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CATHARISM AND THE TAROT

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Introduction

Chapter 8 in *Tarot Symbolism* (O'Neill, 1986) considered the possible contribution of heretic sects to the design of the 15th century Tarot. Since 1986, academic interest in intellectual history in general and esoteric history in particular has produced an entire scholarly library on the late Medieval heretics. The abundance of new studies permits a re-examination of the question and leads to some rather different conclusions than were possible in the book.

Interest in Catharism as a source of imagery arises because of the numerous symbols of dualism in the Tarot: pairs of pillars and pitchers, male/female duals, etc. Catharism, known as Albigensianism in southern France, was fundamentally a dualist heresy that inherited many concepts from the ancient Gnostics. Bayley (1912) hypothesized that the watermarks of French papermakers contained heretical symbols. Waite (1911) suggested the watermarks as a source of Tarot symbols, based on Bayley's 1909 paper "New Light on the Renaissance."

The idea of heretical origins for the Tarot still attracts attention because the Medieval heresies share two important traits with modern Tarotists. First, there is a rebellion against any authoritative imposition of dogma. Cathari and most Tarotists see

self-development, spirituality, and mysticism as an individual and personal quest. Second, they both share a sense of the emergence of a new age of peace and fulfillment. This feeling of like-mindedness seems to reinforce the internal evidence for dualism in the symbols. Intuitively, heretical origins for the Tarot feels comfortable.

But history isn't about feelings; it's about evidence. So we must undertake an extensive examination of the historical evidence to examine the hypothesis that Catharism was a source for the Tarot symbols.

Part I: Origins of Catharism

Were the Cathari direct descendents of the ancient Gnostics? Yes, sorta, kinda. *The Medieval Manichee* by Runciman (1947, Cambridge University Press) is a dated but classic treatment of the subject. The influence of Runciman's work can be seen in the fact that the book was reprinted in 1955, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1991, and 1996. The book is a real goldmine for the English-speaking reader because it provides a comprehensive synthesis of the earlier French and German scholarly studies.

Runciman establishes that fundamental elements of Cathari practice go back to Gnosticism, specifically the Manichees (Burkitt, 1925). The Manichees were divided into initiated Elect and ordinary members called Hearers. The Cathari were divided into Perfecti and believers or Credentes. The Cathar initiation ceremony seems to be derived from the Manichaean ritual. Both distinguished between the Gnosis (knowledge) of the Initiate and the Pistis (belief) of the ordinary believer. Both avoided swearing and were vegetarians. Both gave an equal place to women who could be initiated as Manichaean Elects or Cathar Perfects. The parallels are too numerous and the details too close to be dismissed as coincidence.

We have a well-documented history of the Manichaean lineage. Manichaeanism developed into a Christian heresy, Paulicianism (Christie-Murray, 1976). The Paulicians were persecuted and driven into exile in Macedonia and Bulgaria where they developed into the Bogomils (Obolensky, 1948). The Bogomils were active in proselytizing and sent missionaries throughout Europe.

Many small sects, such as the Messalians, may have contributed to Catharism (Runciman,1947), but several lines of evidence point to the Bogomils as the chief sculptors. Many details of the Cathar initiation ritual, the consolamentum, are modeled after the Bogomil ceremony. Cathar practices, such as no meat, no wine, no oaths, icons despised, passive resistance, marriage discouraged, asceticism, owning no property or money, appear to come directly from the Bogomils. The Cathars appear to have gotten their apocryphal literature directly from the Bogomils.

The only prayer used by the Cathari was the Pater Noster, and they ended it with "For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory for ever and ever." This isn't in the Latin Vulgate Bible and wasn't used in the Roman Church but appears in the Greek version of St. Matthew and in the Slavonic translations used by the Bogomils. We know that a Nicetas, a perfect or bishop from the Drugunthian branch of the Bogomils, visited the Cathar communities in northern Italy and Provence c1167 and administered the consolamentum to many. One of the common terms for the Cathari was "texerant" or "weavers" (Moore, 1975) since many practiced this trade and since they were active in trading cloth and furs across overland routes through Slavic Bulgaria and further east— another possible mechanism of continuing contact.

So there is considerable evidence linking the Cathari to Manichaeanism through the Bogomils. But it must be clearly understood that ancient Gnosticism had passed through many hands and much had been lost. Cathari were quite different from the ancient Gnostics described by Jonas (1958). The distinctive creation myths of Gnosticism (Logan, 1996) are gone. Only two texts, *Interrogatio Johannis* and *Ascensio Isaiae,* are available, and the rest of the Gnostic library is long gone (van der Broek,1998).

The neat logical picture presented by Runciman in 1947 has been contradicted or modified by every subsequent scholar. The major objection is that many of the key features of Catharism had appeared spontaneously all over Europe long before the Bogomil missionaries arrived (Cohn, 1957). Many Cathar doctrines, such as individual spirituality, rejection of the corrupt church, rejection of the sacramental system (or any other intermediary between God and the individual), asceticism, apostolic poverty, laying on of hands, and lay preaching, seem to be indigenous to Europe.

In 591, Gregory, Bishop of Tours, mentions a hermit in the district of Gevaudon. In 744, a Frankish priest, Aldebert, was defrocked for preaching apostolic poverty. Individualistic heretical groups appeared in Ravenna in 970, Chalons-sur-Marne in 1000, and Orleans in 1022 (Wakefield and Evans, 1991). A group appears at Arras in 1025 that abstained from sex and denied the validity of all established religions. A similar group is known from the area of Milan in 1028 (Little, 1988). About 1116, a former monk named Henry was actively preaching against the church in Italy and Provence. The earliest signs of something that can be clearly identified as Catharism appear in Cologne in 1143 and then in Italy in 1179.

Russell (1965) argues that the basic elements of the heresy are western—rebellion against a corrupt church and a spontaneous individualistic spirituality modeled after the apostolic poverty of the early Christians. Cohn (1957) shows that this underlying trend toward heresy was spread all over Europe, and the individual groups didn't seem to be aware of each other. Davison (1927) had already noted that before Cathari were described in 1143, there were already heretics with many similar traits in Flanders and Brittany, around Limoges, Bonn and Gossler, as well as in the valleys of the Rhone and the Rhine. When the Bogomil perfect, Nicetas, visited in 1167 he assembled Cathars from northern France, northern Italy and the Pyrenees (Lambert, 1998).

So despite the common impression, the Cathari were not concentrated in southern France and probably originated elsewhere in northern France or Italy. The emergence of similar groups continued even after the Cathari appeared. For example, the Brethren of the Free Spirit emerged at the beginning of the 13th century (Vaneigem, 1998). They were geographically isolated in northern Europe but shared the concept of individual mystical salvation and had a separate class of Adepts or "Spirituals."

Even the most fundamental doctrine of the Cathari, Dualism, isn't a simple inheritance from the Gnostics. Runciman (1947) points out that the radical opposition of spirit and matter, good and evil, male and female "is as old as mankind." Dualism seemed to be archetypic and is found in other cultures that had no connection with Gnosticism, for example, the Yin-Yang in Chinese Taoism. Philosophical discussions of good and evil and the gap between the infinitely good God and material existence was a problem for Neoplatonism, Greek Stoics, Jewish thinkers at Alexandria, and Hermetic philosophers. Cantor (1963) saw Catharism as a mixture of rebellion against the church

and the dualism of Neoplatonism. McGinn (1979) saw the idea of dualism as intrinsic to the Judeo-Christian concepts of God and Satan—the eternal struggle between good and evil.

The most reasonable resolution of the problem of origins would seem to be a combination of the two theories. Archetypic elements of individual spirituality and dualism were intrinsic to Western culture and appeared spontaneously at a number of times and places in reaction to a corrupt church. At some point, probably early in the 12th century, Bogomil missionaries arrived and found the ground well-prepared for their specific doctrines and practices. The result was the Catharism of France, Italy and Provence.

This reconstruction of Cathar origins is based on exhaustive examination of the written evidence. But it appears to minimize the contribution of Judaism and Islam to the basic ideas. This area has not been researched to any great extent and remains a job for the future, but we do have some few hints at least for connections with Catharism in Provence. During the period before the Albigensian Crusade, Raymond VI was the Count who ruled most of the centers of heresy in Provence. Davison (1927) points out that "few of his subjects were Catholic. In the thriving cities, Jews and Moors lived on an equality with Christians."

I am only aware of a single scholarly treatment of the possible connections between the Cathari and the early QBLH of Provence. In *Origins of the Kaballah,* Scholem (1962) points out that the Provencal development of QBLH took place at precisely the same time as the flowering of Catharism. Both were urban phenomena, and

there is some overlap, but, for the most part, the centers of QBLH and Catharism were in different cities.

Scholem notes some similarities between ascetic subgroups within the QBLH community and the Cathar Perfects. He also notes that both groups sometimes referred to the two wives of Satan and that there was an Italian Cathar bishop named Johannes Judaeus at the end of the 12th century. But these are "disparate and unconnected details" (236). About the only substantive overlap of doctrine was the transmigration of souls, although the details are quite different.

So Scholem concludes that the possibility remains open for some slight mutual influence. But the influence couldn't be very strong because in rejecting the Torah as a work of Satan, "the Cathars go much further in their metaphysical anti-Semitism than does the Catholic Church"(236). He also gives an example of an unmistakably anti-Cathar polemic by a prominent Rabbi.

Part II: Cathari Doctrine and Practice

We have a great deal of information on Catharism because of the Inquisition—specifically set up after the Albigensian Crusade to stamp out the heresy. As always, one has to look at the testimony of accusers with a critical eye. Charges of immorality, for example, were not based on evidence but on the prevailing theory of heresy (Moore, 1975). Heresy was evil and unnatural and therefore was expected to show moral and physical symptoms. Leprosy was often taken as evidence of heresy, but with Catharism we have some peculiarities that make the Inquisition records much more reliable than one would expect.

One must first recognize the profound difference between the initiated Perfecti and the ordinary Credentes. The Perfecti were literate and had a great respect for learning. Cathar medical doctors were prevalent in the courts of Provence (Runciman, 1947). When the church began to send Dominican preachers to convert them, the Cathars reacted by smuggling Perfecti into the prestigious School of Theology in Paris so they would be prepared to debate (Lambert, 1998). Dominicans in Italy sent letters to the Pope complaining about the lay heretics who read books and knew more theology than the priests.

The Perfecti understood their dualist theology and were deeply committed to its truth. When they were discovered by the Inquisition, many would stand proud and proclaim their ideas. Indeed, they considered martyrdom by the Inquisition as clear evidence that they alone followed the path of the early Christian martyrs persecuted by pagan Rome. Their testaments, consistent with each other and voluntary, seem a reliable source for Cathar doctrine.

The Credentes were largely illiterate, at least up until the 14-15th centuries. For the most part, Catharism was an urban phenomenon and the believers were craftspersons and artisans—the new middle class. There was no systematic religious education and they knew little or nothing about doctrine (Little, 1988). This posed a dilemma for the inquisitors since heresy was defined as errors in doctrine. But when they questioned suspects, neither the dangerous heretical Credentes nor the innocent faithful Catholics gave the right answers.

But while the Credentes knew little about doctrine, they were very much concerned with practice (Lansing, 1998). For most believers, the appeal of Catharism was

not the logic of the doctrine. The appeal was the immediate presence of the Perfecti, men and women of obvious holiness, and in sharp contrast with the married priests exacting tithes. The advice of these "holy ones" seemed closer to the fundamental Christian message than the materialism of the Church. The Credentes were focused on the living practice of Catharism and therefore the Inquisition kept careful notes of these practices to use in future prosecutions. Wakefield and Evans (1969) provide translations of several treatises on doctrine and practices prepared by the church for the purpose of guiding future inquisitors. Aside from the occasional hyperbole, the treatises can be taken as reliable, because they needed to be diagnostic and accurate.

Theologically, the Cathars were dualists but there was variation in details. The two main varieties, radical and moderate, were inherited from the Bogomils (Runciman, 1947). The radicals believed there were two co-equal and co-eternal creative principles or Gods, one good and one evil. The Old Testament was written under the influence of the evil principle and was totally rejected (Leff, 1967). The moderates believed that there was one supreme God, and the evil creative principle was a fallen angel. The moderates also rejected most of the Old Testament but retained the Prophets and the Sapiential books. The focus for both groups was the New Testament and the two apocryphal books, "The Questions of John" and the "Ascension of Isaiah" (Leff, 1967) which they got from the Bogomils.

The Cathari were also Christians. They believed that Christ was sent to show humans how to free the spirit from the evil body, but Jesus couldn't be a God-man because that union would violate the basic incompatibility of God and evil matter (Runciman, 1947), nor could Mary be the Mother of God (Leff, 1967). Humans were

spirits imprisoned in an evil body and surrounded by an evil world. Salvation consisted in denying satisfaction of all physical needs since to fulfill them led to the perpetuation of the evil material entrapment. There was no hell nor purgatory and no final resurrection of the body. The route to salvation was asceticism in this life, setting the stage for the liberation of the spirit when the body died.

Male and female was not a fundamental duality—it was an alien imposition (Lansing, 1998). Men and women were given equal status among Cathari because both were asexual spirits, equally entrapped. The male-female distinction was a false dichotomy, invented by an evil creator—designed to perpetuate the entrapment of spirit through procreation. Sexual intercourse wasn't sacred—it was an abomination that permitted the abuse of woman by drawing attention away from the true spirit-matter duality and focusing attention on a false dichotomy.

Cathar practice was designed to draw the logical moral conclusions from this body of dualist beliefs. The route to salvation was a strict asceticism (chastity, poverty, fasting) that dismantled the spirit's obsession with the body. Marriage was firmly deplored (Davison, 1927; Runciman, 1947) and even meat, the product of propagation, was forbidden. According to one early testament (Moore, 1975), "We value virginity above everything....We do not sleep with our wives, we love them as we would mothers and sisters. We never eat meat....We hold all our possessions in common."

The Cathari also incorporated doctrines and practices adopted, not from dualism, but from the other heresies of the middle ages. All oaths and swearing were forbidden. The Church was viewed as evil, the whore of Babylon. They rejected the sacraments, the priesthood, all Christian prayers (except the Pater Noster), the adoration of the cross,

relics, icons, and any attempt to capture spirituality in a material manifestation (Leff, 1967). "The Church was in the lives of its members; nothing man-made of wood or stone had a part" (Wakefield and Evans 1991).

The Perfecti, initiated by the Consolamentum after years of preparation, were dedicated to the strict asceticism mandated by their dualist theology. The Credentes, the ordinary believers, could not be held to that standard. For them, normal commerce and marriage were deplorable but allowable. They had not been called to the spiritual life and must await a future incarnation.

The only way that the Credentes could achieve salvation in this lifetime involved a strange "escape clause." The initiation of the Perfecti that permitted the freeing of the entrapped spirit required a vow of strict lifelong asceticism which the ordinary believer could not maintain. Unless, of course, the vow were taken and the consolamentum administered just a few minutes before death (Runciman, 1947). This strange escapist practice had two long-lasting ramifications. First, it led to an obsessive interest in the prediction of and preparations for death. Second, it led to the absolute need to have Perfecti immediately accessible for the deathbed ceremony. For the ordinary believer, therefore, Catharism without Perfecti had no real appeal—it would simply be an abstract theology with a depressive message of inescapable entrapment.

Part III: Catharism and Tarot

Okay, after a couple of dry historical sections—let's get down to the nitty-gritty! Is the Tarot actually Gnostic in origin? The answer is—it's hard to see Catharism as the sole or fundamental source of the Tarot symbols. It is possible that the dualist heresy was A source, but essentially we have to reject the idea that the dualist heresy was *the* source

(or primary or fundamental, etc.). After analyzing what the Cathari believed (in Section 2), it just isn't consistent to think of the Tarot as a Cathar symbolic system.

Let's just focus on the big pieces. The concept that the Cathars would have used a material (and therefore evil) means, such as a set of images, to express their beliefs is inconsistent with their belief system. They rejected every material expression of spirituality as a tool of Satan—a means to keep the spirit entrapped in matter. The Perfecti weren't concerned with instructing the Credentes—so there is no justification for the idea of a catechism or instructional aid or memory device. The Cathari rejected relics as evil—they were remains of the evil matter that the saintly spirit had rejected and therefore escaped. They rejected icons and any attempt to capture spirituality in a material manifestation (Leff, 1967). The Cathars had no churches of wood or stone(Wakefield and Evans, 1991). By a logical extension, nothing material, of paper and ink, would have had a part either.

The most important reason that the dualist Cathars have been suggested as a source for the Tarot is the prevalence of dualist symbolism in the Tarot Trumps, but this internal evidence becomes inconsistent when examined in detail. Take, for example, the dualist symbol of the two pillars. The presence of two pillars on a card is taken as a reference to Boaz and Jachin, the twin temples at the entrance to the Temple of Solomon, but the Cathars saw the Old Testament as a tool of Satan. The radical dualists rejected all of the Old Testament, the moderate dualists only included the Prophets and Sapiential books (Leff, 1967). The descriptions of the Temple in Kings and Chronicles were not part of their belief system. The very concept of erecting a material (material=evil=Satanic)

Temple was anathema. So the idea of using two material objects (i.e., pillars) to symbolize the material/non-material duality of the Cathars doesn't make sense.

A similar judgment must be made about the male-female dualities in the Tarot Trumps: Lovers, Empress/Emperor, Papess/Pope. For the Cathari, sexual differences were not a fundamental duality; gender was an alien and evil imposition (Lansing, 1998). For them, the fundamental reality was the duality of divine spirit trapped in satanic matter. Sexual difference was just a component of the entrapment—deluding the unenlightened spirit into continued focus on the material—luring the spirit into sexual attraction, intercourse and procreation which served to continue the entrapment of spirits in bodies. Sex was not sacred to the Cathars; it was an abomination and intrinsically deceptive and evil (Davison, 1927).

This rejection of the male-female duality was carried to the extreme of vegetarianism and chastity. Nothing that was a product of procreation, such as meat or eggs, was permitted. Complete abstinence from sexual contract was required of the Perfecti (Runciman, 1947). Marriage was deplored even among the Credentes (Davison, 1927). Indeed, the equal status given to women among the Cathari resulted from the premise that all humans were asexual spirits, equally entrapped in matter.

So the many symbols of duality in the Tarot Trumps (pillars, vases, sex, etc.) might have a source in the dualism of Neoplatonism or the duality intrinsic to the Judeo-Christian tradition, but for the Cathars, any pair of material objects was simply part of Satan's illusion—it was a false dichotomy designed to distract the attention of the entrapped spirit away from the truth.

Turning to the smaller details, a characteristic that the Cathari shared with many heretical groups of that period was the total rejection of the corrupt Church. So there shouldn't be any Pope card. Since the Pope was the Anti-Christ, the incarnation of Satan, there shouldn't be both a Pope and Devil card. The Cathari rejected the whole of Catholic dogma, so there shouldn't be Moral Virtues. Believing themselves specially chosen of the Holy Spirit, they mostly rejected external authority and practiced passive resistance, so there shouldn't be an Empress or Emperor card. Simply stated, if one were to express the belief system of the Cathari in a set of images—it wouldn't look like the Tarot trumps. Conversely, many of the Tarot symbols seem in direct conflict with Cathar beliefs.

Perhaps, the most serious problem with seeing the Tarot as a Cathar product is the Angel (later called Judgment) card. This card shows the orthodox Catholic dogma of the resurrection of the body. At the end of time, the souls of the blessed will be reunited with their bodies which will rise, miraculously uncorrupted, from their graves. Obviously, the idea of reuniting the freed spirits with their evil bodies would be totally anathema to the Cathari (Bynum, 1995). The Cathari totally rejected the doctrine of the resurrection of the body (Lansing, 1998). They had a concept of a final Judgment, but that was a judgment of spirits—separating those who had freed themselves from matter from those who remained entrapped. There is nothing in their concept that corresponds to bodies rising from graves as shown on the Tarot image.

So the hypothesis that the Cathari were *the* designers of the Trumps must be rejected. The hypothesis that the Cathari were the inheritors of great occult secret tradition is also difficult to swallow. The classic text of Runciman (1947) concludes: "The careful questioning of the Inquisitors, well trained to unearth any secret, reveal no

trace of any occult lore imparted to the Cathar initiates" (177). The last sentence of the book (187) states "It is perhaps safer to admit of no connection between the Dualist and the Occultist Traditions." Simply stated—there isn't a shred of evidence for a Cathar/Tarot or a Cathar/Occult connection—not from converted Cathari and not from spies who were inserted into the system by the Inquisition.

But does that mean that the Cathari made no contributions to the concepts of the trumps? *No!* That contribution remains feasible, perhaps even probable. The circumstantial evidence remains strong. There are dualist symbols in the Tarot, even if they aren't the symbols that the Cathari themselves would have used. The Elects of the Bogomils dressed like monks (Runciman, 1947) and might be represented as the Hermit—carrying the enlightenment over the mountains. In Provence, the Credentes were craftspersons. Lambert (1998) specifically mentions shoemakers (147)— possibly hinted at in the Bateleur card. The Church was viewed as evil and was referred to as the whore of Babylon. So the Tower card, seen as the Tower of Babylon or the crumbling House of God, is also suggestive of heretical inputs. However, the route from the Cathari in the 12th-13th centuries to the Tarot designers in the 15th is circuitous—it's a great historical detective story.

Part IV: Albigensian Crusade and the Inquisition

The "problem" of the Cathari was solved by the Albigensian Crusade. Without going into irrelevant details, the Cathari in Provence (called Albigensians after the town of Albi) were preaching the downfall of the Church under the protection of powerful local rulers who were snubbing their noses at the Pope. When they murdered a Papal Legate, the pope went anaerobic and called on the rulers of northern France to intervene.

More motivated by greed than obeisance to the pope, the rulers of Northern France had a terrific excuse to move in and take over the rich agricultural properties and Mediterranean ports. Atrocious as it was, it was nonetheless successful and the infrastructure of the heresy was demolished in southern France.

The Albigensian Crusade (1207-1244) and its aftermath removed a ruling class and brought about a massive transfer of power, which in turn opened the way to sustained and effective persecution (Lambert, 1998). The Inquisition was invented to eradicate the remnants that went underground. The last resurgence of Cathari in Languedoc was Pierre Autier (1299-1310). Interestingly, to cover his preaching, Autier carried a bunch of Parma knives for sale (Lambert, 1998) suggesting the Bateleur card. In 1326 at Carcassonne, the last Cathar in France was burned (Leff, 1967). As far as we know, the heresy ceased to exist in Provence.

But the Cathari probably didn't originate in Provence, and they certainly didn't end there. We know that the Provencal Cathari maintained communications with the Bulgarian Bogomils, and it is possible that many migrated there, where the dualist religion continued to flourish under sympathetic rulers, but there was a refuge much closer to home in the powerful city-states of northern Italy. We don't know where Catharism first emerged as a fully developed religion, but as early as 1028, heretics very similar to Cathars were noted near Milan (Little, 1988), and the second report of fully developed Catharism was 1179 near Milan, shortly after they were reported in Cologne in 1143. We also know that when the Bogomil initiate, Nicetas, visited the west in 1167, he first visited the communities in Italy and then moved on to Provence. So Catharism is about as old, and even possibly older, in northern Italy.

While the pope could encourage the northern French rulers to overrun Provence, he had no such option in Italy because the city-states were too powerful. The city-states were very jealous of their autonomy and viewed the pope as a rival for political power and control. As a result, they had a long tradition of anti-clericalism and had long struggled with the pope and bishops over the rights, liberties and endowments of the Church (Lambert, 1998). So by 1250, one of the largest communities of practicing Cathari was in communes clustered around Milan (Runciman, 1947). Ferrara, where the Tarot is first mentioned in 1442, had a particularly active Cathar community (Davison, 1927). In Viterbo, under protection of Giovanni Tignosi, a heretic pope was elected in 1231.

In many cases, the city officials were not so much sympathetic to Catharism as they were reluctant to yield to the church in passing anti-heretical laws and didn't want to set the inquisitors loose after their behavior in France. So, for example, in 1260 Pallaviciono became prefect in Milan and prohibited the Inquisition from operating there (de Salvio, 1936). In 1322, the synod of Valence condemned Matteo Visconti as a heretic because he rescued and harbored Cathari. The port of Genoa, easily reached from the Provencal coast, was another place of refuge (de Salvio, 1936). The records of the Grand Inquisitor Bernard Gui in the early 14th century also mention that Italy was a haven of refuge for the Provencal Cathari. Two leading families in Florence (Nerli and De Barone) had a Perfecta in their family (Lambert, 1998).

The liberal atmosphere in Italy can be seen in the story of Princess Blazena Vilemina, daughter of King Premysl Ottokar I of Bohemia and his queen, Constance of Hungary. Known as Guglielmina, she came to Milan about 1260 (Newman, 1995). She

wasn't a Cathar though she may have been influenced by the Brethren of the Free Spirit, a similar sect in northern Europe (Vaneigem, 1998). Although her followers proclaimed her to be the Incarnation of the Holy Spirit, she wasn't generally regarded as a heretic and four local churches had paintings of the "saint." An altarpiece at Biassono depicts the Trinity with Jesus and Gugliemina sitting side by side (Newman, 1995). Moakley (1966) suggested that one of her followers, Maifreda da Pirovano, cousin of Matteo Visconti, was the model for the Papess card in the Visconti-Sforza deck. She was indeed elected Pope by the sect.

However, by the end of the thirteenth century, the situation began to change. Some of the Cathari's most powerful patrons and protectors lost political power, and they were reduced to a clandestine existence (Lambert, 1998). The last bishop was arrested in Figlione in 1321, and the last Cathar detected in Florence was in 1342. In 1387-9 Inquisitors discovered Catharism in the valleys of the Alps, working in intense secrecy, meetings at night, imposing oaths against betrayal, using secret sign of recognition, "pressing little fingers together." In Lombardy, the city states, like Milan, Genoa, Verona, Venice, and Florence, remained Cathar hiding places into the 15th century (Leff, 1967). In 1412, the end of Catharism was marked by digging up fifteen dead heretics and burning their bodies (Lambert, 1998). After this, the religion as a public entity only existed in Bosnia.

The fatal flaw that caused the death of Catharism was the critical role of the Perfecti and their vulnerability to detection. Without the Perfecti to administer the deathbed consolamentum, the ordinary Cathar believer is reduced to hopelessness—there is no means for salvation, and Catharism makes no sense. And in the growing

commercial atmosphere of the Italian cities, with their intimate dissected neighborhoods, it became impossible to hide a celibate vegetarian who had taken a vow of poverty!

So why couldn't the Perfecti blend in, pretending to be married and eating meat only in public? Because even a casual touch from the opposite sex was a sin. With that sin, the Perfecti lost their status as initiates and their power to administer the deathbed consolamentum. They would have to be re-confirmed and receive a new consolamentum each time this occurred. So by their own doctrine, it was practically impossible to "blend in." In addition, literacy had waned among the Perfecti during the 14th century (Lambert, 1998), and lines of communication between groups became minimal or non-existent. Without written documents and with little opportunity to communicate or reinforce an oral tradition, the elegance of the original theology stood little chance even if the unlikely circumstance that an individual "Perfect" could be hidden within sympathetic families and neighborhoods.

So could the Tarot, which appears for the first time in Ferrara in 1442, be a direct legacy of the Cathari? Well, it is possible—but it is a stretch. Catharism maintained itself in small secret groups, and it is conceivable that remnants of these still existed by the time the Tarot appears. However, as we saw in the last chapter, little of the original Cathar doctrine was retained in the Tarot, and there are obviously non-Cathar symbols. So it is far more likely that the contribution of Cathar dualism to the Tarot was indirect—it passed through other hands in the later stages.

As we will see in the next few sections, the remnants of Catharism were not so much eradicated as transformed. In the transformation, much of the distinctive Cathar dogma inherited from the Bogomils was lost. However, much of the spirit of the heresy

was retained. Also, much of the everyday practice and idealism survived. The story of how the spirit and practice of Cathar dualism might have influenced the Tarot is utterly fascinating, but it will require a couple of dry historical chapters to establish the background and present the story.

Part V: Joachim of Fiore

To understand the transformations that occurred in Catharism, we must pause to consider the strange mystic and prophet, Joachim of Fiore. Too "Catholic" for the occultist historian and too "heretical" for the orthodox, he appears more often in footnotes than in the text of history books. It has only been in recent decades that his incredible influence on the intellectual history of the Middle Ages and Renaissance has become the subject of scholarly research. Recently, Betts (1999) has written a book-length treatment of how much the Tarot owes to the apocalyptic vision that was his heritage.

Joachim was not a heretic in the European fashion—he was not a wandering hermit preaching against the corrupt Church and advocating a return to Apostolic poverty. Born c1135, Joachim became a cloistered Cisterian monk, formed his own Order of S. Giovanni in Fiore in 1196 and died there in 1202 (Reeves, 1976). Those dates mean that he was alive during the flowering of Catharism, but his influence was not felt until later through his writings on a prophetic interpretation of history. Throughout his life, he remained a faithful servant of the Church, and although some of his teachings were condemned, his personal sanctity was never questioned. Reeves (1969) points out that his position in the Church has always been ambiguous. He is listed in the official Acta Sanctorum as "beatus," but he is also listed as a heretic in the official Catalogus

Haereticorum. Dante gives him a high place in Paradisio, possibly as a cynical jab at the Church's ambiguity.

Joachim's original vision of history was complex, and the details and numerology evolved through his writings, but the original complexity need not concern us because it was the popular commentaries, rather than Joachim's original writings, that had the real influence. Seen through the eyes of the commentators, the basic structure of Joachim's theory has an uncanny resemblance to the Fool + 21 trumps structure of the Tarot. For example, Joachim uses the analogy of the pilgrim (Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972) very much as modern writers use the "Journey of the Fool" to describe the basic structure of the Tarot.

For Joachim, the basic unit of history is the Status (Status=age or stage). History is divided into three ages, each with seven steps. The first status is the age of the Father, captured in the Old Testament, with seven steps represented by the seven seals mentioned in the book of Revelation. This first age had a germination period of 3x7 = 21 generations from Adam to Jacob and a fruition period of 3x7 = 21 generations from Jacob to Ozias. The second status is the age of the Son, with seven step represented by the opening of the seven seals in the book of Revelation. This second age had a germination period of 3x7 = 21 generations from Ozias to Jesus and a fruition period of 3x7 = 21 generations from Jesus to St. Benedict.

The third status was the age of the Holy Spirit with a germination period of 3x7 = 21 generations from St. Benedict to ? and would have a final fruition period of 3x7 = 21 generations from ? to the "Consumatio Seculi," the end of time (Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972). Later commentators were to simplify this so the transition to the age of the

Holy Spirit was occurring during their own time. However, they retained the basic three and seven structure that might be represented in the Tarot trumps.

There is another aspect of Joachim's writings that offers an alternative to the typical interpretation of the two pillars in the Tarot as Boaz and Jachin of the Temple of Solomon. In Joachim, "The two testaments stand like everlasting pillars to the end of time, and upon them must the spiritual structure of the third status be built....They are the feet of the angel of the Apocalypse 10:1 'as pillars of fire,' and later the earth and sea upon which he plants his feet."(Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972).

Thus, the two pillars become the Old and New Testament upon which the Church rests. A remarkably simple and orthodox explanation for symbolism that has often been offered as proof of Judaic influence on the symbols. In other places, Joachim uses a diagram of two pillars, representing the parallel history of the *Ordo monachorum* and *Ordo clericorum* (Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972). So throughout history there will be a dual structure of civic and religious infrastructure and hierarchy. Given the parallel Tarot symbols of religious Papess/Pope and civic Empress/Emperor infrastructure, this offers another simple and orthodox explanation of the dual pillars.

Although Joachim offered a complete theory of history, it was his prediction of the immanent transition to a new age that attracted the most attention. His theory was taken as an apocalyptic vision, and that vision, of course, goes to the very heart of Christianity (McGinn, 1994). In the Gospel of Matthew, we find Jesus saying:

> For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily, I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

The early Christians viewed themselves as the fulfillment of Judaism and the beginnings of a new age. They expected Jesus to return any day and announce the final judgment and the end of time. The Church Fathers, particularly Origin, labored hard to explain the words of Jesus as referring to the personal salvation of the individual, rather than referring to the end of time (Cohn, 1957). In spite of the success of that explanation, Christianity has remained an apocalyptic religion and the last book of the New Testament, Revelation or Apocalypse, is very much a vision of the end-times. Throughout the ages, this prophetic book was seen as the ultimate esoteric/occult text. There was much hidden behind the symbolism.

The apocalyptic vision remained as a heterodox element of Christianity. In 156, A.D., Montanus of Phrygia announced that the New Jerusalem of Revelation was about to descend (Cohn, 1957). His movement was widespread, spread throughout the Roman Empire even to Gaul. Irenaeus from Asia Minor settled in Gaul toward the end of the second century and did much to establish the apocalyptic outlook in the west (Cohn, 1957). Early Christian writers often referred to the books of the Apocrypha and Pseudoepigrapha (Charles, 1913; James, 1924). These books were full of apocalyptic prophecies but were dropped from the official canon of the Protestant Bible although the Apocrypha remains in the Roman Catholic Bible.

Indeed, there was hardly a time in Europe without wandering lay preachers announcing the immanent end of time and the need for repentance and asceticism in preparation. There is documentary evidence from France 591 and 744, Flanders 1112, Italy and Provence 1116, Brittany 1145 and 1224 (Cohn, 1957). Adso of Montier-en-Der (c950, A.D.) was already anticipating many of the detailed predictions of Joachim, such as

the coming of the Anti-Christ and a Frankish ruler who would restore the Roman Empire in the West (McGinn, 1979). So Joachim was addressing a Christian audience that was well-prepared to receive his message.

Much of Joachim's work is visionary, and he makes use of a number of diagrams. One of his primary figures is a tree of history with three branches and seven leaves on each branch. He specifically calls this the Tree of Life. Similar tree diagrams were well established in Christian art by the 12th century (Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972), and it is possible that Joachim got the idea of the tree from these sources. However, his use of a diagram for the Tree of Life more than two centuries before it appears in QBLH does give one pause! Joachim's birthplace in Calabria had a vigorous Jewish community, and we know that he undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in his youth.

Indeed, he himself may have been of Jewish origin, though this has been disputed (Reeves, 1976).

> One of the few contemporaries, however, whose influence he acknowledged was Petrus Alphonsi, a Spanish Jewish convert, and it may be that Joachim's whole sense of the Godhead at work in the very stuff of history itself springs from deep Hebraic roots (Reeves, 1976).

And again, "There seems little doubt that Joachim drew on Jewish mysticism through the converted Spaniard" (Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972). However, Joachim's tree is quite different from the 10/22 structure that first appears in the 16th Century and is the tree traditionally applied to the Tarot. Scholem (1941) briefly examines the possible connection of QBLH with Joachim and concludes that a direct influence is doubtful.

While it is difficult to demonstrate a tie to QBLH in Joachim's work, we can be fairly certain about the Neoplatonic influence. For example, he adopts the nine hierarchies of angels from the Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dynsius (Reeves, 1976). On the other

side of the coin, the Neoplatonist, Nicholas of Cusa, was very interested in apocalypticism and wrote a treatise "Conjecture regarding the Last Days" about 1440 (McGinn, 1998). The Neoplatonist Giovanni Nesi wrote "Oracolo de novo saeculo" in which he integrated Neoplatonism with the prophetic tradition of Joachimism (Reeves, 1976).

The close ties with Joachimism are important because dualism is a fundamental premise in Neoplatonism (Daniel, 1992). To Plato, Plotinus, and the Hermetic philosophers, the fundamental problem of philosophy was the tremendous gap between the infinite, eternal, immutable spirit of the One and the finite, temporal, mutable material world. The emanations of the Neoplatonists, the sephiroth of QBLH, the Incarnation of Jesus, and the radical dualism of the Gnostics are all proposed solutions to this same problem and all originate in the Alexandrian/Greek synthesis of the first centuries of the present era. As Joachimism became blended with Catharism, it was relatively simple to transform the radical dualism of the Cathars (which is not represented in the Tarot) into the more orthodox expression of dualism in Neoplatonism (which may be represented in the Tarot).

Our primary interest is in showing how Joachimism influenced Catharism and helped to transform it. However, it is also important to realize that Joachim's vision of history was extremely influential in its own right (Leff, 1967). By 1248, there was already an elite group at Hyeres in Provence, including lawyers, doctors and other literati, studying and discussing Joachim's prophecies (Reeves, 1976). From the beginning of the 13th century through the 16th century, there was a general impression that a new age of the Holy Spirit was dawning and the world was soon to end (Wylie, 1996). Joachim's

vision is very much a part of this development, and we find him discussed by Jean de

Roquetaillade 1344, Telesphorus of Csenza 1390 and Pierre d'Ailly 1414 (Reeves, 1976).

Joachim's ideas were readily accepted into the syncretism of the Renaissance because

their vision of a new classical golden age fit well with the emergence of an Age of the

Spirit.

Joachim also fit neatly into the esoteric and mystical interests of the Renaissance.

His interpreters saw the dawning age of the Spirit as providing new access to the great

mysteries,

> the further spiritual illumination prophesied by Joachim chimed with the
> new learning and especially with the forms of secret and mystical
> knowledge pursued by some of the Platonists(Reeves, 1999).

> By all avenues of knowledge, occult as well as open, it was his [man's]
> destiny to ascend to celestial secrets. Alchemy, magic, the cabbala,
> astrology, prophecy, could all be viewed as aspects of the veiled
> language in which the Eternal divulged the fundamental secrets of
> existence. (Reeves, 1976).

In the early 16th century, Cardinal Egidio of Viterbo, General of the Augustinian

Hermits, met in Venice with Silvestro Meuccio, the editor of Joachim's works. Egidio

was a Platonist and student of Hebrew literature, especially the mysticism of the cabala.

He gathered within his household humanist scholars in Greek, Hebrew, and Eastern

languages. He believed it possible to read the divine thoughts through number symbolism

and concordances(Reeves, 1976). John Dee, regarded by Yates (1972) as a source of

Rosicrucianism, was interested in Joachim's number symbolism. It seems probable that a

figure of circles in a Rosicrucian work by Franckenberg, "Raphael oder Arztengel" was

modeled after Joachim's figure of the Wheels of Ezekiel (Reeves, 1976). So Joachim had

a significant impact in his own right, irrespective of his role in transforming Cathar dualism.

Joachim also fit neatly into the popular culture and its fascination with prophecy, divination, and apocalypse. Prophecy and divination were a part of everyday urban life (Niccoli, 1987). It was preached from the pulpit and in the piazzas. Of particular interest are the printed prophecies or "broadsheets" that were displayed, sold, and discussed in the market. Printed in the same shops that produced the early woodblock Tarot decks, they contained vernacular verse with images. We have about twenty Italian examples from 1480-1530 (Niccoli, 1987). The concept that the early Tarot had a connection with prophecy and divination becomes more feasible the more we learn about the popular culture of the Italian towns of the 15th century.

It is time now to return to our main theme—the possible influence of Catharism on the Tarot symbols, but to understand the complex transformation that occurred, we must next look at another incredible genius of the time—St. Francis of Assisi.

Part VI: Franciscans

The Albigensian Crusade had crushed the political and hierarchical infrastructure that supported the Cathars in Provence. The Inquisition persecuted the remnants in Provence and Italy for the next two centuries, but a third influence entered the scene and effected a final transformation: the Franciscan Friars.

We pointed out in previous chapters that the popular appeal of Catharism never rested with dualist theology. There was no systematic religious education and the ordinary believers knew little about theology. The appeal of Catharism lay in the presence of obviously holy men and women, the Perfecti, who lived with the people and

ministered to their spiritual aspirations. In marked contrast to the corrupt clergy of the time, the Perfecti were following the precepts of Christ and seemed to provide direct access to that wisdom. To their protectors and sympathizers, the Cathari always seemed better Christians than their persecutors.

As the Inquisition made access to the Perfecti more and more difficult, the Franciscans appeared on the scene in Provence and Italy. In the eyes of the people the Franciscans must have looked pretty much like Perfecti (Davison, 1927). The radical poverty was identical. The early Franciscan women wandered along with the men and were given honored, if not equal, status (Lansing, 1998). Critical of Church corruption, encouraging individualist spirituality, chaste, dressed in simple tattered cloth, and living among the people, the Friars became a simple substitute and the common people flocked to them in great numbers (Lambert, 1998).

In fact, the similarity naturally raises the question of whether the Franciscans were derived from the Cathar Perfecti. The answer seems to be a flat **"No!"** (Davison, 1927). We pointed out in previous chapters that Catharism had dual origins: a distinctive dualist theology which they inherited from the Bogomils superimposed on an archetypic drive for individualism spirituality which seems to be endemic to the European civilization. The Franciscans adopted much from this archetypic spirituality (Lambert, 1998), but there is no doctrinal overlap with the Cathar dualist theology (Lambert, 1977). Francis was meticulously loyal to orthodox Catholicism, accepting the sacraments, strict obedience to the Pope, the Incarnation, and all of the other elements that were rejected by Catharism.

Problems within the Franciscan order started soon after the death of Francis. The Pope wanted the Order to take on new responsibilities that would require them to own property and handle money. This was vehemently opposed by many Friars as violating Francis' vision. This opposition caused a split, resulting in a number of independent groups breaking away from the Order and forming the heretical Spiritual Franciscans and Fraticelli. The new groups were centered in Provence and Italy—and we find ourselves back on the main topic of how Catharism was transmitted to the Italian Renaissance.

Over time, the Spirituals wandered further and further from orthodoxy. They came to reject the Church as an evil force preventing them from following the strict rule of Francis. To justify their claim to authenticity, the Spirituals became the major commentators and propagators of Joachim's theory of history. About 1240, an abbot from Fiore carried the works of Joachim to the Franciscan house at Pisa (Reeves, 1976). The Spirituals immediately focused on Joachim's description of the transition to the New Age of the Holy Spirit.

Joachim was taken as justification for the claim that an extreme crisis was about to occur. The transition would be marked by the emergence of the Anti-Christ in the form of an evil Pope (Reeves, 1969). The evil pope was, of course, identified as the current persecutor of the Spirituals and the proper response was the total rejection of the Church. In the New Age, this evil Church would be overthrown but the transition would be traumatic and the righteous should expect great suffering. This served to give a theological significance to the persecutions that the Spiritualists were experiencing (Reeves, 1969).

Joachim had prophesied that the transition would be marked by the emergence of "spiritual men" who would lead humanity into the new age of enlightenment (McGinn, 1979). Needless to say, the Spirituals announced that they were those spiritual men! And although Joachim said little about poverty (Lambert, 1977), the Spirituals identified Franciscan poverty as the special mark of the prophesized spiritual men (Christie-Murray, 1976). Thus, the Spirituals found affirmation for their ideas and their role in history in Joachim. In 1254, John of Parma wrote a preface to a new edition of Joachim called the Eternal Gospel and proclaimed a new religion with no need for the evil Church or its sacraments (Christie-Murray, 1976).

The Spirituals disseminated and popularized the ideas of Joachim turning him into a major influence on subsequent intellectual history. Their version of Joachim proved to have remarkable flexibility. Subsequent dissidents identified the Anti-Christ with whatever temporal or spiritual agent opposed them. In sequence, the Dominicans, Augustinians, and Jesuits all justified their missions by claiming that they were the prophesized "spiritual men"(Reeves, 1969). Predicted dates for the final transition came and went without trauma, each time replaced by a new, improved prediction.

Although Catharism had little input to the original Franciscans, the same cannot be said of the followers of the Spirituals. Francis had organized his followers into three "orders." The first order was composed of the male Friars. The second order was composed of the females who wanted to enter religious life, but Francis was also inundated with requests for a deeper spiritual experience that was compatible with continued secular life. Francis formulated the "Tertiaries" to meet this demand.

Consciously or not, the Tertiaries were a close copy of the Cathar Credentes or believers, taking over their role in the culture and recruiting most of the remnant heretics. The movement embraced many types of people, from urban craftsmen and merchants to princes, nobles and ladies of royal or noble blood. Patterns of devotion ranged from guilds of workers and groups who founded hospitals or hospices to those who pursued the mystical or contemplative life (Lee et al., 1989). In the long run, providing a substitute that fulfilled the spiritual aspirations of the people proved more effective than the sword or the stake.

In Provence, the Tertiaries fell under the influence of the brilliant Spiritualist and Neoplatonist, Petrus Johannis Olivi (Lee et al., 1989) and became synonymous with the heretical Beguines. The term Beguine first appears at the end of the twelfth century and is probably derived from the pronunciation of the word Al-*bigen*-ses (Leff, 1967). However, it is not clear whether the term implies a direct relationship with the Cathars or is simply a generalized term for heretic. The centers of the new heresy overlapped but were not identical with the Cathar towns. More importantly, there was no sign of Cathar doctrine in the Beguines and both Olivi and his fanatical followers were firmly opposed to Catharism (Lambert, 1977).

Nevertheless, there are some reasons to be suspicious that the Beguines included remnants of Catharism. For example, the word "consolation" is given particular importance: "consolation is granted to those who have humble hearts...and who are open to and worthy of knowledge of the imminent coming of the Last Times" (Lee et al., 1989). That concept could be a transformed relic of the Cathar initiation or consolamentum. As another example, in 1325, Prous Boneta was interrogated at

Montpellier, a center of Beguine activity. Her confession is a strange mixture of Catharism and Joachimism (Reeves, 1969). In 1387, Inquisitors discovered a remnant Cathar group in the valleys of the Alps, working in intense secrecy, meetings at night, imposing oaths against betrayal, and using secret sign of recognition (pressing little fingers together). The significant point is that one of the leaders of the group was an ex-Tertiary.

It is important to recognize that the Spiritual/Joachim heresy and the associated Tertiaries were not centered in Provence. They extended throughout Italy and into Spain and Germany. The groups were not formed into any central organization but were in communication and shared a body of commentaries on Joachim (Lee et al., 1989)

In Italy, Ubertino da Casale (1253-c1341), a student of Olivi, wrote "Arbor Vitae" based on the "Lignum Vitae" of Bonaventura (Douie, 1978). Using the imagery of the Tree of Life from Joachim (Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972), the manuscript was widely circulated in the vernacular and was extremely popular. One suspects that when the 16th century Christian Cabalists started representing the QBLH tree, they were influenced by such Joachimite documents. Indeed, this is the closest I have ever come to finding a connection to a QBLH Tree diagram that would have been readily accessible when the Tarot appeared in 15th century Italy: Joachim's tree, influenced by his Spanish Jewish friend, Petrus Alphonsi (Reeves, 1976), and transmitted by the Spiritual Franciscans. In the 14th century, the Joachimite treatise, Breviloquium, arrived in Catalonia (Lee et al., 1989). Scholem (1962) notes that this was probably too late to have influenced the QBLH doctrines of the millennium.

Another fascinating Spiritualist document, *Vaticinia de Summis Pontificibus,* appeared in Italy about 1304. Grundmann (1929a, b) points out that they were modeled on the Oracles of Leo c1180. Each page of the treatise shows an image of a pope with caption and oracular text. By the second half of the 14th century, two versions had been combined into a collection of thirty images. A large number of copies of the treatise were woodblock printed and circulated throughout the 15th century (Reeves, 1999). Surely, many would have noticed the connection between the Tarot Pope and this Spiritualist treatise!

As we have seen with both Catharism and Joachimism, the Spiritual Franciscans endured in Italy long after the Inquisition had extinguished the heresy elsewhere. Throughout the 14th century, the Fraticelli found admirers and protectors, even among orthodox bishops (Douie, 1978). Florence was under an interdict for its refusal to obey papal orders, and became in a place of refuge in defiance of that interdict. In 1484, the archbishop of Florence was still complaining to the pope that the Fraticelli had not been eliminated from his diocese (Douie, 1978).

Milan remained another refuge because the citizens "prized their independence so highly that they preferred to tolerate heretics rather than surrender to the demands of their bishops or of popes" (Lambert, 1977). The last recorded trial of Fraticelli was 1466 in Rome, so it is clear that the Spiritualists were still influential when the Tarot first appeared, sometime before 1440.

But, in fairness, it should be noted that the Church's treatment of the Spirituals was never monolithic. Groups that declared the Church to be the "whore of Babylon" and the pope to be the anti-Christ were relegated to the flames, but more moderate groups,

that simply wanted to follow the inspiration of Francis, were treated more kindly. For example, in 1417, the papal vicar at Rome, Cardinal Isolani, took small groups of hermits near Rome under his personal protection (Douie, 1978). In 1446, the church gave an abandoned abbey to a group of Spiritual hermits and rather than forcefully disbanding them, encouraged them to join one of the recognized orders (Leff, 1967). In 1473, 1510, and 1581, moderate Spiritual groups were reunited with the Franciscan order (Douie, 1978).

So, by the middle of the 15th century, when the Tarot first appears in the city-states of Italy, Joachimism, Spiritual Franciscans, and Catharism—transformed through the institution of the Franciscan Tertiaries—were all present and their popular influence is well-documented. What is most important is that all of this esoteric activity and persecution had left as its inheritance a totally orthodox social institution—the Catholic Confraternity!

Part VII: Confraternities

Originally, "confraternitas" referred to groups of lay persons and secular clergy affiliated with a monastery (Little, 1988). They provided an opportunity for a deeper spiritual experience while remaining in the secular world. Before the end of the 13th century, the zeal of the Mendicant Orders (Franciscans and Dominicans) turned them into a popular form of lay piety (Banker, 1988).

The friars saw the confraternities as a logical extension of the Franciscan Tertiaries (Henderson, 1990). The confraternities provided an outlet for individual spirituality and penitential asceticism outside the control of a corrupt clergy (Henderson, 1994). This spontaneous need had spawned heresy throughout the centuries and

culminated in the tragedy of the Cathari. The confraternity was encouraged as an orthodox institution that could minister to this legitimate instinct for self-development (Lambert, 1998).

The organizations were set up as independent religious fraternities (Terpstra, 1995). They administered community charity (Pullen, 1971), commissioned art (Schiferl, 1991), organized processions and religious dramas on Holy Days (Wisch and Ahl, 2000), and cared for abandoned children (Terpstra, 2000a). But beyond the charitable and ritual activities, they also supported a contemplative, individualistic spirituality for their members (Henderson, 1990).

The friars' perception of the demand for individual spirituality proved accurate beyond their wildest imaginings. Florence had fifty-two confraternities by 1400 and 156 by the end of the century (Eisenbichler, 1991). Some confraternities had over six hundred members (Banker, 1988). The number and influence of confraternities continued to grow into the 16th century (Black, 1989). By the middle of the sixteenth century, there were 126 confraternities in Venice (Trexler, 1980). Between 1247 and 1763, a total of 377 confraternities were founded in Venice (Mackenney, 2000). Some of the confraternities still exist today, for example, running the ambulance service in Florence (Capponi, 1990). The movement grew beyond any possibility of ecclesiastical control, and they jealously guarded their independence and freedom from control by the clergy (Flynn, 1989).

The friars explicitly set up the confraternities as a substitute for Catharism (McGinn, 1979). One of the most famous organizers was the Dominican Peter of Verona, himself a convert from the Catharism of his parents (Little, 1988). We have suggested in earlier chapters that the confraternities transmitted the transformed doctrine and practice

of Catharism into 15th century Italy where the Tarot first appears. Yet, on the surface, they appear to glitter in their pristine orthodoxy!

Each confraternity, for example, had to draw up a "constitution" that was approved by the local ecclesiastical authorities. In some cases, their statutes explicitly state that the extirpation of heretics was a primary objective (MacKenney, 2000), but the ordinances were carefully designed to meet the approval of the church and "may not necessarily reflect the true, or at least the full, intentions and objectives of members."(Flynn, 1989). And therefore, "it is not always helpful to see the written document as driving the activity it records" (Mackenney, 2000).

The confraternities eventually absorbed the remnants of Catharism, but there are numerous hints that they also served as a place of refuge (Lambert, 1998). Their sympathies are revealed, for example, in the case of Domenico di Pietro Rosse, a Franciscan tertiary, who combined his duties in a Catholic confraternity with an active life as a Cathar believer (Lambert, 1998). One of their charitable institutions was the "ospedale," a hospice available to pilgrims and itinerant preachers (Esposito, 2000). It is unlikely that itinerant Perfecti were turned away. Houses were maintained in the larger Italian cities for newly converted Jews and Muslims (Lazar, 2000) which seems to reflect a continuation of the openness of early Cathar Provence. The dukes of the house of Este in Ferrara (where the Tarot first appears in 1442) had long risked papal disfavor by providing housing for refugee Jews (Horowitz, 2000). There are also minor hints such as confraternity orphanages that maintained themselves by doing piece work in the textile trade, the traditional trade of the Cathari (Terpstra, 2000a).

We pointed out in an earlier chapter that the deathbed administration of the Consolamentum was the keystone of Cathar practice. It is very suspicious therefore, to find that care of the dying was a crucial element in the Confraternities as well (Tetel et al., 1989). Confraternity members would, for example, spend the last night with condemned criminals, walking with them to the execution (Banker, 1988). Care of the dying and burial of the death was a function reserved to the Confraternities in most Italian cities (Terpstra, 1991).

There is also the strange phenomenon of the Flagellants. Based on their interpretation of Joachim, the Spiritual Franciscans had calculated 1260 as the year marking the transition to the Age of the Spirit (Barr, 1988). A number of groups prepared for the event with an asceticism reminiscent of Cathar dualism. Although nothing much happened that year, the asceticism emerged as ritual self-flagellation that was instituted in a number of confraternities (Leff, 1967). The flagellant confraternities remained on the heterodox fringe (Torre, 2000) and may represent an aberrant relic of Cathar rejection of the evil body.

These clues indicate that some of the confraternities, at least, preserved a sympathy for Cathar practices even while they replaced it as a social institution. Suspicions of heterodoxy were often raised because of the absolute secrecy of confraternity activities and membership (Barr, 1988). Originally intended to protect anonymity during their charitable activities, the secrecy made rulers nervous as the confraternities acquired political influence and power (MacKenney, 2000). The Church remained suspicious of any individualistic spirituality outside of ecclesiastical control

(Flynn, 1989). In 15th century Florence, the confraternities were closed on a number of occasions because of these suspicions (Eisenbichler, 1998).

Perhaps the most intriguing speculation is that the Confraternity was the institution that actually produced the first Tarot! The circumstantial evidence is considerable. The confraternity was a powerful, heterodox force in the right place and the right time as the Tarot first appears. As refuge and replacement for Catharism, the confraternity inherited much from the Provencal synthesis of earlier centuries. The influence of the Franciscans provided Joachimism and the Neoplatonism that transformed the Cathar dualism. The Joachimism is evident in the heterodox flagellant confraternities. The Neoplatonism is evident when one discovers that the confraternities provided the model for the Florentine Academy founded by Alamanno Rinuccini (Weissman, 1990) which, in turn, became Ficino's Platonic Academy (Kristeller, 1956).

As secret organizations motivated by individualistic spirituality, the Confraternity provided a forum for the exploration of esoteric mysticism within an orthodox Catholic culture. As a result, they attracted humanists (Weissman, 1990) and the intellectual elite (Eisenbichler, 1998). These intellectuals would have added the astrology, neo-Pythagorean numerology, art of memory, and the other esoteric disciplines which seem to be represented in the Tarot (O'Neill, 1986). Since the confraternities were in charge of Holy Day processions and pageants (Henderson, 1994), they are the logical source for the processional elements from Petrarch's "I Trionfi" that are evident in the Tarot (Moakley, 1966) and probably the source for their original name, trionfi (Ferrara, 1442; Dummett, 1980).

But the creation of the Tarot required more than intellectual syncretism. It also required artists and printers and the confraternity was the only institution in the Italian city-states that brought together members of different social classes (Esposito, 2000). Nobility, intellectuals, and artisans were brought together weekly in the secrecy of the confraternity (Banker, 1988; Terpstra, 2000b). As social and political institutions, they cared about the welfare of their neighbors. As esoteric religious institutions, they were concerned about the education and edification of their neighbors. Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised to learn that they produced "woodblock devotional images" (Zardin, 2000) for distribution. Since the printers were already producing woodblock decks of playing cards, the production of the first Tarot seems a very small step indeed!

And, as if that bold speculation were not enough, recent scholarship tends to see the confraternities as the progenitors of the Rosicrucian secret lodges and even Freemasonry (Terpstra, 2000b). The confraternities established a tradition which Terpstra (2000b) characterizes as "Ritual Kinship." All of the critical elements are there: oaths of secrecy (Black, 2000), secret rituals complete with special robes (Rondeau, 2000), and initiation ceremonies of quasi-sacramental significance (Polizzotto, 2000).

Some of the confraternities were explicitly designed to provide devotional and social services for trade guilds (Henderson, 1990). The guild was an important organizational unit of urban life and probably had strong religious and charitable aspects by later Medieval times (Black, 2000). The confraternities may provide a critical link between the Medieval guilds of "operational" Masons and the later "speculative" Masonry that has not received sufficient attention from Masonic historians. Both the confraternity and Freemasonry are fraternal organizations, outwardly seen as charitable

institutions, with secret initiations and ceremonies, monotheistic, encouraging morality, and mutual aid. Both were catalysts for political dissent. Both channeled a traditional esoteric concept of personal spirituality and mysticism.

Reading descriptions of 16th and 17th century confraternities (e.g., Bernardi, 2000), it is hard to ignore the resemblance to Freemasonry. With the coming of the Enlightenment, religious values changed and so did the confraternities.

> Ironically, this rejection of Ancient Regime confraternities was not a rejection of traditional confraternitas, or ritual kinship itself. That powerful urge found secularized civic-religious expression in the propagandist evocations of revolutionary brotherhoods, in the mutual aid of fraternal lodges, and in the arcane secretive rituals of the Freemasons(Terpstra, 2000b).

The Italian Confraternities seem reasonable candidates for the point of origin of Tarot. They preserved and transformed the earlier esoteric synthesis achieved in Provence. They provided an intellectual forum within which additional esoteric elements were added to the synthesis. They explain how esoteric concepts became integrated into a restrictive Catholic culture. Once integrated, they formed a social entity that preserved the synthesis and may have transmitted it to the later Rosicrucians, Freemasons, and Occultists.

Part VIII: Tarot Imagery

In Section 3, we examined the hypothesis that the Tarot symbols are the product of, or were directly influenced by, Gnosticism in the form of Catharism. The answer was clearly *No!* A scholarly examination of Catharism uncovered doctrines that are in direct conflict with a number of the Tarot symbols, as well as with concept of any material expression of dualist dogma.

In Sections 4-6, we saw that the doctrine and practice of the Cathari had been transformed by the Albigensian Crusade, the Inquisition, the Spiritual Franciscans, Joachimism, and the Tertiary/Beguines. What remained of Catharism in 15th century Italy was something quite different from its original expression in the 12th century. In Section 7, we introduced the speculation that the confraternities retained what was left of Catharism: the drive for individual spirituality, the liberal attitudes of the Cathar communities, the transformed ideas and practices—the spirit of heresy in an orthodox institution.

In this section, we return to the Tarot symbols with a new hypothesis, a new question: Is there any internal evidence in the Tarot symbols that indicates that they were influenced by the transformed Catharism as it existed in 15th century Italy? If there is some/any evidence, is the evidence strong enough to indicate a dominant influence? Or simply another influence that was synthesized with the many other influences that are documented in O'Neill (1986)? The purpose is not to prove or disprove an influence. The purpose is simply to examine the images objectively and see if there are any indications of heretical influence. For this exploration, we will narrow our attention on the oldest extant cards—the 15th and early 16th century hand-painted and woodblock cards illustrated in Kaplan, Volume One (1978) and Volume Two (1986).

FOOL

In one sense, the 15th century viewer, immersed in the Humanism and Neoplatonism of the Renaissance, would have seen the Fool as the "lowest estate of man" (Lambert, 1977). But, at the same time, the religious mindset of the times might have seen this image of wandering and poverty as the highest state of the reformed man—the

man on the verge of the new age—the new saint. Basically, what motivated the popular response to the early European heretics, to the Cathar Perfecti, and to the Spiritual Franciscan was their rejection of worldly values and their commitment to apostolic poverty. One might even speculate that the harassing "dogs" that appear in later decks are a ribald reference to the Inquisition and its persecution of the Cathar and Franciscan heretics.

The images on the woodcut decks (Kaplan II:276, 286) might support this type of dual interpretation because the Fool in these decks can be taken as an earnest traveler, but the hand-painted decks (Kaplan I:65, 112, 117) do not support the dual interpretation. Goiters and exposed genitals are hardly compatible with the chaste Perfecti or Franciscan!

BAGATTO

The same type of ambiguity attaches to the Bagatto. The traveling mountebank/trickster might be seen as the next higher "estate of man" in a Humanist/Neoplatonic mindset. But the itinerant preacher (heretical/heterodox/orthodox) also employed simple tricks to attract a crowd and traveled in the disguise of salesman. However, the images on the early decks, whether hand-painted or woodblock (Kaplan I:65, 117, 131; II:274, 286) don't support this dual interpretation—they all show an entertainer/trickster with no hint of an underlying spiritual intent. The evidence indicates that the concept of the Bagatto as an itinerant preacher was not part of the original concept.

PAPESS

The Papess card is often offered by occultists as proof-positive of the esoteric origins of the Tarot—the two pillars representing the two pillars of Solomon's Temple and clear evidence of Gnostic dualism. However, we saw in Chapter 1 that the Cathari had dismissed the description of the Temple in the Old Testament as a work of the Devil. A far more plausible source is the Figurae of Joachim (Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972) who drew two pillars as a symbol of the Old/New Testament and the Secular/Ecclesiastical Authority. The dualism is therefore more likely Neoplatonic than Gnostic.

If the source for the symbolism of the dual pillars is Joachim, then we are faced with a real dilemma. Joachimism was influential in the 15th century, irrespective of any direct connection to heresy, but it is also true that the 15th century knew Joachimism only through the popular commentaries of the Spiritual Franciscans. Therefore, any time we trace symbolism to Joachimism, we cannot definitely confirm a connection to heresy—nor can we dismiss it off-handedly.

In a very real sense, the concerns over the interpretation of the symbolism of the dual pillars are of academic interest only. This is because of the evidence in the early cards themselves—there isn't a hint of pillars on any of them! So the evidence indicates that the dual pillars wasn't part of the original concept.

Beyond the irrelevant detail of the pillars, the Papess card admits of a number of possible interpretations. For details see "The High Priestess: Sources of the Waite/Smith Symbolism" at <http://www.ninalee.com/oneill/2.htm> and Tom Tadfor Little's The Hermitage at <http://www.tarothermit.com>. Two of the possible interpretations are

relevant here. The Tarot Papess may represent a Sibyl—a pagan prophetess. If one accepts this interpretation, then we are reconnected to the apocalyptic view of history and Joachimism. But, once again, a reference to Joachim neither confirms or negates a tie to Catharism.

A second potential interpretation of the Papess was offered by Moakley (1966). She suggests that the Papess represents the heretic Maifreda who was actually elected Pope by a small sect of Guglielminites (Newman, 1995). If one accepts Moakley's interpretation, then the Papess card does indeed indicate a tie to heresy. However, we need to be careful— Maifreda belonged to a heretical sect—but it was not a Cathar sect and had no ties to Catharism. Whether one accepts Moakley's concept is a matter of interpretation left to the reader.

EMPRESS

In many respects, the symbol of the Empress is more enigmatic than the Papess. There was no prominent Empress at the time, and it is a stretch to find any heretical implications in the symbol. About the best I can offer is that the two symbols of temporal rule are not Count/Countess or King/Queen as they might be if the cards had originated in Provence. The symbols are not Duke/Duchess as they should be if they referred to a specific ruler of an Italian city-state.

In the early thirteenth century, the Italian patrons of the Cathari belonged primarily to the Ghibelline political party. This party advocated the return of the Holy Roman Emperor as ruler of Italy—largely as a buffer against the growing political power of the Papacy. So there is a slim chance that the Empress/Emperor symbols make reference to this political theme.

However, it seems far more likely that the Papess/Pope, Empress/Emperor are simply symbols of female/male, spiritual/temporal authority. As we saw in Section 3, the sexual duality does not have its source in Catharism which regarded gender as an illusion. The temporal/spiritual duality, however, might have its source in Joachimism where this duality was given prominence in the dual pillars of Church and State (Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, 1972).

EMPEROR/POPE

A stronger case can be made for the Joachimite origins of the Emperor and Pope symbols. The transition to the new Age of the Spirit would be signaled by the emergence of a "World Emperor and Angelic Pope" (Reeves, 1976) who would establish a new order following the destruction of the evil Anti-Christ ruler and pope. An example of the iconography associated with the "World Emperor" can be found in the Frontispiece of McGinn (1979). The woodblock print is from Methodius of Olympus "Revelations" Basel 1516 and shows the Emperor dedicating crown and orb to the Crucified Christ. The Ghibelline expectation that the World Emperor would be the Holy Roman Emperor may be implied by the heraldry of the Black Eagle on early hand-painted cards (Kaplan I:67, 88, 99, 103) and on the woodblock sheet from Milan (Kaplan II:286).

LOVERS

We saw in Section 3 that the Lovers symbol is diametrically opposed to Cathar doctrine. Gender and sexual attraction are Satanic traps. This would not have been much different in the 15th century since the transformed versions of Catharism were still based on asceticism and chastity. The Lovers symbol seems simply to refer to the role of human

love in the self-development of the individual. Following the hypothesis of Moakley (1966), the immediate source is probably the "Triumph of Love" from Petrarch's epic poem, "I Trionfi."

CHARIOT

The Chariot card carries no implication of heresy. It's likely the image is also inspired by Petrarch's "I Trionfi" in which the "Triumph of Chastity" follows the "Triumph of Love." Two of the early hand-painted decks hint at this source by showing a noble woman on a vehicle that looks more like a parade float than a war chariot (Kaplan I:68, 101). Two of the partial cards (Kaplan I:125, II:276) also suggest the Triumph of Love. The others suggest a chariot in a victory procession. None of those variants seems to carry any obvious heretical content.

JUSTICE/FORTITUDE/TEMPERANCE

The presence of the three virtues argues strongly for a basically orthodox source for the Tarot images. There is nothing even vaguely heretical here. The absence of the fourth Moral Virtue, Prudence, may hint at an esoteric influence since the three virtues correspond to the three Pythagorean virtues. These were known in the late Middle Ages through Iamblicus' "Life of Pythagoras," but that association would suggest a Neopythagorean or Neoplatonic influence rather than heresy.

HERMIT

The majority of the early cards suggest the image of Father Time. Panofsky (1939) devotes an entire chapter to the rich iconology of this symbol in Medieval and Renaissance art and explicitly draws the connection with Petrarch's "Triumph of Time"

which is a likely inspiration for the image. One of the woodblock images (Kaplan I:128) is clearly Father Time with the typical wings and crutches. For most of the others, the key feature is the hourglass (Kaplan I:68, 114, 130).

However, since the card was later named "Hermit," the image might have had additional connotations to the Renaissance viewer. Perhaps the reference is to Joachim who distinguishes the secular preacher from those who "live the hermit life on the mountain top" (Reeves, 1976). The mountain top appears in one early deck (Kaplan I:114). The reference might also be to the small groups of Fraticelli hermits who still existed in 15th century Italy.

Of immediate relevance to our topic, the Hermit might also refer to the Cathar Perfecti or their replacement, the Spiritual Franciscans. However, the name fits better than the images. The early images are relatively well-dressed (Kaplan I:68, 114; II:273) compared to the tattered habits of the ascetics. Eisenbichler (1991) shows an image of a confraternity member in black robes and carrying a lantern (Figure 17). This resembles the one early image that shows a lantern, rather than an hourglass (Kaplan II:273), but that Tarot image shows the man's face rather than the conical hood covering the confraternity brother, so the early Tarot images really don't support the hypothesis of heretical influence on this symbol, in spite of the suggestiveness of the later title.

WHEEL

The Wheel of Fortune image was a common allegorical image in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. The immediate inspiration is likely to be Petrarch's "Triumph of Fortune." I don't see anything about the early images that suggests any heretical connotations.

HANGED MAN

Moakley (1966) suggested that the Hanged Man image was a "shame drawing." She documents that traitors were often represented in this manner in graffiti or wall drawings. It is conceivable that some would have seen the image as St. Peter, who was crucified in the inverted position, but that is a stretch since the Tarot image really doesn't fit the description in the apocryphal Acts of Peter (James, 1924). Nevertheless, we cannot simply dismiss the possibility since Latin manuscripts of this work with its Gnostic connotations did exist in Europe. The iconography might have entered the Renaissance mindset through Dante, but that possibility is quite complex and will have to await the following chapter.

The simplest interpretation would seem to be allegorical—the need to reverse material values in order to progress in self-development. This would explain why the image is shown holding bags of money on two of the early cards (Kaplan I:114, 130). This theme may be an obscure reference to the reversal of secular values and the ascetic poverty of the Cathari and Spiritual Franciscans, but it could also be a perfectly orthodox reference as well.

APOCALYPTIC TRADITION IN WESTERN ART

Many of the remaining cards in the Tarot share imagery with the Western artistic tradition associated with the book of Revelation. This tradition is unfamiliar to the Tarot community, and now seems a convenient point to interrupt our analysis and introduce it. Betts (1998) introduced the idea that the Tarot is based on an apocalyptic vision and the following may be seen as a follow-up on his original insight.

The book of Revelation records a series of prophetic visions, in the tradition of Old Testament prophets such as Ezekiel. The visual imagery inspired Western Christian artists as early as the fourth century. The result was an orthodox artistic tradition that was pervasive in Christian Europe. Having investigated this tradition, I have personally become convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that some of the Tarot symbols are based on this tradition. For example, the Emperor/Pope symbols, with their potential connection to the World Emperor and Angelic Pope of Joachimism, frequently appear together in this tradition.

James (1931) points out that the beginnings of the artistic tradition are found in mosaics of Roman Churches of the 4th century, e.g., St. Pudentiana. He documents ten illustrated manuscripts of Revelation between the 8th and 12th century. The manuscripts are from Italy, then Spain, then Germany. Perhaps inspired by the popularity of Joachim's apocalyptic vision, there was a great increase in the number of illustrated manuscripts in the 13th to 15th centuries. James (1931) documents ninety-two manuscripts and admits that this is far from a complete list. Manuscripts from this active period are most abundant in England and Northern France.

These traditional images do not only appear in illustrated manuscripts. They appear in mosaics, stained glass, tapestries, frescoes, bas-reliefs, oil paintings, and almost every other conceivable medium. A remarkable book by van der Meer (1978) contains 228 plates with illustrative examples. He provides a map of the location of significant examples and the geographic spread is impressive: British Isles—15, Scandinavia/Russia—7, Germany—36, Austria—7, Czechoslovakia—2, Low Countries—11, France—78, Spain/Portugal—28, Italy and Balkans—34. So the tradition

was pervasive throughout Europe and the imagery appears in both religious and secular art (Emmerson, 1992).

We will point out the Tarot symbols which appear to draw on this artistic tradition as we go through the rest of the cards, but by way of introduction, we can take the panorama that van der Meer (1978) chose as his Frontispiece. It shows Christ enthroned in a Mandalora (here only partial) and surrounded by the four beasts (here represented by angels). This immediately calls to mind the later World card. Christ is illustrated with a book in his lap and his hand extended in the familiar papal blessing seen in the Tarot Pope image. In the background are angels emerging from clouds blowing elongated trumpets, much as they appear on the Judgment card. The background also shows the "New Jerusalem" which is found on the early World cards. The image is taken from a French Book of Hours c1410. This panorama suggests significant overlap between Tarot imagery and this pervasive Apocalyptic art tradition.

The familiar image of the World card as a triumphant figure in a mandalora surrounded by the four beasts doesn't actually appear in any of the early cards. Nevertheless, it will serve to illustrate how tightly the later Tarot image might be connected with the Apocalyptic tradition. James (1931) documents that Leo I, elected 440 AD, placed a mosaic of Christ enthroned in a mandalora with the four beasts in St. Peter's in Rome. The mosaic is long gone, but it illustrates the great age of this iconography in orthodox Christianity.

The popularity and pervasiveness of this image of the enthroned Christ can be seen in the examples documented in van der Meer (1978). He provides illustrations from the 6th century, c827, c840, c869, 1076, c1110, c1150, c1250, c1350, 1400, and a

woodblock print from 1420-1435. In an appendix, van der Meer (1978) provides a list of the known examples of Apocalyptic iconography. He apologizes for not including all of the examples of the enthroned Christ as that "would make the list impractically long." Since he then proceeds to list several hundred examples, this specific image must have been very widespread indeed!

The important point is that the apocalyptic iconography was not a rare phenomenon, hidden in esoteric manuscripts and only seen by a few. This iconography was common in churches and popular prayer books by the early 15th century. "The images were so common that the viewer would recognize them immediately" (Camille, 1992).

This apocalyptic tradition antedates Catharism and is totally orthodox. The only remote taint of heresy comes from the resurgence of popularity of the iconography in the 13th to 15th century. The resurgence was likely motivated by the popularization of Joachim by the commentaries written by the Spiritual Franciscans. However, this was simply a resurgence of the older orthodox iconography—the imagery itself was not affected in any way by Joachimism.

The earliest woodblock-printed illustrated Apocalypses appear in second quarter of the 15th century and were probably produced by the heretical Brethren of the Common Life (Klein, 1992). We have six examples of these woodblock books from the 15th century (Camille, 1992), so they are likely to have been quite popular. These were primarily picture-books (James, 1931), intended for barely literate readers. So once again, the resemblance of the Tarot symbols to the orthodox apocalyptic tradition cannot be taken as evidence of a heretical source for the Tarot, but we also cannot dismiss off-

handedly the suggestion that these perfectly orthodox images might have influenced the Tarot through the fringe Joachimite heretics who were responsible for the resurgence of the traditional imagery.

It is important to point out that the apocalyptic iconography is conspicuous in a number of the Tarot symbols—but not all of the Tarot symbols. So although the evidence indicates an influence on the Tarot, it does not indicate that this is the sole or even dominant source of the Tarot imagery. On the other side of the coin, the Tarot images leave out some of the most conspicuous elements of the traditional imagery, e.g., seven candlesticks, Christ with a sword emerging from his mouth, the devil as a dragon, four horsemen, twenty-four elders, etc. So the evidence does not support the hypothesis that the Tarot is simply another example of the traditional representation of the book of Revelation. The reasonable conclusion seem to be that this artistic tradition was another of the sources of images for the synthesis in the Tarot symbols.

There are two other minor points that must be made before we proceed. First, the woodblock books demonstrate that some of the Tarot images were quite familiar to the printers that produced the early woodblock decks. Second, scholars such as James (1931) and Camille (1992) point out that the illustrations were intended to serve as meditation or contemplation aids. So designers of images similar to the Tarot saw the imagery as something more than allegory and intended the imagery to serve a spiritual and educational purpose as well. When the gamesters recognized an image from their prayer book, some at least must have seen the images as something more than random illustrations for a card game.

DEATH

The image of Death as skeleton with scythe is almost universal in Christian art and has a direct tie to Revelation 6:8, "And I saw, and behold a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death." The most common representation in the early cards shows Death mounted (Kaplan I:90, 14, 125, 129, 131; II:272). As one of the four horsemen, Death is a very common element of the Apocalyptic tradition. For example, van der Meer (1978, plate 182) shows a woodcut, very similar to the Tarot images, with the skeleton on horseback and the fallen evil ruler and pope. The fallen figures also appear on three of the early cards (Kaplan I:90, 114,131). A similar concept appears in heretical Joachimite commentaries where the Antichrist is envisioned as being vanquished by one of the four horseman (Douie, 1932).

The skeleton/scythe also appears in images of Petrarch's "Triumph of Death" (Panofsky, 1939). In this iconology, the image is not on horseback and probably explains why two of the early cards (Kaplan I:71, 104) show Death unmounted. So, the Death image appears to be a lily-white orthodox image with known and documented contemporary sources. The only hint of heresy is through the Joachimite stimulation of the Apocalyptic tradition.

DEVIL

The Devil is an important symbol in human religion. The existence of evil seems to require a causal principle and this cause becomes personified as one pole of an archetypic duality. The image of the Devil certainly appears in the Apocalyptic tradition (van der Meer 1978) although the typical representation shows the dragon attacking the woman and child or angels thrusting the dragon into hell. However, James (1931)

describes a 9th century manuscript that has a seated and horned devil holding the end of a chain controlling five people chained by the hand. This appears to be related to later Tarot Devils, but the chain and seated posture do not appear in any of the early woodblock decks. (The Devil never appears in any of the hand painted decks).

Because the Devil is such an important figure in religious iconography, it appears in both Cathar and orthodox theology. So we cannot dismiss the possibility of a Cathar influence in this card, but neither can we confirm it because the Devil is a perfectly orthodox symbol as well! So this ambiguity continues to plague our investigation.

TOWER

The tower image is one of the most consistent in the early decks. They all show towers crumbling, falling or in flame (Kaplan I:115, 125, 129, 131; II: 272, 276, 286). The iconography of the destruction of the Tower has a long history in the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, in Judges 8:18, Gideon marks his great victory by destroying the Tower of Penuel. The image appears in the Prophets, for example Ezekiel 26:4, "They will destroy the walls of Tyre, [and] they will demolish her towers," and Zephaniah 3:6, "I have wiped out nations, their corner towers lie in ruins."

The destruction of the Tower is commonly represented in the Apocryphal tradition (e.g., van der Meer 1978, plates 143, 151) based on Revelations 14:8 and 18:10. James (1931) describes a manuscript of 894 that depicts the fall of Babylon. The cover illustration of McGinn (1979) also shows the crumbling tower. The Apocryphal tradition probably inspired the use of this image in Petrarch's Sonnet 137 "Covetous Babylon...And its high towers, enemies of heaven, and those who live in them will be burned inside and out" (McGinn, 1979).

The image also appears in the iconography of the heretics. The Beguines believed that the church of Rome was the Babylon, the great Harlot referred to in Revelation (17:5), and would be destroyed utterly and catastrophically before the beginning of the new Age of the Spirit (Emmerson, 1992). Later decks that name this card "House of God" may be referring to this heretical concept. Interestingly, the Tower card only appears in one of the early hand-painted decks (Kaplan I:115). It is a stretch, but was this card possibly omitted from the nobles' decks because it was seen as heretical?

The Tower card, like the Devil, leaves us in an ambiguous position. The image was used by both heretical and orthodox Christians. The appearance of the image in the Tarot could be influenced by Joachim-transformed Catharism. But the image also appears in totally orthodox contexts as a part of the Apocalyptic tradition.

STAR/MOON/SUN

These three cards admit of a simple, orthodox interpretation. They reflect the Renaissance fascination with astrology (e.g., Allen, 1941). This seems affirmed by the early cards that show astrologers taking measurements (Kaplan I:117, 129). They may also be influenced by the Neoplatonic cosmographic in which star, moon, and sun represent three of the spheres surrounding the earth. They also reflect a Humanist contribution since two early Sun cards show the face of Apollo (Kaplan I:73, II:273). However, they also appear as incidental background images in the Apocalyptic tradition (e.g., van der Meer, 1978, plate 143). Joachim used star, moon, and sun as a simile for his three historical periods (Douie, 1932).

There is considerable variation in the early representations of these cards. Some show just the heavenly body (Kaplan I:130f; II:273). Some show a woman or man or

cherub holding up the image (Kaplan I:72f, 99, 104; II:274). Others show more elaborate scenes, including the Milanese sheet (Kaplan II:286) which resembles the images in later Tarot decks. However, I am at a loss to find anything whatever that suggests a specifically Cathar influence anywhere in this imagery.

ANGEL

The image of the angel(s) trumpeting the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment is an integral part of the Apocalyptic tradition that goes back at least to the 9th century (James, 1931). The image appears throughout this orthodox artistic tradition (van der Meer, 1978).

As we pointed out in Section 2, the Catholic doctrine of the resurrection of the body was flatly rejected by Catharism. Without exception, the early cards show people rising from graves or tombs (Kaplan I:71, 90, 116, 128, 130; II:273). So on the basis of the evidence, we must reject the hypothesis that the Tarot is a Cathar product or was directly influenced by the original doctrine.

However, the final judgment and the resurrection of the body was still an important element of the Joachimite tradition. These events marked the end of the third and final age of history (Douie, 1932). As such, the image on the early cards could be influenced by the Catharism transformed by the Spiritual Franciscans and Joachimism. However, as usual, the image was shared with orthodox theology and can be viewed as having no connection to the dualist heresies.

WORLD

The early cards show the "New Jerusalem" in a circle or wreath with two cherubs (Kaplan I:73, 104), a woman above (Kaplan I:92, 109, 116) or an angel (Kaplan I:117, 130; II:273) or a figure that appears to be Mercury (Kaplan I:128). The iconography comes from Revelation, and I trust the reader will not be scandalized to learn that it begins the 21st Chapter: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...I saw the holy city and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of the heaven, as beautiful as a bride dressed for her husband."

This image of the New Jerusalem is an integral part of the Apocalyptic tradition with one example (van der Meer, 1978, plate 45) that is older than 827 and a manuscript example (James, 1931) from 894. And, as usual, this vision from Revelation was also a part of the Joachimite vision.

SUMMARY

To summarize our laborious journey through the symbolism of the 15th and 16th century cards—the evidence is ambiguous. The images that might suggest a Joachimism inspired by the Spiritual Franciscans also belong to a perfectly orthodox and ancient artistic tradition. There is nothing here to demonstrate an heretical input. There is nothing here to refute a heretical input.

PART IX: DANTE

It occurred to me that as we progressed through this series of studies, it was difficult to see how the many threads were woven together. As the infrastructure of Catharism was violently disrupted, its remnants were transformed by the Spiritual

Franciscans with their Joachimism and their institution of the Tertiaries and later the Confraternities. The Gnostic doctrine, inherited from the Bogomils, was supplanted by a Neoplatonic Apocalypticism. Critical pieces in this puzzle are the result of relatively recent scholarship and are not well known in the Tarot community.

It occurred to me that one way to tie the pieces together would be to perform an experiment. If all of these esoteric dynamics were indeed a part of the culture, then we should be able to detect them in that culture, independent of the Tarot. We have an excellent, well-documented, and influential example of the intellectual and spiritual dynamics of the transition period in Dante's *Divine Comedy.* As one of the best-studied works of European literature, we have a considerable data base of evidence and commentary to draw upon.

So I propose to examine Dante and his epic poem to determine if the spiritual dynamics proposed in earlier chapters were, in fact, an influential element in the Italian culture that the Renaissance inherited. I am not going to test the hypothesis that Dante's masterpiece is the specific source of Tarot imagery. Dante's potential influence, primarily exercised through Petrarch, will be the subject of a future essay. For the moment, we are concerned with whether or not the Franciscan, Joachimist, Tertiary/Confraternity transformation of the earlier Cathar heresy can be detected in a well-studied example of Pre-Renaissance writing.

To begin with, *The Divine Comedy,* written between 1308 and 1321 is not Cathar in its doctrine. The sixth circle of the Inferno is the plain of the heretics, and the Cathars are not even mentioned (Bemrose, 2000). Doctrines characteristic of Catharism, such as rejection of the Incarnation, are nowhere to be found in Dante.

There is a clear tie to earlier developments in Provence through the poetry of the troubadours (Bemrose, 2000). Dante was a student of the earlier poets (Barolini, 1993) and the role of Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy* recalls the concept of "courtly love." There are three dreams in the "Purgatorio" that deal explicitly with the theme of worthy and unworthy lovers (Hollander, 1983). This connection doesn't take us very far, however, since the troubadours had little to do with Catharism (Gere, 1955).

I detect only one possible remnant of Gnosticism in the poem. As I will point out, its origin may not be Gnostic, but to be thorough in our investigation, it needs to be mentioned. This one remnant may be Dante's description of Satan. At the pit of the Inferno, Dante and his guide Virgil find the Devil—embedded and entrapped. Viewed from the perspective of heaven, the Devil is entrapped head-down. That image may be Gnostic in origin (Freccero, 1986).

Bousset (1913) points out that the Gnostic myth of the Anthropos depicts the "first man" as thrown headlong into material existence. The myth is explicitly referred to in the Gnostic "Acts of Peter" (James, 1924) where Peter explains one of the reasons why he requested that he be crucified upside-down: "For the first man, whose image I bear, thrown downward with the head."

So, at a critical turning point in *The Divine Comedy,* there may be a reference to a traditional Gnostic mythic concept. Dante was an iconoclast (Bemrose, 2000). It is easy to envision him as giggling for weeks over slipping in a heretical Gnostic image! But, at the same time, a single reference in a huge epic drama cannot be given unskeptical affirmation. This is because the image may also have a simple orthodox interpretation.

The orthodox interpretation is in Plato's Timaeus (43e). Plato describes the confusion and the disorder of the newly incarnate soul. The "circles" of reason and passion in the soul are disrupted when it is yoked to a mortal body.

> The circles barely held together...their motion was unregulated, now reversed, now side-long, now inverted. It was as when a man stands on his head, resting it on the earth, and holds his feet aloft by thrusting them against something; in such a case right and left both of the man and of the spectators appear reversed to the other party (Hamilton and Cairns, 1938).

But if there is only a single (questionable) reference to Gnostic heresy in the *Divine Comedy,* does that mean that the masterpiece is free of heretical implications? The answer is a clear *NO!!* One of the most influential interpreters of Dante, de Salvio (1936), provides convincing arguments that, without his politically powerful patrons, Dante would have been dragged before the Inquisition. We must investigate that claim carefully because it bears on our understanding of how the transformed concepts of Catharism might have been transmitted to 15th century Italy when the Tarot first appears.

Fourteenth century clerical commentators were well aware of Dante's unorthodox tendencies (Hollander, 1993). It is certainly true that Dante deviated from orthodox doctrine, denying, for example, the efficacy of indulgences and prayers for the dead (de Salvio, 1936). Dante is open in his condemnation of corruption in the church (Hawkins, 1993) and of the papacy's attempts to assume temporal power. This was a serious issue in light of a papal letter of 1300:

> The Bishop of Rome enjoys absolute supremacy over the Commune of Florence, over Tuscany, over all kings and men on earth. Every man must yield to the highest hierarch of the Church. It is madness to follow a contrary doctrine and to belittle the authority of the Holy See; to attack the full power that God has granted us entails a suspicion of heresy.(de Salvio, 1936, 51).

So when Dante places many former popes in the Inferno and notable heretics in Purgatorio, that suspicion of heresy gains verisimilitude.

Nevertheless, the hypothesis of a direct influence from Catharism (de Salvio, 1936) seems overdrawn, even in light of the bending-over-backward liberalism that we are attempting to maintain in this series of essays. De Salvio points out that Cathar enclaves still existed in Italy during Dante's lifetime. The northern Italian city-states were still havens of refuge for an active and open expression of Catharism. When Dante was born in Florence, perhaps one third of the noble families were openly sympathetic to the Cathari or had a Perfecti or Perfecta as a family member (de Salvio, 1936). But his arguments for Dante being a relic Cathar are inconsistent with the lack of any characteristic Cathar dogma in *The Divine Comedy*.

The vision of a transformed Catharism still remains the stronger hypothesis. That transformation was largely effected through the Spiritual Franciscans, so let us begin there. Is there evidence that Dante was aware of and influenced by the Spiritual Franciscans? The answer is a clear *YES.*

Dante studied philosophy and theology at the Franciscan school at Santa Croce (Bemrose, 2000) which had been strongly influenced by the Spiritual Franciscan (Hawkins, 1993). In the "Paradisio" (xii:121-126), Dante has Bonaventure comment on the controversy between the Spirituals and the Conventuals (Costa, 1981). Canto XI of "Paradisio" is a glorification of poverty that is virtually a declaration of the Fraticelli position (de Salvio, 1975). Indeed, the Fraticelli cited the Paradisio in defense of their position (Douie, 1932). We know that Dante read heretical works by Ubertino of Casale (McGinn, 1979). The biographies of many of the souls that Dante encounters are taken

directly from the chronicles of the Franciscan Salimbene (Coulton, 1907). I have found several websites that claim Dante was a Franciscan Tertiary, but I have been unable to confirm that.

There seems little doubt that Dante was aware of the controversy within the Franciscan order and that his sympathies lay with the Spirituals. But the strongest influence seems to lie with the Spirituals' interpretation of Joachim. Apocalyptic themes and symbols appear throughout Dante's poetry in general (Shapiro, 1983) and *The Divine Comedy* in particular (Herzman, 1992). Dante's opinion of Joachim becomes clear when he places his soul in Paradise ("Paradisio" xii:140f).

Traces of Joachimist symbols are scattered throughout *The Divine Comedy*. Davis (1993) points out that veiled references to the anticipated "world ruler" occur in all three major parts of the epic: "Inferno," "Purgatorio," and "Paradisio." Hawkins (1993) points out imagery drawn from the apocalyptic artistic tradition, such as the twenty-four elders and the four winged beasts. Reeves and Hirsch-Reich (1972) argue that the vision of stars formed into a great eagle (sixth level of Paradisio) was probably inspired by one of the figurae in Joachim.

Some of the most direct references to Spiritualist interpretations of Joachim occur at the conclusion of the "Purgatorio" (Kaske, 1983). During the great procession, the eagle of the empire swoops down and leaves its feathers on the chariot of the church—turning it into a monster with a prostitute as its rider (Davis, 1993). Beatrice says that a "five hundred five ten" will come to kill the whore. The solution to her puzzle involves the Roman Numerals DVX and probably derives from Joachim's reference to the "novus dux" (i.e., new leader) who would appear to rebuild Christian Society (Reeves, 1976).

One further aspect of *The Divine Comedy* needs to discussed: Dante's concept of the spiritual life is very individualistic (Dinsmore, 1901). The whole poem is an individualistic quest—sacraments and church liturgy play no role here (Ryan, 1993). This concept of spirituality as a personal journey is a central tenet of Catharism. However, it is not unique to Catharism and is common to all of the Medieval heresies.

But while this emphasis on personal mysticism shows a sympathy for the heretics, it's immediate inspiration in Dante is far more likely to be orthodox Neoplatonic mysticism. The paradigm involves an individual pilgrim moving through a Neoplatonic cosmograph (Herzman, 1992). Viewed at this mystical level (Luke, 1975), the Neoplatonic underpinnings are most clear in the "Paradisio" where Dante and his new guide Beatrice ascend through the planetary spheres, the sphere of fixed stars, and the Primum Mobile (Jacoff 1993). At the summit of the cosmos, Dante is granted the Beatific Vision. This personal journey, retracing the steps involved in the creation of the material world, lies at the center of Neoplatonic mysticism and seems a sufficient explanation for the spiritual individualism in Dante.

So what have we learned from examining Dante? At the beginning of the 14th century, enclaves of Catharism still existed in Italy, but their Gnostic dualism had disappeared from the culture, at least insofar as that intellectual culture was exemplified by Dante. Dante acknowledges his indebtedness to the Provencal poets. In an iconoclastic coup, he may possibly have borrowed the image of the "first man" from Gnosticism. But the dualistic doctrine appears nowhere.

On the other hand, the transformed heretical ideas appear prominently in Dante. The opposition to a corrupt Church and the emphasis on individual spirituality, common

to all of the Medieval heresies, is clearly evident. Dante praises the apostolic poverty of the Fraticelli and borrows concepts from Spiritual writers. There appears to be consensus among modern scholars that Joachimism played a significant role in Dante's symbolism.

So many of the heterodox spiritual threads that we have documented in other parts of the Italian culture all come together in Dante. In my opinion, this lends credence to the idea that this spiritual dynamic was a part of the intellectual milieu in the early 14th century. This synthesis carried into the 15th century and was at least encouraged by the popularity and influence of Dante's masterpiece.

Conclusions

This series of studies examined the hypothesis that the Tarot symbols are based on a Gnostic model. The evidence argues against any direct influence from the ancient Gnostics. Their elaborate myths are not evident in the Tarot symbols, their literature was lost, and their concepts aren't preserved in the late Medieval literature. The symbols of dualism in the Tarot are more likely derived from proximal sources such as Neoplatonism and the dualism inherent in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

But if the ancient Gnostic systems were lost, perhaps their influence was transmitted through the Cathar heretics. The Cathari had inherited a Christianized version of Gnosticism through the Bogomils. Enclaves of Cathari still existed in Italy in the 15th century when the Tarot first appears. Nevertheless, a careful examination of Cathar doctrine reveals a number of beliefs that are contradicted in the Tarot. The evidence doesn't support a direct contribution from the Cathari.

Violence and persecution destroyed the infrastructure of the Cathari, but not the spirit of rebellion. The resistance to a corrupt church, the drive for individual spirituality,

the sense of apocalyptic destiny, the idealism of asceticism and Apostolic poverty remained. The Spiritual Franciscans with their institution of the Tertiaries and their adoption of Joachimism stepped in to fulfill these needs. The common believers, never knowledgeable about or attached to the obscure Gnostic doctrine, were won over and the heresy was transformed. The movement remained rebellious and heretical, but was no longer Gnostic in doctrine.

Beyond this point, the decision on heretical elements in the iconology of the Tarot symbols becomes ambiguous. Heresy continued into the 15th century in Italy where the power of the city-states thwarted direct intervention by the Church. The Spiritual Franciscans certainly stepped over into heresy, but their idealism was greatly admired by the people. Through the confraternities, they provided an orthodox outlet for personal devotion. Elements of the iconology that appear to come from the Apocalyptic tradition or Joachimism might have come from the heretics, but might also have come from sources that shared these concepts and considered them orthodox.

The source of the ambiguity is the liberal attitude toward ideas in Renaissance Italy. When the pope ordered Florence to turn over temporal control to him, they said no. They did not consider themselves heretics because they disobeyed the pope. They considered the pope to the Joachimist evil pope--he was the heretic. So orthodoxy had no simple definition--it certainly could not be defined as submission to the will of the prophesied harlot of Babylon. An insightful interpretation is provided by Robb (1907): "the more intelligent among the faithful majority who retained their loyalty to the traditional system could not but be affected in some degree by the liberal and independent ideas which were in the air."

So the simplest, perhaps also the most conservative, conclusion is that there is no heretical influence on the Tarot symbols, but while there is no unequivocal evidence to support heretical influence, there is also no unequivocal evidence to disprove it. Critical elements of the iconology were shared by heretical, heterodox, and orthodox ideologies. Any of those ideologies could have produced the symbols.

We must also keep in mind that in 15th century Italy, the distorted zeal and venom of the Inquisition remained. Although their authority was negligible within the powerful city-states, they remained insidious elsewhere. Recall that in 1412, they dug up fifteen dead heretics and burned their bodies (Lambert, 1998)! In such an environment, we should not lightly dismiss the possibility that an heretical enclave used shared orthodox symbols to express themselves. So the door cannot be securely bolted against the possibility of heretical input.

Our explorations also brought to light two new possibilities that are new to the Tarot community. The first is the possibility that some of the Tarot iconology comes from the artistic tradition associated with the book of Revelation, particularly Death, Tower, Judgment, and World. The relevance of this to our current investigation is ambiguous. The imagery is perfectly orthodox, but its familiarity in 15th century Italy was stimulated by the Spiritual Franciscan commentaries on Joachim. The broader relevance of this potential source of symbolism to our understanding of the early Tarot is beyond the scope of the present studies. That subject deserves a study of its own.

The second new idea was the suggestion that the confraternities were a reasonable candidate for the originators of the Tarot. The relevance of this to the present study was that the confraternities were a special project of the Franciscans and were strongly

influenced by Spiritualist ideas. Once again, the broader relevance of this suggestion to our understanding of the early Tarot is beyond the scope of the present studies. That subject deserves a study of its own.

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