seeing" and "transgression." For centuries, the Hymn to Demeter was part of an *oral* tradition, and when recited or sung outside of the Mysteries, would have been adapted to local circumstances. To the non-initiates, the subsidiary theme of eating/secrecy would have emphasised the idea that something special was imbibed or eaten during the rituals, and to those not initiated, it would have introduced the same idea, non-overtly - *subconsciously* in modern parlance. Similarly, the linked theme of "seeing" and "transgression" would have emphasised that what was "seen" in the Mysteries was indeed secret, and not to be spoken of to those who had not been initiated.

5: Wikipedia's entry on Paul Faure

6: A good basic reference for things Minoan is at
http://wiki.phantis.com/index.php/Minoan_civilization

7: Amazon - Shining Tribe Tarot About Shining Tribe Tarot, Caitlin Matthews (creator of The Arthurian Tarot) wrote - "The deeper levels of creation run through this pack, with a delightful freedom and wise love." Cynthia Giles (author of The Tarot: History, Mystery, and Lore) wrote - "I feel certain that Shining Tribe Tarot will have an enduring place among the most admired and enjoyed decks of this century."

And Mary Greer (bestselling author of Tarot For Yourself) wrote - "I highly recommend this deck whose essence is a combination of the power and joy of the life force."

Minoan Snake Goddess image

Image included from:

<http://witcombe.sbc.edu/snakegoddess/images/minoansnakegoddess2.jpg>

Minoan Snake Goddess from Knossos, Crete

c. 1600 BCE, faïence,

height 13 1/2 inches (34.3 cm)

(Archeological Museum, Herakleion)

