

# ANCESTRAL PATH TAROT DECK

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## ANCESTRAL PATH TAROT

The Ancestral Path Tarot is offered by artist Julie Cuccia-Watts as an ancestral gift to you. It is hoped that you will find it a path to the discovery of your own truths. For the artist, it is a synthesis of her spiritual beliefs expressed within the structure of the Tarot.

Its imagery speaks of the human experience, emphasizing potential tapped in the past and preserved through verbal and written histories, traditions and myths. This visual feast fulfills the *raison d'être* of the Tarot—patterns creating meaningful stories of the human condition.

We are all embryonic ancestors, similar to the fetus in the Hanged One image in the Ancestral Path Tarot. Through the placental cord of cultural transmission, we imbibe the world view of those who shaped and adapted it. We are nourished on the legacy of their belief systems.

We are so immersed in the amniotic fluid of our own particular cultural system that we rarely realize that all this nurturing was meant to prepare us for the birth of our own impact on that culture.

The process of birth into awareness and responsibility as a mature adult is painful. The world outside our cultural womb is complex and diverse. Some womb-nurtured beliefs are inappropriate for survival and success in this world.

Many beliefs from other ancestral paths intrude upon our awareness. There are collective and individual paths of infinite variety. As we sift and sort through all that the human experience offers, from the dawn of humanity through the present, we spend a lifetime “pathworking.”

We follow the path of others; we widen or close off pathways on our journey, and we carve new paths through unexplored territory. More critically, perhaps, we also shape paths for others—contemporaries as well as descendants—who (will) view us as ancestors. Evaluating whether we are clearing a path or muddling it for others is an enlightening exercise.

The emphasis on the path of the ancestors in the Ancestral Path Tarot is not the anthropological emphasis on cults of the dead, but on a living tradition from all human cultures available for us to factor into our world view.

Defining yourself as an ancestor (and your living role models as ancestors) places you in the unique perspective offered by the Ancestral Path Tarot. The deck portrays paths created by ancestors of different cultures and times for our consideration.

## WHAT IS TAROT?

A working definition of the Tarot is simple. The Tarot is a specialized series of 78 symbol-stuffed cards used for divination (reading the cards) and meditation. A Tarot deck is divided into two unequal parts: the MAJOR (GREATER) ARCANA and the MINOR (LESSER) ARCANA.

More attention is paid to the Major Arcana, a group of 22 cards, usually numbered and bearing titles defining their metaphysical or archetypal nature.

The second grouping, the 56 Minor Arcana cards, consists of four suits, usually called Swords, Wands, Cups and Pentacles. Each suit contains fourteen cards (Ace through ten, Page, Knight, Queen, and King). Its structure is similar to that of a modern playing card deck, except that the playing card Jack fuses the Page and the Knight.

The Ancestral Path Tarot adheres to the fundamental structure of Tarot decks. Its Major Arcana sequence of 22 images bears the standard titles (with the exception that the Hanged Man is now the Hanged One), but an older ordering is used. The Justice and Strength trumps exchange position (Justice is the eighth arcanum and Strength the eleventh).

The suits of the Minor Arcana are named SWORDS, STAVES (WANDS), CUPS, AND SACRED CIRCLES (PENTACLES). Numbered cards are to be viewed from

the Ten to the Ace, reversing the typical hierarchical structure. Court cards are termed King, Queen, Knight and Princess for the sake of convenience, as the divine and legendary figures of the Ancestral Path Tarot do not easily adapt to static titles.

The four suits depict representative cultures of four racial groups: Japanese Swords; Egyptian Staves; British Cups; and Native American Sacred Circles. Each culture is portrayed during a distinct historical epoch: the Japanese feudal era; the Egyptian nineteenth dynasty of Ramses II; Arthurian Britain; and post-contact America.

Central myths or legends of these racial groups serve as a backdrop to each suit and trace paths our ancestors forged in shaping their world view.

In the Sword suit, a woman's epic song details the Ainu peoples' relationship with their bear god, and defines relationships between men and women, clans and tribes, and Ainu and Japanese cultures.

The Osirian myth cycle of death and resurrection weaves through the Staves. A chapter from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, entitled "Triumph Over Darkness," speaks eloquently of life and death, light and shadow, and gods and humans.

The Arthurian/Grail mythos sets the stage for the Cup suit. "Morgana's Reverie" synthesizes the story of the Cups as the sister of King Arthur prepares herself for the role of psychopomp on the path to the King's

initiation into the knowledge of his genetic inheritance and his spiritual responsibilities.

In the suit of Sacred Circles, a Menominee creation legend of bear and thunder spirit ancestors and a Winnebago holy (medicine) song support the tale of the vision quest.

Court card images are deified ancestral figures. Creator deities Izanagi and Izanami and their children, Moon God Tsuki Yomi and Sun Goddess Ama Terasu, grace the Sword Court cards. Staves depict the brother-sister ruling deities, Osiris and Isis, with their sister, Nephthys, and son, Horus. The major Arthurian characters—Arthur, his wife Gwenhwyfar, his friend Lancelot, and his sister Morgana—comprise the Cup royalty. And the god/dess forms of the Sacred Circles are Grandfather Thunder, Grandmother Moon, Father Sun and Mother Earth.

Aces symbolize the raw elemental power of each suit: the clear air of the intellect associated with the Swords; the fiery spirituality of Staves; the watery emotional nature of the Cups; and the earthy physicality of Sacred Circles. Each ace is emblazoned with an image defining its suit. Swords were near-mystical objects in ancient Japan; they were believed to contain spirits and were imbued with miraculous powers. The ankh is the Egyptian staff of life and resurrection, the pre-Christian cross of a sacrificed god. The Grail quest is a mystical experience available even to those at the beginning of

their spiritual path. And the Native American drum measures the heartbeat of the earth. It carries messages with the language of its beat, and opens pathways between the worlds of the living and the ancestors.

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## DEFINITIONS—MAJOR ARCANA

**0 THE FOOL:** Beginnings; the heady moment before diving into the future; the state of being untested (inexperienced); the feeling of quivering anticipation when arriving at the brink of experience; exploring the unknown; risking; taking a leap of faith; stepping onto an untested path, or leaping onto the spiral. Consulting an oracle; paying attention to omens; using divination to clear a tangled path.

**I THE MAGICIAN:** Male active force; creativity, spontaneity, practicality, skill, inventiveness; self-reliance, willpower, self-confidence. The ability to imagine, create, and see ideas through to completion. The art of persuasion, or the ability to influence others. Can also represent the use of power for negative purposes: powering-over rather than empowering others; selfish hoarding rather than sharing with the community; exploiting others or resources.

**II THE HIGH PRIESTESS:** Female receptive energy. Intuition, understanding, serenity, wisdom, and self-sufficiency. Purity, virtue, lack of guile. Seeming lack of emotion because emotional entanglements are avoided. Conversely, the card can reveal ignorance, poor judgment, or short-sightedness. Lack of common sense,

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