

# ***THE BRAZEN PILLARS & THE HIGH PRIESTESS***

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Though, it is not uncommon for many Freemasons to dismiss the association with such superstitious divinatory playthings out of hand, there is a long and demonstrably established connection between the Tarot and the craft of Freemasonry. Freemasons such as Antoine De Gébelin, Eliphas Levi, Arthur Edward Waite and Paul Foster Case have been the primary catalysts at every crucial juncture in the evolution and development of this strange and enigmatic deck of cards. A notable example of this connection is the appearance of Jachin and Boaz, the Pillars which stood on the porch of King Solomon's Temple, on the Justice XI, Hierophant V cards and, most conspicuously, on the High Priestess II card in the Rider-Waite tarot deck, which we will endeavor to address in further detail in the following.

Turning our attention to the symbolism depicted on the High Priestess II card, particularly, we immediately notice the presence of the Brazen Pillars – one marked with the letter *B*, the other with the letter *J*. Of these being letters being in reference to the pillars of King Solomon's Temple, there is little doubt. The orientation of the pillars is such as to suggest that the viewer is on the porch of the Temple, with his back to the east, facing the *Sanctum Sanctorum*. This is also the orientation one has when looking at the *Etz Chaim*, with the Pillar of Severity on the left and the Pillar of Mercy on the right. Although, in personal application, the Tree corresponds to the human body as if one were to back into the image – with *Geburah* at the right shoulder and *Chesed* at the left – this is the orientation one has when performing the Qabalistic Cross, a component of the Golden Dawn's Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram.

The Hebrew letter attributed to the High Priestess is *gimel* (ג), which means 'camel' and is represented by the letter *g* in the Latin alphabet. This brings to mind the central position of the ever-present Letter G in Masonic Lodges. The gematric value of the letter *gimel* is 3, which is particularly significant apropos the preponderance of trinary symbolism found in Freemasonry, much of which will be addressed in the chapters devoted to the course of three steps on the Winding Staircase. Qabalistically, the High Priestess occupies the thirteenth path on the *Etz Chaim* – this is the path on the Middle Pillar which unites *Kether* with *Tiphareth*. The Virgin Mary-like appearance of the Priestess seems to allude to the hidden nature of this path, as it flows from the macroprosopus (*Arich Anpin*, אֵרִיךְ אֲנִפִּין, representing God the Father in *Kether*) into the microprosopus (*Ze'ir Anpin*, זְעִיר אֲנִפִּין, representing the Son of God in *Tiphareth*) and may be seen as the vehicle by which the Holy Spirit descends from God, through the Virgin's Immaculate Conception, and manifests as the Son.

The High Priestess II card also corresponds to the Moon, as evidenced by the crescent Moon at her feet, and also to the element, water. These lunar and aquatic correspondences allude to memory and the unconscious mind and, thereby, to reflectivity and depth, strengthening the hermetic concept of the macrocosm being reflected in the microcosm and vice-versa. The Priestess is depicted with a Hathor-esque headdress which, in its bovine symbolism, may be read as a nod to the Taurian precessional age – both Bat and Hathor being Taurian age deities. This is Masonically significant in that the *Anno Lucis* of Freemasonry, which adds four-thousand years to the Gregorian year, roughly marks the beginning of the Taurian age, a 2160 year period when the vernal equinox occurred in the sign of Taurus.

The attributes of the ancient Egyptian cow-goddess Bat were subsumed by Hathor during the Middle Kingdom; in time, Hathor's attributes were largely subsumed by Isis. This mythological evolution is somewhat represented in the High Priestess II card in that the Priestess, in Isiac fashion, appears to be guarding the veil which separates the viewer from the Mysteries of the *Sanctum Sanctorum*. Pomegranates, another motif found on the chapters of the Solomonic pillars, are depicted on the veil, perhaps as an allusion Persephone in her chthonic aspect, or possibly to the plentitude of the Mysteries contained therein. Lastly, we will address the scroll in the Priestess' hand, which reads "TORA". This may be interpreted to be in reference to the Jewish Torah (Hebrew; תּוֹרָה, meaning 'law' or 'teaching') which, most specifically, refers to the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Tanakh. Another interesting interpretation involves the word TORA in its anagrammatic modes: ROTA TARO ORAT TORA ATOR (which is somewhat corroborated by the Wheel of Fortune X Tarot card). This quasi-Latin sentence may be interpreted to read: "The wheel of Tarot speaks the law of Hathor". [Greer, *Tarot for Your Self: A Workbook for Personal Transformation*, Weiser, 1984, p. 27]