

10 An Emerald Tablet and a Game Board: A Quiet Bridge from Egypt to Rome and Beyond

Before we get into other bridges from Egypt to the world, here is a little chart of the basic Egyptian letters.

Egyptian Transcription			
	A, a		Kh, kh
	A, a		Kh, kh
	Y, y		S, s
	@		S, s
	W, w/U, u		Sh, sh
	B, b		Q, q
	P, p		K, k
	F, f		G, g
	M, m		T, t/T, t
	N, n		Th, th
	R, r		D, d
	H, h		J, j
	H, h		

Do not worry about the “pronunciation”. Just notice that the letters are all consonants (the “A”s at the top are either glottal stop or perhaps a kind of cross between “ah” and a short “l” as in “it”). The @ is a sign I use for a little grunt made deep down in the throat. Notice that none of these letters looks at all like the Hebrew/Phoenician letters. The artistic style is also very different.

The Egyptians wrote many pictographs and ideographs. They had symbols with single syllable sounds or even two or three syllables, and they mixed these all together in a very elaborate and artistic system that had many options. The Semitic peoples chose to stick only with consonant phonemes as their letter symbols.

When the Hebrew/Phoenicians extracted an alphabet system from the complex Egyptian writing system and spread it around the world, they created a wonderful bridge for porting ancient Egyptian wisdom secrets even to people who had never heard of Egypt. The Qabbalah held the special teachings, and in the turmoil at the end of classic Egypt much was garbled and lost along the way. But we will sort through the clues and find that the Egyptians had very clever ways of preserving and transmitting information. In our modern information society these techniques are very worth studying.

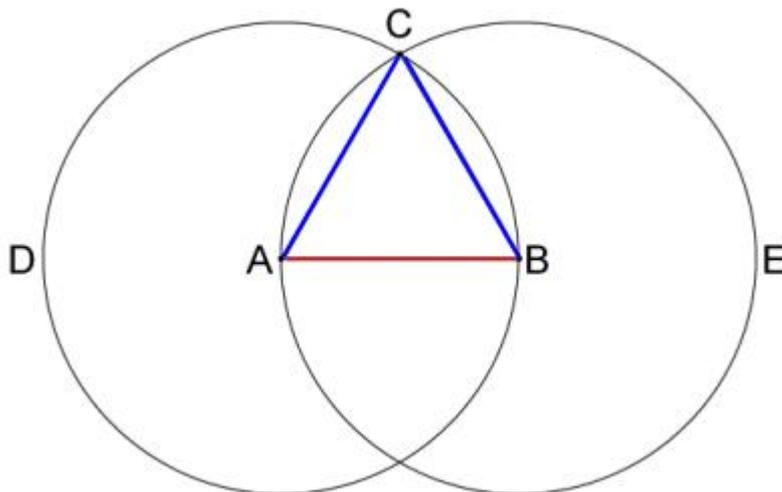
For all our vaunted high technology, vital information is frail in our society and often lost in an overwhelming welter of media partly due to lack of prioritization. We will identify some of the Egyptian technologies for preserving information in the next bridges we discuss.

The Tarot passed through many historical eras and many civilizations participated in its development. We already began exploring the influence of the Jewish Qabbalah tradition. Qabbalah as a written tradition began to appear in the late Ptolemaic period and the start of the Roman Empire. As Rome incorporated Egypt into its Empire, Egypt lost its own sovereignty, and was no longer occupied by the benign Greeks who under Alexander's leadership had driven the Persians out of Egypt. The Greeks were fascinated by Egyptian civilization, and many came to study at the great Library of Alexandria that Alexander had established. Many famous Greek writings on science and mathematics came from the work of scholars who studied in Egypt. They wrote in Greek but took many fundamental ideas from the Egyptians. As a result Western students generally do not know that many "Greek" ideas were learned from the Egyptians.

For example, Euclid, the famous Greek writer on geometry, lived in Alexandria. He put his name on his work, and deserves his reputation, but undoubtedly learned a great deal from the Egyptian scholars. His

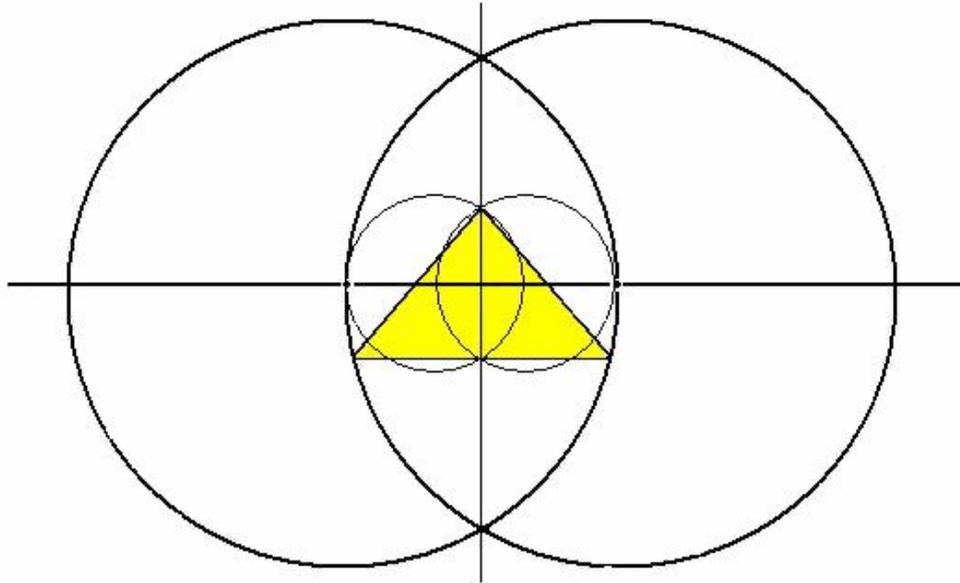
first “proof” is actually a construction that pays homage to all that he learned in Egypt about the Sacred Science of Geometry. The Greeks loved the Platonic forms, simple and symmetrical, so Euclid begins his book on plane geometry showing how to draw an equilateral triangle [the simplest “Platonic” closed plane figure] with just a compass and a straight edge. He forgot to tell us that we must draw it on a flat piece of paper, assuming we knew he meant plane geometry. In the exercise he includes a fundamental Tarot secret that I will show you goes right to the heart of Qabalah and the ancient alphabet. Almost nobody notices it, and mathematicians would probably scoff at the idea Euclid was a Qabbalist.

Draw a fairly long straight line segment on a piece of paper with a straight edge. Then anchor your compass at some point along the line and draw a circle (Ra). At a point where your circle cuts the straight line anchor your compass again and then place your compass pencil point on the center point of your first circle. Draw a second circle. This second circle will cut the first circle (actually at two points, one above and one below the straight line, if you draw a complete circle.) Then take your straight edge and connect first one center, then the other center to the point where the two circles intersect. We will arbitrarily choose the point above your original straight line segment. Those two straight lines and the segment of your original line between the two centers will generate an equilateral triangle, because each of those three lines is a radius of one of those equal-sized circles.



The above drawing is what students for several thousand years have seen when they first open up their geometry texts. What I will now

show you is how Euclid hid in this little construction the true angle of the Great Pyramid for those with eyes to see. Here it is revealed.



You can see that our first drawing of Euclid's construction is now embedded in a larger repetition of that first drawing. The yellow triangle is the outline of the Great Pyramid and gives us the symbol for Isis and the Hebrew letter Daleth. The apex is the same as the one in the smaller drawing. However, we have drawn a second straight line parallel to the first straight line and through the downward reflected apex, where the two smaller circles also intersect. The two new large intersecting circles take the width of the whole first pair of intersected circles as the radius and are drawn in the same way, but with the larger radius. Where the second straight line intersects the two large circles, defines the two bottom corners of the Great Pyramid silhouette. Then simply draw straight lines connecting those two points to the original upper apex. Euclid was hiding Sacred Geometry and a "thank you" to the Egyptians for a magnificent "construction" within his first construction proof of "ordinary" geometry. The mathematical and engineering aspects of this hidden construction of the Great Pyramid by Euclid are worth further study. Who knows what other gems lie hidden in his Elements of Geometry?

This drawing and much more fascinating material on sacred geometry can be seen online at:

<http://www.ancient-wisdom.com/sacredgeometry.htm>

Now I would like to briefly introduce a document known as the Emerald Tablet. This is what the text looks like from a rubbing or transcription made by someone from the lost tablet.



This text dates possibly from the Ptolemy period, but tradition holds that Alexander found it among the books being collected for his Great Library, which would make it earlier than Ptolemaic. Alexander is said to have carried the little tablet with him on his journeys, and, when he died, the tablet returned to Egypt with his mummy as part of his burial goods.

We do not know the exact historical facts, but later both the tablet and the mummy of Alexander disappeared, though perhaps not at the same time. The mummy was still there in early Roman Empire times and the Roman Emperors would come visit it. Some say that during the 1st century a popular philosopher and teacher named Dionysius of Tyana traveled around the known world visiting the graves of pharaohs and emperors. When he saw the Emerald Tablet, he either took it or made a copy to use in his teaching. Anyhow, the tablet is lost but the text

inscribed on it survives and was handed down by Arab scholars and later was translated not only into Arabic, but Latin. Later, the famous mathematician and physicist Isaac Newton specially made an English translation as part of his research into Qabalah. The Emerald Tablet is short, but forms an important early document that shows Egyptian and Semitic cultural exchange occurring, and it is an important document regarding the transfer of the early Tarot Tradition of Ancient Egypt into the Middle East and Europe. It is well worth studying.

The language of the tablet is not the earliest Semitic alphabet writing, but, if you study the letters, you will begin to recognize them. So the tablet is NOT in Egyptian, and the language is written in a dialect using the old Semitic alphabet. I transcribed the text into the pure old Hebrew/Phoenician alphabet. Then I made a translation and added some notes.

After my initial promising explorations of early Qabalah, I realized that the source was Egypt, and the Qabalah was just a bridge to bring cultural wisdom out of Egypt. Qabalah itself made lots of creative contributions to the world, but to understand how the wisdom ideas linked back to ancient Egypt I had to investigate ancient Egypt. So I began earnestly studying the Egyptian language and art as keys to discovering answers.

In my study of Tarot I realized that in Europe and many other places it played the role of a card game. There was also some evidence of cartomancy, the use of cards as an oracle to understand how a situation was trending and how it perhaps could be influenced or at least better understood.

Most if not all the card games in the world may have evolved directly or indirectly from Tarot. The problem I found was that archaeologists in Egypt had not found any playing cards. Egyptians used papyrus for writing and painting, but it apparently was not so suitable for frequent manipulation of small papyrus rectangles. So I started just looking at various kinds of Egyptian games, and quickly found a game board that already appeared in the 1st dynasty. In fact, the very first pharaoh used the glyph for this game board in his name.



Men



a



Cartouche of Mena

Scholars read the pharaoh's cartouche as Men-a, but it is highly possible that the name should be read as A-men. This name is probably a title, but it is a curious name for a pharaoh. Taken separately, the "a" is a term of endearment, indicating high esteem, and is rightly a prefix, but Egyptians often read their cartouche names in a special order for ritual reasons. The letter that looks like ripples is "n" to confirm the final letter of the syllable "men". The "men" glyph is a pictograph of a game board with pawns on it viewed from the side. The word itself, however, means foundation. So the people may have called him "The Precious Foundation" because he first unified North and South Egypt into a single country. In future this unity of Egypt's two "halves" was to be a hallmark of a successful pharaoh.

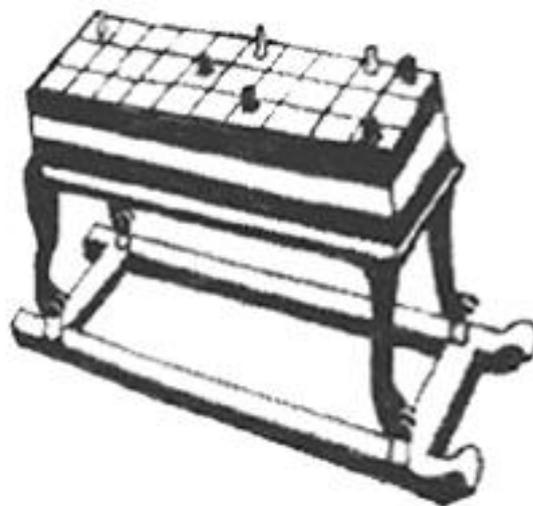
However, Egyptian is rarely so simple. The word "Amen" means "hidden". Sure enough, there is an important Egyptian deity called Amen. Sometimes he is just called "Men" or "Min", which goes with the game board glyph. He is closely associated with the sun god Ra, being the part of him that is not seen, or perhaps the time when he is not seen. This deity also is a god of fertility, both human and agricultural, which links him with the energy of the sun.



Amen

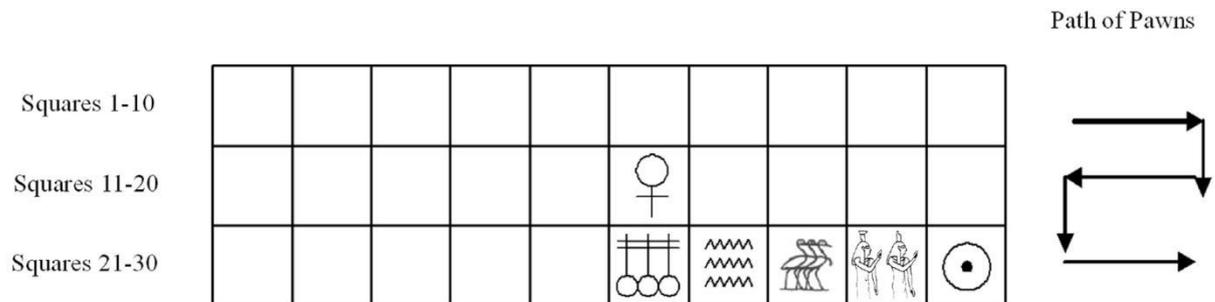
So various game boards turn out to have been a part of Egyptian civilization from the earliest times, and they were not only for amusement, but held deep symbolic meanings. From the side view it is not clear how the board is laid out. Fortunately we have art showing people playing the game throughout classical Egyptian history, and there is a short text that discusses the game board as well as drawings of game boards scratched on bricks or stone and some fragmented pictures of the board that include some of the images people sometimes put on the board. The text actually describes the board layout in a poetic and humorous fashion. (A very extensive collection of material about extant game boards, their designs, with a translation and detailed discussion of the “Game Text” was compiled by Professor Peter Piccione in his Doctoral Dissertation.)

To give an idea of what this board looked like, here is a sketch of an example in the Cairo Museum that came from the tomb of Tutankhamen. He had three other smaller such game boards (without the elaborate playing table.) The boards could have drawers for holding the pawns and wooden throwing sticks or knucklebone dice.

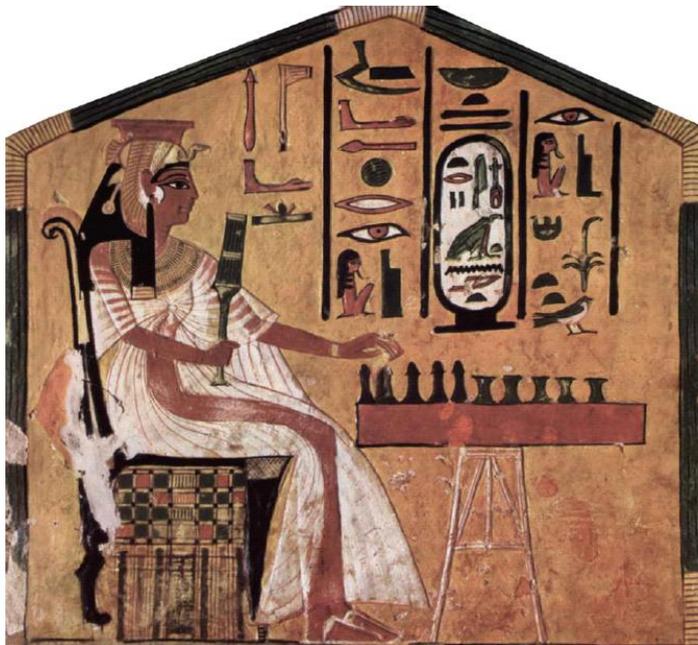


The name of the game was “Senet”, a word that means to pass beyond. We do not know detailed rules of the game, but there were no doubt a number of variations. In general it was a kind of race game between two players in which each player tried to move his team of pawns across the board as fast as possible. The goal was to get all of one’s own pawns to the end of the board’s pathway and then let them exit the board. Below is a sketch showing the probable path followed in one popular version. The board has three rows of ten squares for a total of

30 squares. The pawns were first arranged on the “top” row (squares 1-10) and then proceeded to move along the board “boustrophedon” (back and forth as when a bull plows). Many boards had only empty squares, but some put glyphs at key places. A “life” glyph could appear at square 15, and squares 26-30 were all special and had special glyphs.



Piccione noticed that at some point people began using the Game Board as a divination tool. When playing a game, the two players sat opposite each other facing the opposite long sides of the board. When using the board as an oracle, a single person (or a couple) would sit on one long side only. When divining they usually would erect a little booth made of papyrus and other plant material (just like the Jewish Succoth booths) and set up a little table in the booth so they were in a sacred space. Divination was a sacred ritual.



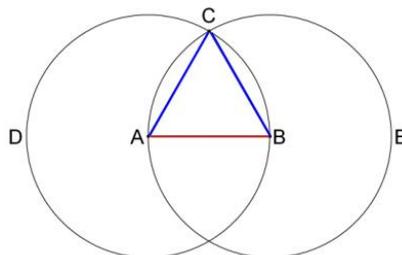
Queen Nefertari sits in a booth and consults the oracle about her future life.

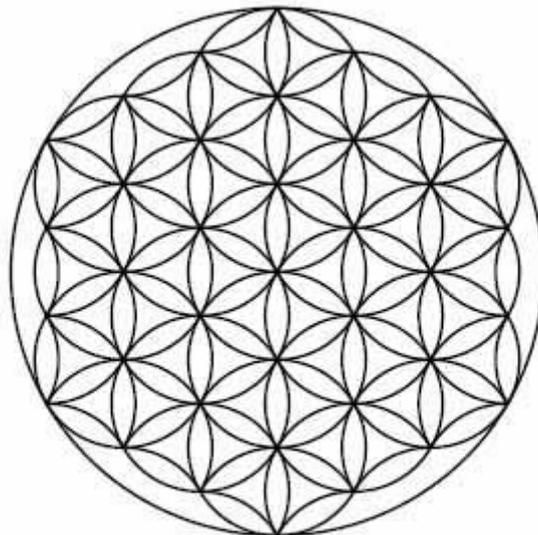
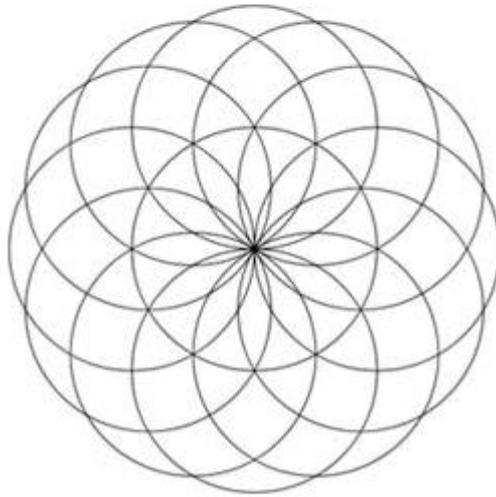
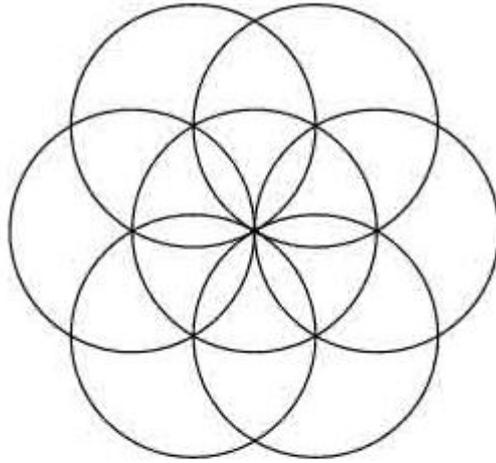


In the Papyrus of Ani we see Ani and his wife sitting in a booth in front of a Senet Oracle Board and consulting about their future lives together. Outside the booth we see their tomb. The two human-headed birds are their souls waiting for the decision about what they will do in their future life.

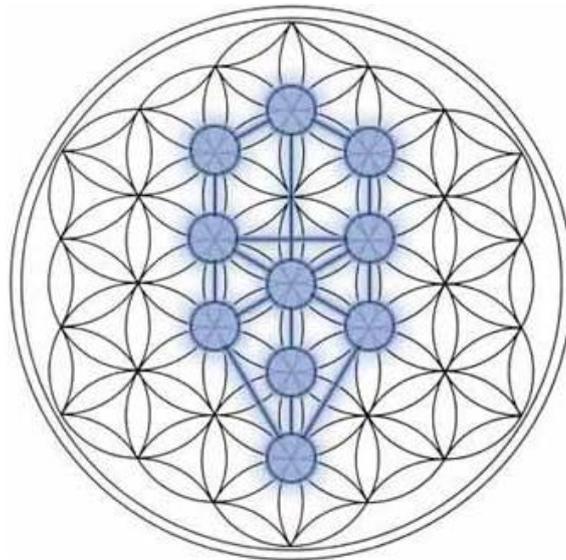
As I studied the Game Text, it became clear that many of the images on the squares were recognizable as symbols of the major Egyptian gods. It also became clear that the Game Board was a calendar. Perhaps the Game Board was like a deck of cards. Instead of shuffling and pulling cards a diviner threw sticks to get numbers that indicated the “card” for the reading. The Senet Game did not survive long in popularity after Rome took over and gradually fell into disuse. However, it occurred to me that perhaps we could find evidence of the details of the oracle process. This would be part of the ritual and spiritual tradition of Egypt, and not so much the play of the Game Board. So there might be one or more other layouts specifically suited to divination.

In any case, if this turned out to be an early form of the Tarot, then we would have a mechanism for the transmitting of large amounts of ancient Egyptian wisdom into other lands through a medium that could be played as a popular game (like Tarot) and that also could function as an oracle like the Tarot. So game boards became a key technology for hiding and preserving important information through turbulent times.





[Flower of Life](#)



Tree of Life embedded in the Flower of Life.
Image from Crystalinks

10 Study Questions:

- * Discuss the various “bridges” that foreign visitors to Egypt created to guide important parts of Egypt’s fading wisdom to preservation in the rest of the world.
 - A. The Hebrew/Phoenician alphabet for simple written communication.
 - B. The Greek scholars systematizing and translating material on Egyptian Sacred Geometry and other scientific topics..
 - C. The “Emerald Tablet” as an example of early Qabbalistic writing to translate Egyptian Tarot ideas about the universe and man’s role into a brief but informative document.
 - D. The Senet Game Board as both a popular amusement and an Oracle containing hidden Egyptian wisdom.

- * Can you identify Ra and Isis in Euclid’s first construction proof?

- * Can you identify Osiris in the same drawing?

- * Study the Emerald Tablet (in my **Senet Tarot of Ancient Egypt**, Part 1, pp 117-128, a free download from the bentylightgarden.com Store Menu.) If possible, use a Hebrew dictionary to help you. See how many Tarot Trumps you can find hidden in the Tablet (including the name of the board glyph itself.) Later articles will add information to help you probe deeper into the Emerald Tablet

- * Why would Isaac Newton want to translate the Emerald Tablet into English?
- * What symptoms are there that the Senet Oracle Game Board is a key to very early development of the Tarot in Egypt?
- * Why would people start using a game as an oracle?
- * At the end of the article are more intersecting circles drawn from the original two of Euclid. They develop into a pattern known as the Flower of Life. This can be seen in a very old temple to Osiris in Abydos, Egypt. How much do you think Euclid knew about the Flower of Life?
- * In the last drawing of the Flower of Life certain lines are highlighted revealing inner structure. What do you see there? Can you find the mathematically symmetrical version?
- * How does this article relate to the Series Overview?