18 Tarot During the 19th Dynasty

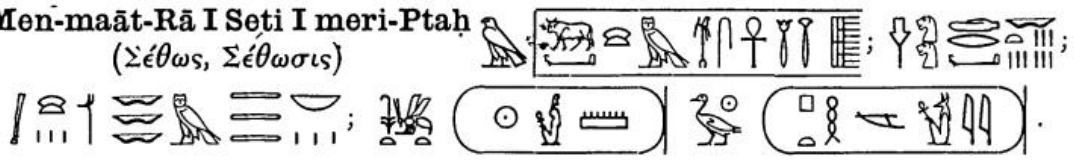
The 19th dynasty started off well with pharaoh Ramessu (Rameses I). This was the beginning of what would be the Ramesside era with many pharaohs of the 19th and 20th dynasties taking the name Rameses. This emphasized the lesson in the Shedy that all the gods are born of Ra, and this includes of course each pharaoh of Egypt, who was always called by the title, “Son of the Sun”.

For some strange reason the second pharaoh of dynasty 19 chose the name Sety. Sety means Follower of Set, and Set came to be known as the “Devil” in Egyptian mythology. This pejorative meaning was a misunderstanding of Set’s role in Egyptian civilization.

Photograph of mummy of Sety I, Cairo Museum

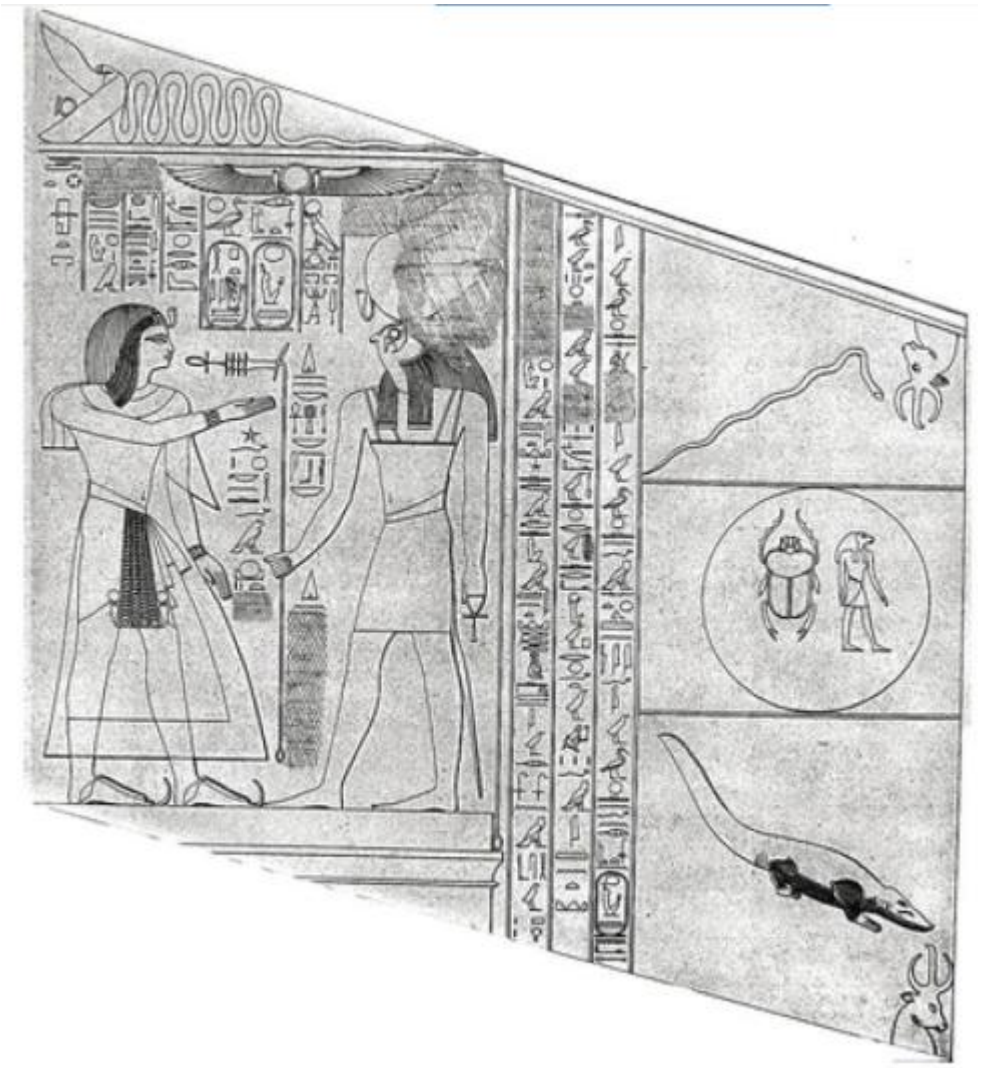
Here are Sety’s titles:

Men-maāt-Rā I Seti I meri-Ptaḥ
(Σέθως, Σέθωσις)

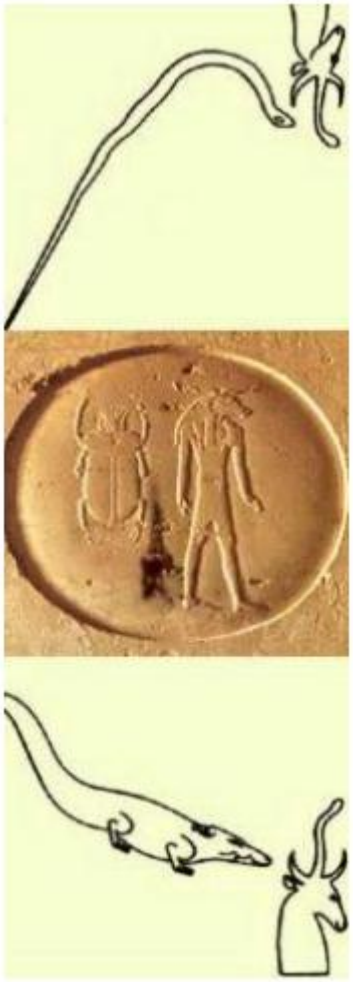


Sety's "King of North and South Egypt" title is Men Maat Ra (or Maat Men Ra). His "Son of the Sun" title is Sety, Mery Peteh. The first title means "The Senet Board is the Truth of Ra" or "Truth is the Foundation [Senet Board] of Ra. Sety saw the Oracle Board as the foundation of universal Truth (Maat). He called himself A Fellow of Set, Beloved of Peteh (Ptah). Peteh is an "opener" god, a creator deity associated with Baba. In the Memphis triad Peteh is the spouse of Sekhmet (Strength Trump and operator of the Solar Eye). Baba is the Fool card and holds the Lunar Eye (the Egyptian code for the **Book of Changes**). Peteh was associated with craftsmen and metal workers. Sety was a strong leader and finished the construction of the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, a huge project probably begun by Horemheb. He also built a remarkable large temple at Abydos next to the Osireion (Temple of Osiris, the Magician card of the Tarok), a remarkable megalithic temple possibly much older than Sety's temple. Because Abydos was the traditional location where Osiris was killed by Set, Sety wrote his name in that location as Thety, using the Knot of Isis glyph.

Sety's first great contribution to the Tarot tradition was to design a cover illustration for the **Litany of Ra**. This cover illustration became standard for all royal copies of the **Litany of Ra**, and each pharaoh just substituted his own portrait into the tableau of his initiation into the Litany's Shedy secrets by Amen Ra, an initiation that anchored him into life as an immortal.



Here is a photo of the cover card Sety designed for the **Litany of Ra**, showing Amen Ra initiating Sety into the secrets of the Senet Tarot Shedy System. On the right we see three special card images that he added to the set, but without any labels or commentary. The middle panel is Sety's design for the Sun card. It is a solar disk with a scarab (Khepera) on the left for the creative daylight phase, and a humanoid figure with an animal head that represents the nighttime phase (Awef). Later horns were added and it became a form of a ram-headed human. The upper panel shows the serpent Apep (the navel cord) and a precursor of Set. Below is a crocodile, a minion of Set, suggesting fears and fantasies. These are emanations of Ra, but swiftly vanish when the sun arrives. The little antelope heads with a third horn mean "fast", the way shadows disappear when light arrives.



The three cards added by Sety I to the Tarot deck. The middle card is the sun, Ra. The upper card is Apep, and the lower card is probably Sebek.

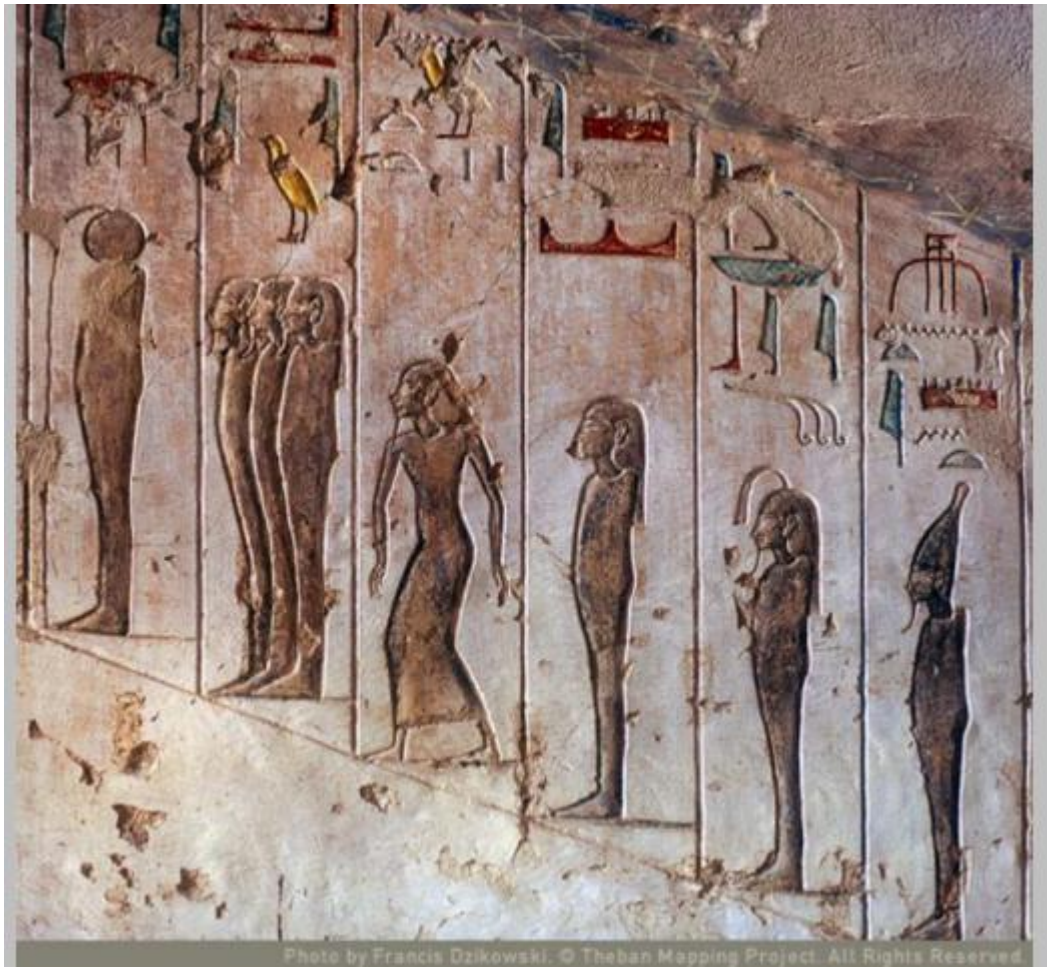
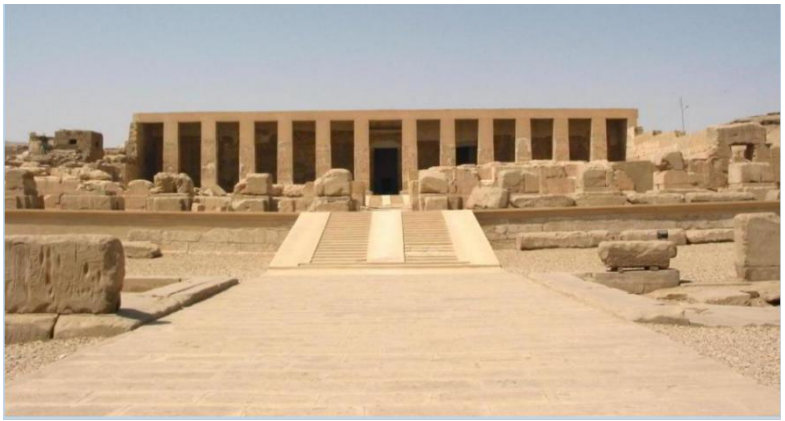
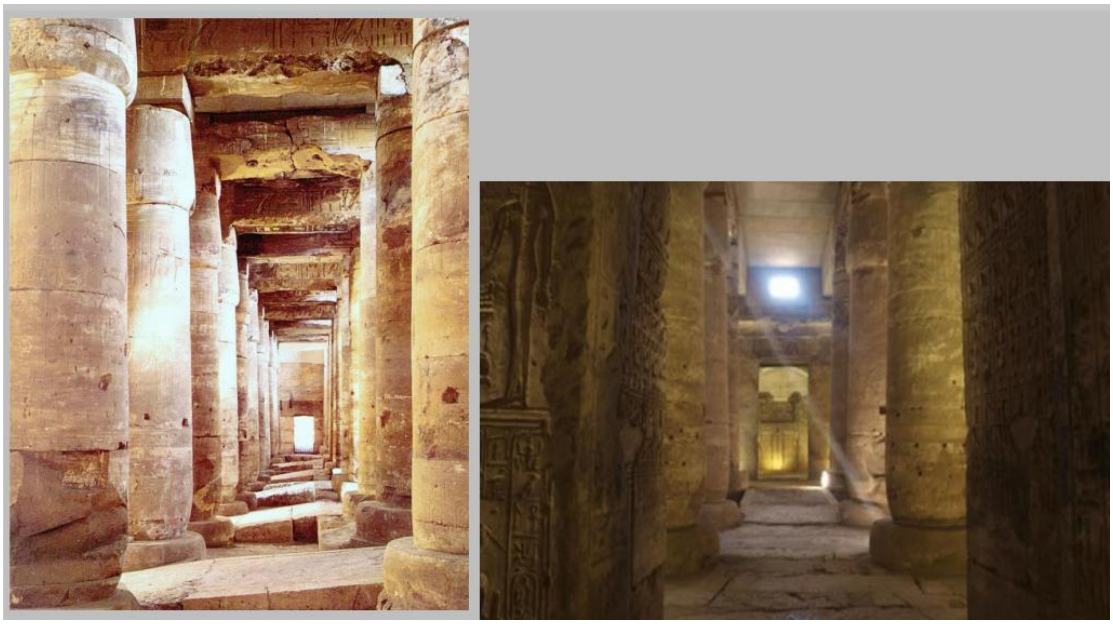


Photo of a section along a hallway of KV17, the tomb of Sety I. Here a sequence of cards are beautifully etched on the wall as thin rectangles, each with its appropriate label. Bright colors were added to the labels. On the far right is Osiris, labeled with his common title: Khenty Amenety. Notice that he is in the form of a mummy and wears the tall white crown, but lacks the usual pair of ostrich feathers adorning the crown and is not holding his scepters. This is a bit unusual for the image of a Trump deity card. (See my version of Osiris in the Senet Tarot).

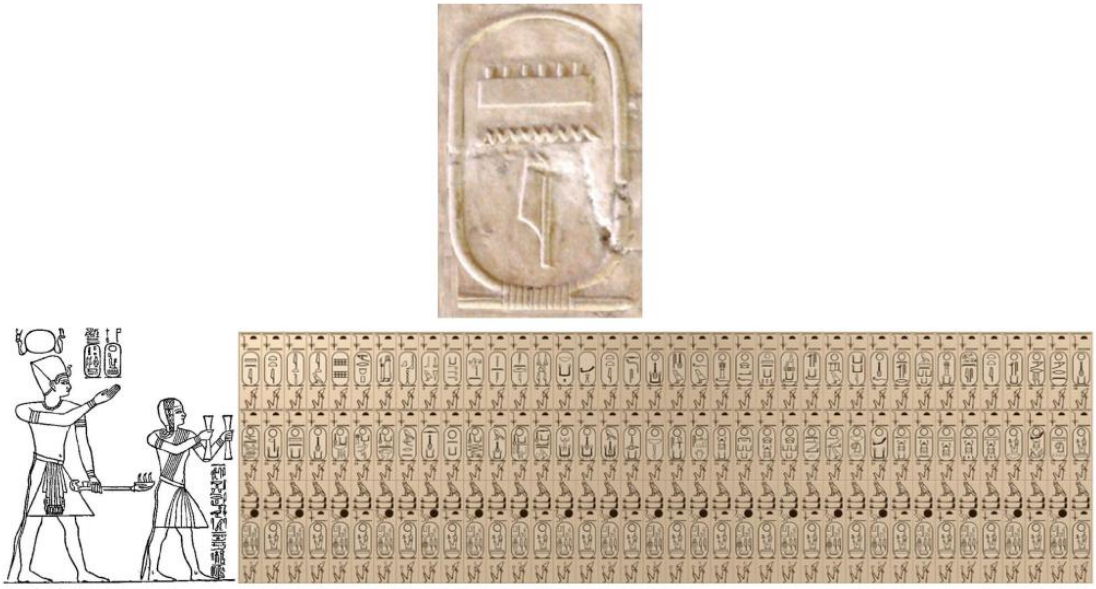


Entrance to Temple of Sety I at Abydos



Views inside the Temple

Sety did something else very creative that added a new aspect to the Tarot tradition. At his grand temple in Abydos he built a special hallway that led to the Osireion behind his temple. He then went through the entire history of Egypt from Mena (Amen) the first pharaoh of the 1st dynasty who unified Northern and Southern Egypt on down to his own reign. He then selected from all the many pharaohs that had reigned during several thousand years 78 who fulfilled his qualifications as a great pharaoh. His main standards were that the pharaoh unified or maintained the unity between North and South and that his reign was prosperous.



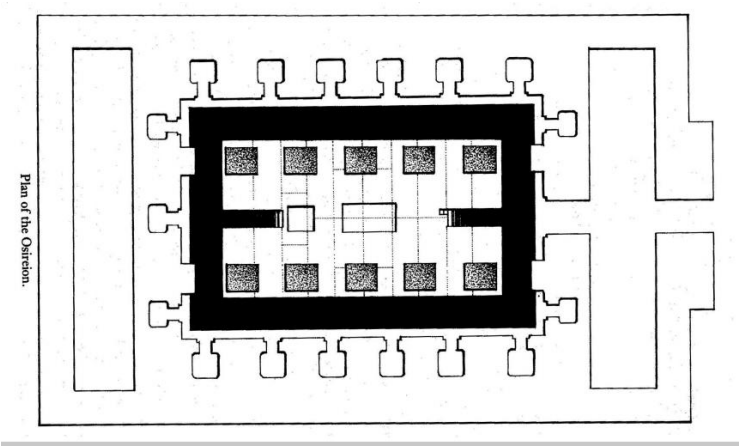
Sety and his young son Prince Rameses II honor the list of 78 pharaoh cartouches compiled by Sety and carved on the wall of his temple next

to the Osireion (Osiris Temple). The list begins with Mena (blownup image above) and includes Sety and Rameses.

Photo of Sety and Rameses paying homage to their list of Great Pharaohs. We do not know much about many of the pharaohs on the list, but it includes the pyramid builders such as Khufu and the pharaohs who preserved the Pyramid Texts, such as Wenas, Teta, Pepy, and so on. Sety holds a special censer in the shape of a human arm and hand. This symbolizes the Hand of Horus always extended for the benefit of the community.

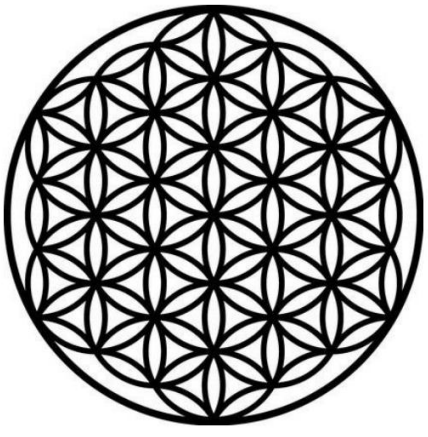
A Great Pharaoh also must have adhered to and enhanced the Great Tradition of Egyptian civilization. For that reason Akhenaten, and even Tutankhamen could not be on the list. Also the Hyksos foreign rulers could not be on the list, and any pharaohs who only ruled in the North or in the South during the so-called Intermediate Periods.

Is it a coincidence that the number of pharaohs matches the size of the Litany deck? I don't know. But in my card collection I have a royalty of England deck. I also have a deck of American Presidents, although we do not yet have enough presidents for a full Poker deck. I also have Authors and other decks honoring special people. I do not know whether Sety invisioned organizing his deck other than in chronological order, but that is what we have, and Rameses later also made his own list.



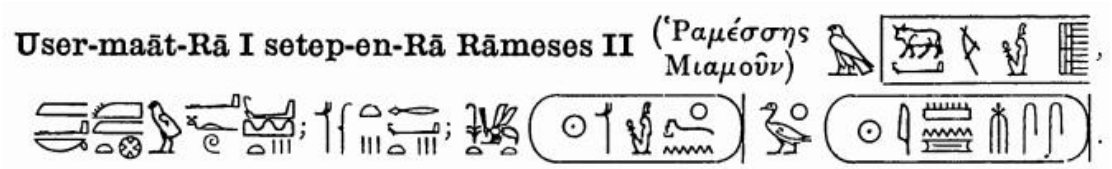
Layout of the Osireion behind Sety's temple.

Remains of the Osireion, now partially flooded with water from the Nile.



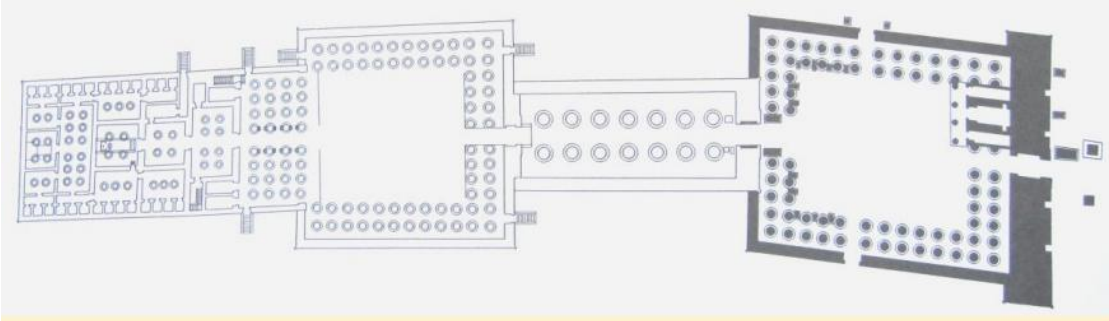
Flower of Life symbol is carved on a megalithic pillar of the Osireion in several places.

Photograph of Rameses II, son of Sety I. His mummy is in Cairo Museum. He lived to be about 90 years old and Egypt is filled with monumental statues from his reign.



The two cartouches form the name [Weser-Maat-Ra Setep-en-Ra] [Rameses Mery Amen]. Oddly, if you take the first word in the reading of the first cartouche and the last word in the reading of the second cartouche and put them together, you get Weser Amen, the name of the vizier who helped Tutmose III design the first Tarot deck. (The royal names in cartouches were usually not read in standard order because of honorific customs.)

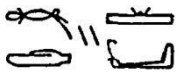
A special contribution Rameses made was to build a huge courtyard and pylon entrance to the Luxor temple. The courtyard has 78 huge pillars, one for each card of the Egyptian Tarot deck. The next courtyard inward has pillars commemorating the 64 changes of Baba's Lunar Eye.



Map of Luxor temple. The area drawn darker on the right is the courtyard with pylons built by Rameses II. It contains 78 huge pillars and a great pylon wall with two great obelisks in front. In the upper right corner of the courtyard is a special old structure built by Tutmose III to house the "boat" sedans of Amen (Hidden Sun), Mut (Light and Love), and Khonsu (Moon). To honor that important old structure is why Rameses built his courtyard at a skewed angle. There is a straight line running from Amen's boat (the middle berth) into the far inner recess of the temple. The temple was buried in sand for centuries, and a mosque was built over one corner of the courtyard. It is still there, now floating high in the air on top of the pillars.

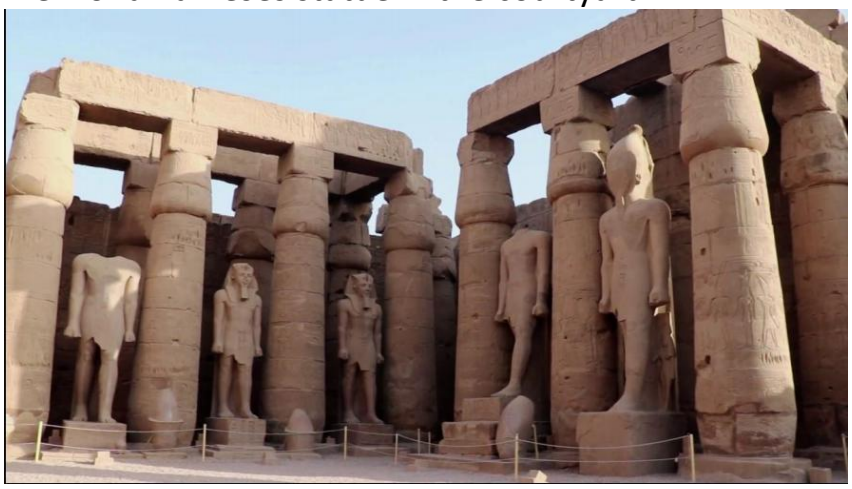
Pylon entrance to Luxor temple. Only one obelisk remains, the second was removed to Paris. At the bases of the obelisks are baboons, telling us that these are the legs of Baba the Gigantic Fool Baboon standing there guarding the temple. (See details of a troop of baboons squatting at the bottom of the obelisk on the left. The empty base on the right has been despoiled.)

The sacred “boat house” behind the pylon was built by Tutmose III, creator of the first Tarot “deck”. So Rameses paid it special honor in his courtyard with a pillar for each card and did not remove or move the boat house. This resulted in the funny angle of his huge courtyard. The boats suggest specific meditations and rituals used in the Tarok Shedy tradition.



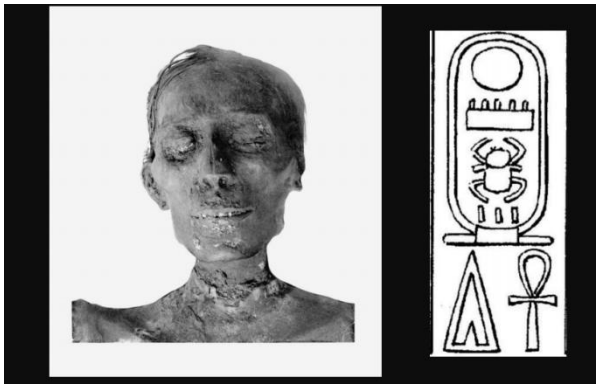
“Shedy” was a water flask made of an animal skin, probably used for carrying water in the hot desert. The word also means to nurse at the breast, which was how they drank water by squeezing it very sparingly from the skin flask. It came to mean careful study, recitation of sacred texts, meditation, probing of the deep mysteries, and other aspects of the Royal Shedy Training Program.

View of a Rameses statue in the courtyard.

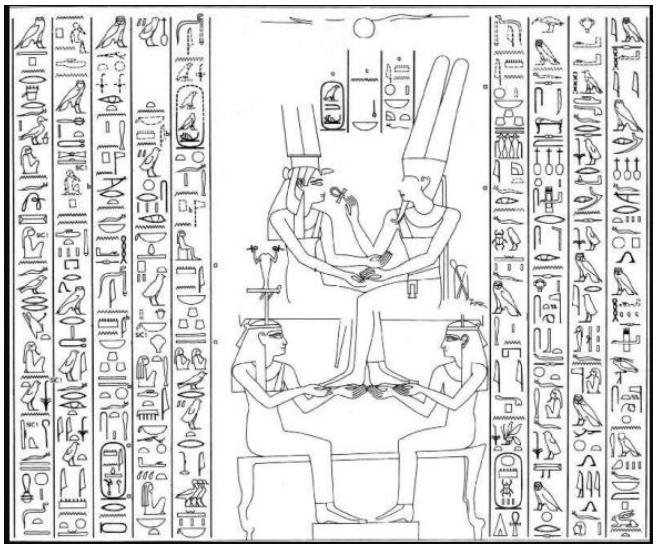


Double rows of gigantic pillars in the Court of Rameses II. Gigantic statues of Rameses stand between each pair of pillars.

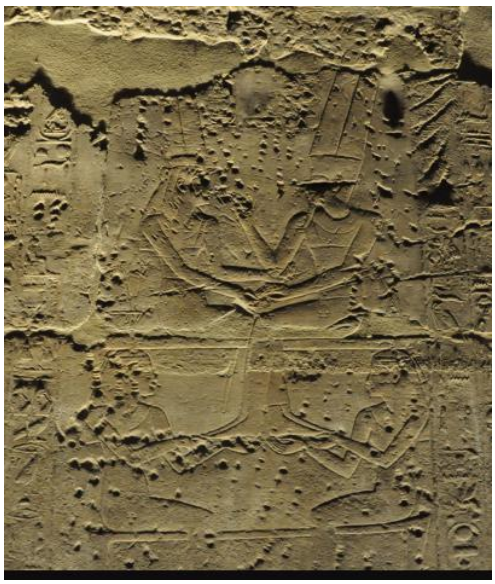
Young Tutankhamen and his wife are represented in Luxor temple because he contributed some aspects to its structure.



Tutmose IV, the pharaoh who created the wonderful picture of transcendental lovers on the wall of Luxor temple.



A drawing of the wall art that includes the surrounding text and a fair rendition of the art, but it is not as clear as the drawings made by Schwaller de Lubicz and Lucie Lamy and portions of the art are already missing..



Above is a recent photo of the current condition of this masterpiece of transcendental love by Tutmose IV. Some destruction is deliberate and some is just due to air pollution and total neglect of this great ancient treasure.

Rameses also followed his father and made his own temple with another list of pharaohs done in almost the same manner. We have more megalithic statuary from Rameses II than any other pharaoh. Perhaps he lived too long, because the craftsmen had nothing else to do. From his time on the Ramesside era continued, but gradually lost its original creativity and grandeur. Nevertheless we have 9 copies of the **Litany of Ra** in the Valley of Kings or nearby, and the mummies of each of these pharaohs has survived, though they were moved and hidden from the tomb robbers by the followers of the Shedy tradition.

[U] Weser Amen (Useramun, Vizier to Thutmose III), South wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber of Theban Tomb 61.

[Th III] Jehuty Mes III (Thutmose III), Valley of the Kings on the pillars of the Sarcophagus Chamber [Th III G] and on his shroud dedicated by Amen Hetep II to his father Jehuty Mes III. Most of the shroud is in the Cairo Museum, with a small fragment in Boston. There are no illustrations on the shroud.

[S I] Sety I (Sethos I), Valley of the Kings, entrance hall. Title fig. first appears.

[R II] R@ Meses II (Ramses II), Valley of the Kings, and Temple at Abydos

[Mer] Mer en Peteh (Merenptah I), Osireion at Abydos.

[A] Amen Meses had a text in his tomb, but Sety II hacked it off.

[S II] Sety II (Sethos II, Merenptah II), Valley of the Kings

[Si] *Sa* Peteh (Siptah, Merenptah III), Valley of the Kings.

[R III] R@ Meses III (Ramses III), Valley of the Kings

[R IV] R@ Meses IV (Ramses IV), Valley of the Kings

[R IX] R@ Meses IX (Ramses IX), Valley of the Kings, portions only.

[R X] R@ Meses X (Ramses X), Valley of the Kings, a few extracts only.

I have made a preliminary photographic record of the complete deck in the tomb of Rameses III, Valley of the Kings. I also have photos of the portions on the walls of Rameses IX's tomb. We need high quality photos of the entire Sety I deck and all other surviving decks. I also found a complete deck carved on a granite sarcophagus in the Cairo Museum, but have not been able to photograph it with proper lighting and camera. Much work needs to be done, and all the texts need to be photographed clearly to check the precious transcriptions made by Hornung.

18 Study Questions

* Why are the 19th and 20th dynasties known as the Ramesside era?
* What does that have to do with the **Litany of Ra** Tarok tradition?
* What do the cartouches of Sety I tell us about him?
* What famous structure in Egypt is mainly attributed to Sety I?
* Where is Sety's own famous temple located? Why is that location important?
* Why did Sety write his name differently at his own temple?
* Describe Sety's important contribution to the **Litany of Ra** Tarok deck.
* Describe how and why Sety designed the Sun Trump card the way he did.
* What other cards did Sety design, and why are they humorous?
* What special hallway did Sety build into the rear of his temple, and why is it important in the Tarot tradition? Consider the cultural aspects and the Shedy tradition.
* What special megalithic temple is just outside the hallway in the rear of Sety's temple? Why is it important in the Tarot tradition?
* What special symbol is on the columns of that temple?
* What was the great contribution of Rameses II to the Tarok tradition?
* How did Rameses subtly link his contribution to the pharaoh who first created the Litany Tarok deck?
* Who silently guards the Tarok contribution of Rameses and the entire structure behind it?