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## ETHNOLOGHIA ON LINE

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## ΕΘΝΟΛΟΓΙΑ ON LINE

ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΟ ΗΛΕΚΤΡΟΝΙΚΟ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΟ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ ΕΘΝΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ

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## The Birth of *The New Urban Shaman's Oracle*: The Creation and the Crafting Process of a Contemporary Tarot Card Deck for Personal and Community Healing and Transformation

Athanasios Barmpalexis

### Abstract

This article examines the background and the creation process of a contemporary tarot card deck crafted by a 'western' shamanic healer in Scotland, Terry Mace, named by its creator as *The New Urban Shaman's Oracle*. Its creation was the outcome of a profound inspiration that Mace had experienced in October 2015 while staying in Delphi for a conference, and later, after witnessing the socio-political and financial struggles of life in Athens during the memorandum years. However, the *Oracle*, according to its creator, is unlike the majority of all other contemporary tarot decks whose primary focus and function is divination; with its powerful, contradictory, and sometimes profane, messages and profound imageries, Mace's tarot deck aims and intends to inspire and raise social and political awareness for its readers, both in personal and communal levels. Drawing upon participatory ethnographic fieldwork data gathered between 2014 and 2019, the article presents the background for the birth of the *Oracle*, the motivations and inspirations of the artisan, as well as its crafting process, aims, objectives, and meanings. It also examines historically and socio-culturally tarot cards, while it includes reactions by some of the individuals who have used Mace's deck for their own personal reasons and purposes. Finally, it tries to show how the different living ways and cultural background of another European country like Greece can ultimately be a source of inspiration for people like Mace, who come from a completely different socio-cultural context.

**Key words:** tarot, contemporary shamanism, street art, the Delphi Oracle, social awareness, healing, Greece in the crisis years



### Η Γέννηση του *The New Urban Shaman's Oracle*: Η Δημιουργία και η Διαδικασία Κατασκευής μιας Σύγχρονης Τράπουλας Ταρώ με Στόχο την Προσωπική και Κοινωνική Επούλωση και Μεταμόρφωση

Αθανάσιος Μπαρμπαλέξης

### Περίληψη

Αυτό το άρθρο εξετάζει το πλαίσιο και τη διαδικασία δημιουργίας μιας σύγχρονης τράπουλας ταρώ που εμπνεύστηκε και δημιούργησε ένας «δυτικός» σαμανικός θεραπευτής στη Σκωτία, ο Terry Mace, την οποία ονόμασε «The New Urban Shaman's Oracle». Η δημιουργία της ήταν αρχικά το αποτέλεσμα μιας βαθιάς εμπνεύσης που είχε ο Mace τον Οκτώβριο του 2015, ενώ βρισκόταν στους Δελφούς για ένα συνέδριο, αλλά και μετέπειτα, όταν έγινε μάρτυρας των κοινωνικο-οικονομικών δυσκολιών της ζωής στην Αθήνα κατά τα χρόνια των μνημονίων. Ωστόσο, το «Oracle», σύμφωνα με τον δημιουργό του, δεν ακολουθεί την πλειονότητα των σύγχρονων ταρώ, των οποίων η κύρια λειτουργία είναι η μαντεία. Με τα ισχυρά, αντιφατικά, και μερικές φορές προκλητικά, μηνύματα και τους βαθείς συμβολισμούς της, η τράπουλα του Mace στοχεύει να εμπνεύσει και να καλλιεργήσει κοινωνική και πολιτική συνειδητοποίηση στους ανθρώπους που τη χρησιμοποιούν, σε προσωπικό αλλά και σε συλλογικό επίπεδο. Βασισμένο στη μέθοδο της συμμετοχικής εθνογραφίας και σε εθνογραφικό υλικό συγκεντρωμένο από το 2014 μέχρι το 2019, το άρθρο παρουσιάζει το πλαίσιο για τη γέννηση της τράπουλας «Oracle», τα κίνητρα και τις εμπνεύσεις του δημιουργού της, καθώς και τη δημιουργική διαδικασία και λειτουργίες της. Το άρθρο εξετάζει επίσης ιστορικά και κοινωνικο-πολιτισμικά το ταρώ, ενώ συμπεριλαμβάνει και διάφορες εντυπώσεις/αντιδράσεις από άτομα που είχαν τη δυνατότητα να χρησιμοποιήσουν την τράπουλα του Mace. Τέλος, προσπαθεί να καταδείξει πώς οι διαφορετικές συνθήκες διαβίωσης και κουλτούρα σε μια Ευρωπαϊκή χώρα σαν την Ελλάδα μπορούν να αποτελέσουν πηγή εμπνεύσης για ανθρώπους σαν τον Mace, προερχόμενος από ένα εντελώς διαφορετικό κοινωνικο-πολιτισμικό πλαίσιο.

**Λέξεις κλειδιά:** ταρώ, σύγχρονος σαμανισμός, τέχνη του δρόμου, το Μαντείο των Δελφών, κοινωνική συνείδηση, παραδοσιακή θεραπεία και επούλωση, η Ελλάδα στα χρόνια της κρίσης

## 1. Introduction

Tarot is a deck of seventy-eight highly artistic playing cards, first introduced in Europe during the fifteenth century as an elaborated card game. From the late-eighteenth century on, however, many of these card decks had been attributed with a mystical nature, and people started using them for cartomancy, divination, and other similar spiritual or esoteric purposes. This change in function has continued until nowadays, as tarot cards are considered one of the most important mediums within the contemporary New Age and neo-pagan spiritual movements, used constantly by the practitioners of the two movements in their practices, rituals, and ceremonies. They are thought of providing the card reader with a variety of diverse functions, from guidance for spiritual enlightenment and individual development, to foretelling and answers through divination.

Among the people who has incorporated the tarot card deck into his contemporary spiritual work is Terry Mace. Mace is a folk healer who is living and working in North-East Scotland and specialises in shamanistic techniques combined with modern ideas of psychoanalysis and philosophy. Apart from working with various tarot decks, Mace has decided to also craft his own deck, naming it "*The New Urban Shaman's Oracle*." Mace conceived the idea of creating his own deck in October 2015, after being guided by a vision at the Oracle of Delphi, Greece, during attendance at the ISARS (International Society for Academic Research on Shamanism) Conference in Delphi. He was also later inspired by the socio-political and financial struggles he witnessed in Athens, where he started taking photos of graffities, street art and the Greek lifestyle during his stay in the Greek capital. Upon his return to Scotland, Mace started crafting his deck, aiming towards buyers from the British market, showcasing, therefore, how a society like the Greek one, facing entirely different issues to the ones of the British society, can actually become a means of bringing the two cultures together. Based on this concept, therefore, Mace's deck is not meant to be used for divination or spiritual affirmation, but rather for personal consultancy, transformation, and community change; it is crafted and designed to challenge the individuals using them and to raise their awareness so that they can find home within themselves and their place within the societies they live.

Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork –photos, videos, and interviews– gathered during my research for my PhD thesis on 'western' forms of contemporary shamanism, this article focuses on the creation process of *The New Urban Shaman's Oracle* deck. The article will begin with a concise examination of the historical background and the socio-cultural context of tarot cards, before going into a detailed presentation of the birth and development of the *Oracle* deck, focusing on the motivations and inspirations of the artisan, its crafting process, as well as its aims, objectives, and functions. It will also include testimonies of other individuals who have used the cards for their own purposes and their impressions and reactions regarding the *Oracle's* function and usability. Finally, it will touch upon the current form of the deck, while also looking at the struggles that its creator has been facing, in order to finalise it.

## 2. Tarot's Origins and Historical Development

The tradition of tarot was first introduced in Southern Europe –predominantly in Italy and France– in the mid-fifteenth century. Initially, the cards were primarily used as playing cards, having become known amongst the populace as ‘*Trionfi*’, while its basic playing rules were first found in written form in a manuscript, by someone named Martiano da Tortona, sometime before 1425, according to Campbell (2004). The etymological origins of tarot are, however, uncertain and under debate. For instance, there are theories associating it to the Italian river Taro in northern Italy (Eason, 2000: 3), while Vitali informs us that there might be some linkage with the word ‘*taroch*’, a synonym for foolishness in the late-fifteenth century (Vitali, 2008).

As stated earlier, this type of deck had seventy-eight cards in total, elaborated with extravagant, artistic depictions or drawings (Dummett & Mann, 1980). A common tarot deck had four suits of fourteen cards, a separate twenty-one-card trump-suit and a single, usually unnumbered, card known as the *Fool*, acting as the top trump card. The trump cards and the *Fool* have become widely known as the *Major Arcana*, while the rest of the cards are known as the *Minor Arcana*. These two terms were first introduced by Jean-Baptiste Pitois in the late-nineteenth century (Decker, 1996).

It was only in mid-eighteenth century that tarot began losing its original purpose and context, “rendering its imagery mysterious” and mystical (Farley 2009: 174). By the 1780s, “the practice of fortune-telling with regular playing cards had been well established for at least two decades” (Dummett and Mann 1980: 96). Among the first who attributed ancient mystical powers to tarot was a French pastor, Antoine Court de Gébelin. Gébelin believed that tarot originated from Egypt, and that the cards were enhanced with secret wisdom and symbolism (Farley 2009: 174). Other influential figures of the French society of the same era shared similar ideas. For instance, French occultist Jean-Baptiste Alliette (also known as ‘*Etteilla*’) linked it with the Hermetic tradition, and in particular Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom (Decker et al., 1996: 77). Alliette was in fact, the first who introduced tarot as a divination tool (Farley, 2009: 106–111). Moreover, Eliphas Lévi associated it with Jewish-originated mysticism, even arguing that the “twenty-two trump cards, the Major Arcana, represented the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet” (Gregory, 2012: 277).

In England, tarot decks first emerged in the late-nineteenth century; they were in fact, given an upgraded mystified role under the influence of the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*. Formed in 1888, *Golden Dawn* was a British masonry order, whose members were committed to the study of magic, metaphysics, and the occult (Regardie, 1993). The Order's most prolific members, Aleister Crowley, A.E. Waite, and Samuel Liddell MacGregory Mathers saw tarot as a portal to unknown mystical worlds, and used it as a means for their own personal development and self-awareness (Gregory, 2012: 277; Farley, 2009: 174). Helen Farley notes that the British occultists went into a

fruitless quest to discover the one true and authentic tarot, which resulted in rectifying tarot according to their own beliefs, politics, and personal agenda: “They judged that tarot had been deliberately altered to conceal its true purpose and meaning, or it had been carelessly copied resulting in an inadvertent loss of significance” (Farley, 2009: 151). Sociologist Mike Sosteric is also of the same opinion with Farley. According to him, tarot had become:

An esoteric tool of mysticism, a supreme instrument of divination, a deck of secret knowledge, an ancient Egyptian fountain of wisdom, a bible of bibles, a bible of humanity containing wisdom from the time the world was born, a book of Thoth, a book of Adam, a revelation of ancient civilizations, and the whole of cosmic/cosmological/theological and philosophical ball of wax rolled into one convenient package of cheaply illustrated paper cards (Sosteric, 2014: 362).

One major concern, that preoccupies both among scholars and tarot users, has been tarot's historical continuity; especially the question whether there is a link between the first decks of late medieval Italy and the contemporary ones. Farley, in her book *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism* (2009), attempts to provide an answer to the question by examining tarot's historical development and its transformation stages. The writer reaches three important conclusions. Firstly, there is no continuity in the tarot's purpose. Despite initially being used as an elaborated card game, tarot has been nowadays transformed into a device oriented for divination and healing. Secondly, there is no continuity in its structure, as many modern decks do not even conform to the basic structure of the Minor and Major Arcana cards. And finally, there is no consistency in its symbolism either (Farley, 2009: 175).

However, Farley counterargues her own argument, by pointing out that despite these three major developmental inconsistencies, tarot could be regarded as an ever-evolving and ever-continuing concept, as it can be applied to Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1968) scheme of how concepts develop through time. Wittgenstein, using the example of family resemblances, concluded that possessing a certain group of seemingly common properties, or traits, could indicate that a person (or a thing) “should probably belong in a certain class” (Farley, 2009: 176).

Farley points out that there are such traits among tarot decks as well. They usually follow the seventy-eight-card structure –according to her, the presence of the twenty-two trump cards in particular “distinguishes the tarot pack from every other kind of playing-card pack” (Dummett & Mann, 1980: 7). They mostly follow the common Major Arcana sequence, beginning with either the *Fool* or the *Magician* card. They rely predominantly on the importance of symbolism and naming and, finally, they have three main functions (they are used as playing cards, as divinatory advisors, or consultancy tools). Farley (2009: 176) also notes that it is not necessary for all decks to possess all the above characteristics, concluding that, “it becomes possible for two decks to share no characteristics yet still fall into the common family of tarot.”

### 3. Tarot in Context

Since its first conception in the mid-fifteenth century, tarot has been continuously influenced by “the cultural and social environment shaped by the reactions to war, religion, plague, enlightenment science, exposure to exotic cultures and other incendiary concerns,” where “the symbolism on the cards reflects the fickle results of human behaviour” (Farley, 2009: 173). A closer examination could reveal that the influences of the socio-political settings were apparent in tarot even before its development into a magical tool. The early Italian tarot decks for instance, should not be merely regarded as card games. Their elaborated depictions are considered to be the reflection of the social concerns of the time, as early symbolisations of concepts such as death, good fortune, and spirituality, and of “the desirability of living a life of virtue” and the “contempt with which corporeal concerns were held, namely the corruption of the Church and the inefficacy of the Holy Roman Empire” (Farley, 2009: 176).

The shift in tarot’s function –from a mere card game to a means of divination/consultancy– has been sociologically linked with the emergence of two specific movements: freemasonry and the occult. Both movements are considered to be outcomes of the transformation of the socio-political settings of post-French-Revolution Western Europe (Dummett & Mann, 1980: 357–92), in a time period, therefore, that the pre-existing, dominant socio-economical system of feudalism had gradually declined, replaced by the newly-found industrial capitalism (Sosteric, 2014: 365). Both Sosteric and Yvonne Jewkes argue for example, that the emergence of the middle-class freemasonry groups accommodated the new socio-economic system of capitalism by reinforcing and successfully re-constructing the power relations “for maintaining collective discipline” (Jewkes, 2005: 47). Among the main functions and aims of those ‘brotherhoods’ was to help their members develop the appropriate skills to handle the forthcoming changes in working behaviours and relations: among them, the “acceptance of modern command and control structures” (Sosteric, 2014: 366). Tarot, due to its alleged mystical powers, was used within these societies not only as a tool for the “ideological indoctrination and the mutual education” (Sosteric, 2014: 368) of their members, but also as a “vehicle of initiation” into the groups laws and orders (Sosteric, 2014: 372–3).

Furthermore, tarot’s emergence has also been linked with the ever-growing dissatisfaction with organised religion. Farley (2009: 174) argues that the idea of tarot’s mystical origins was able to find acceptance in the eighteenth-century French society, where “the value of conventional religion was being questioned, and new heterogeneous forms of spirituality were merging into the cultural milieu.” In France, the decks played a significant role in ritualistic magic, the same way they did in the British freemasonic traditions; they symbolized “the microcosm that could affect change in the macrocosm,” and were used as a tool for fortune-telling, where “the macrocosm reflected in its symbolism” (Farley, 2009: 174). However, there are different opinions regarding the alleged mystical nature of tarot. Sosteric for example, devalues entirely this spiritual-related attribution of tarot, and emphasises its sociological

aspect instead. He argues that both in France and the United Kingdom, tarot was used as “a weapon [...] in an esoteric (i.e., secret) class war by ruling elites to regain the power they lost [...] as a result of the scientific revolutions” (Sosteric, 2014: 358–9).

As mentioned above, the role of tarot as a divinatory/consultant device has been perpetuated until today. One of the main reasons for this continuation in function is according to Farley (2009: 175), the protection of “esoteric wisdom.” As a result, tarot decks have become a mystical means that explains things and phenomena science is unable to provide answers for (Maitre & Becker, 1966: 82–98), and “a tool for developing the inner eye” (Noddings & Shore, 1984). Moreover, academic notions around the unconscious and conscious mind have become central to the examination of tarot; in particular, Jungian archetypal psychology has dominated tarot imagery and its interpretation (Sosteric, 2014: 371). Psychotherapists and transactional analysts following Jungian ideas, such as Arthur Rosengarten (2000), claim that “tarot images (like any good images) are artistic devices that can carry significant additional meaning.” Furthermore, John Beeb (2008) considers tarot a Jungian tool that can assist in archetypically analysing the unconscious, Sallie Nichols (1980) sees it as a tool that can facilitate the Jungian process of individuation, while Sheldon Kopp (1974: 6) advocates the use of tarot in psychotherapy sessions by incorporating “the imagery into personal mythology.” As Farley (2009: 156) summarises, “tarot became a psychotherapeutic device, considerably cheaper and more accessible than a therapist.”

Nowadays, tarot has become one of the most significant tools within the New Age culture and its various manifestations. The term “New Age” was applied to an emerging spiritual movement developed in the “western world” in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, where a variety of diverse spiritual beliefs and practices from both the ‘western’ and ‘non-western’ worlds have been blended together. Naturally, tarot shares the same characteristics: Farley describes it as “an intoxicating mix of East and West, where Buddhist Tantra bumps up against Native American shamanism, crystal healing and past-life regressions” (Farley, 2009: 151). Regardless of its various, and sometimes contradicting components and influences, tarot plays a pivotal role in the self-actualisation and the personal development of its users. In a rapidly changing, globalised world, where technology and scientific achievements are emphasised and the humane factor is often set aside, many ‘westerners’ develop feelings of alienation and scepticism; tarot cards therefore, according to Gregory (2012: 278), “invite an intimate personalisation of their meaning and, as result, there is a surfeit of tarot decks, books, workshops, and accessories, each tailored to individual visions and theories on the cards.” Gregory also shares a different opinion regarding the contradicting nature of the influences in contemporary tarot; she asserts that as tarot is placed in the centre of different and divergent worldviews, it is natural that its symbolism displays traits from all New Age components; and that is the reason, according to her, that tarot is seen as the “New Age tool par excellence” (Farley, 2009: 151).



#### 4. Terry Mace and the Conception of the *New Urban Shaman's Oracle*

As already mentioned, Mace is a contemporary shamanic healer, offering his services in the wider area of North-East Scotland. Undoubtedly, the most important, and the longest in timespan, project of Mace is the creation of his own tarot card deck. In October 2015, I was given the opportunity to present a paper on 'western' forms of contemporary shamanism, as found in Scotland, at the ISARS conference in Greece. The focus of my research in 2015 was Mace, as he was the first major contributor that I worked with, and his school of *Rainbow Zen Shamanism*. We decided that it would be a great chance to travel together to Greece for the conference. The conference was held, as already mentioned, in Delphi, the birthplace of the world-famous *Oracle of Delphi*. There was a two-levelled motivation behind our decision to attend the conference together: It was seen as an adventure, "a journey", that would validate and strengthen the bond between researcher and contributor, and it would also be beneficial for both parties: I would have emotional support during my first major conference participation, and Mace would get the chance to visit a place rich in history (spiritual and cultural) that he has never been to before. The trip involved two days in my hometown, Thessaloniki, four days in Delphi for the conference, and two more days in Athens, where we would stay with my brother's family.

During our stay in Delphi though, Mace started feeling a deep inspiration originating from the mysticism and the spirituality of the place. He started exploring the place on his own, wandered around, went to the woods, connected with animals, while also started having issues sleeping, as his mind was constantly "in motion" and in deep thoughts. Among his many mystical experiences, Mace also had a very profound vision while visiting the archaeological sites in Delphi, which, however, he wished to only keep for himself. Moreover, he started connecting profoundly with other participants in the conference; especially younger people who approached him initially out of curiosity, but eventually bonded with him deeply.

Furthermore, after the end of the conference, upon arrival to Athens, Mace was shocked, and at the same time awed, by the ways of living in Greece during the years of the financial crisis. Mace was particularly amazed, not only by the levels of poverty and the noticeable struggles of the people, but also by the neo-classical architecture, the lively vibrancy, the numerous flea markets, the local cuisine, and especially, the street art found everywhere in Athens. Mace's fascination with the Greek street art peaked during our visit to the Athenian neighbourhood of Exarcheia. He immediately started taking photos of all the graffiti, the amateur artistic expressions, or anything else that transmitted some special energy to him. When I then asked him the reason and the motivation behind the thousands of photos he had been taking, he was unable to explain it coherently. On the way back to Scotland though, Mace realised an inner need to register this connection. This resulted in the creation of his own card deck based on all those photos taken. He decided to name his creation *The New Urban Shaman's Oracle* (henceforth, the *Oracle*). However, his deck would not be a typical tarot deck, destined for mere

divination or spiritual affirmation. Instead, it would aim for other values, functions, and purposes: personal consultancy, transformation, social awakening, and community change.

## 5. The Concept behind the *Oracle*

Mace started working on his deck right after returning from the trip. His intention to design the deck was kept a secret from everybody; I was informed about it through a Facebook message a few months later, in early 2016. In my mind, his eagerness to take all those photos was merely out of admiration and fascination, and it never crossed my mind that it could lead to the crafting of a tarot deck based on what was captured on camera. On April 10 of the same year, during his workshop titled “Making Your Own Oracle Card Deck” at the Holistic Ways Festival (a travelling New Age/holistic health and spirituality festival that visits Aberdeen every March and October, see Figures 1–2), Mace first spoke publicly and in detail about how the *Oracle* emerged:

*Sakis and I, we participated within an academic conference, the ISARS conference. And Sakis presented his paper, he's dropped a paper, his PhD paper... part of it. And lots of young people started talking to Saki and I. And specifically, me, because Sakis introduced me as a, at that time, 'Rainbow Zen Shaman', a shaman. And what was clear, was that those young people really, really needed some direction. So that was how it started. Then I went to Athens. And when I got to Athens, three things happened. The first thing that happened, was I saw poverty at a level that I've never seen poverty at. Really! And I've been all around the world. Well, I've seen some pretty bad things, but this was amongst the worst. What I saw was people dying in the street. I shit you not. I mean, they would literally die. I mean, you know, some of those people, you might give them one or two days – you know, one or two days, to live without any support, assistance, or food. They were really ill. I saw clearly that people were dying or have died. Now, that homelessness, that poverty, of course, has been as a direct result to what's happened, not just politically and economically in Greece, but socially. So, I am not here to speak about that. But what I will tell you is this. It affected me deeply. It affected me so deeply that I couldn't get out of my mind what I've seen. So, Sakis and I spent a good afternoon or more, actually giving out what we could afford. Yeah, we went into some pretty difficult areas. Now, whilst I was in those areas, what I discovered was this incredible graffiti and street art. And I was lucky to meet some of the artists. And what that inspired in me was the vibrancy. And what was so evident was the duality of it – it was light and dark! You had this real 'light and dark' sense, you had this sense of real duality, of real conflict and struggle. You had the anarchists, you know – 'We want to raise war!' (Mace imitates carrying a gun) And then you had the 'goddess crowd'! (Mace lifts his hands) You know, mother love. The complete 'peace and war'. And then you had these hubble images of life, what looked like, you know, fear and death and all this. And the more I saw them, the more Sakis and I went around the whole of Athens into these areas, the idea was forming. So already in Delphi, I started to understand the need of the young people to have wisdom, to have some eldership, to have some 'oracle-ship'. Plus, we're in the heart, the navel of the world, at the oracle of Delphi. And what started to happen, was this idea. So, I took pictures. And Sakis was very very good, you know, he indulged me. And I took a lot of pictures, as you can see. [...] When I returned home to Scotland, I began to deconstruct, analyse, and put together everything that had happened to me while in Greece and to connect deeply with the things that I had seen on the streets of Athens and within my visions. (EI 2016.028).*



Photo 1: Mace's stand at the spring (March-April) Festival (taken in Aberdeen, 9/4/2016)

This multitude and diversity of inspirations –the mysticism of Delphi, the multifaceted Greek art and lifestyle, and an impoverished and challenged society– prompted Mace to not create a deck oriented for foretelling purposes or spiritual affirmation, the main function, namely, of the majority of the other contemporary decks. Instead, he felt that people needed a tool for guidance and social awareness, especially in a time where personal and communal values and principles had significantly declined.

In fact, after his return to Scotland, Mace had started realising that this decline in values and principles were not only part of the Greek society, but also of the British and the French ones, showcasing, therefore, that European cultures actually have more in common than he had originally thought. He started paying closer attention to this phenomenon, after a visit in Paris in summer 2016 with his French partner, Christine, and each time he was commuting to Aberdeen. He wrote in November 2016 about this:

I vividly saw the same poverty, social political economic collapse, and the incredible words of *The New Urban Shaman* prophets etched within the street art and graffiti of the back streets and alleys of Paris... Likewise, I felt this very same vision and connection once again on the streets of Aberdeen when I was drawn to take the photographs of the new street art and graffiti and objects in the Union Terrace Gardens.<sup>1</sup>

Mace's deck, therefore, aims for assistance, re-direction, and personal and community transformation. It has been crafted and designed to challenge and to raise self-awareness to the users, so that they can find power within themselves, and their “sacred place” within the societies they live. “A real-world deck, for the here and now,” as its creator calls it, adding that:

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<sup>1</sup> Newsletter by Terry Mace, 11 November 2016. Published publicly on Facebook (published with permission).

It deals with all the real-world stuff that each and every one of us have to deal with every single day of our life. [...] Once you identify what the problem is, you need to take an action. Action to change your own life and it [the deck] directs you to do that.<sup>2</sup>



Photo 2: Mace's stand at the autumn (October) Festival (taken in Aberdeen, 8/10/2016)

The shift in function is in fact a recent trend among contemporary tarot decks. Farley (2009: 176) points out that nowadays many decks have become 'better suited to the changing conditions' of the current socio-economic settings which affect the individual and communal needs of contemporary people, just like the *Oracle*. Tarot, according to her, has become a "tool to facilitate inner transformation," while "the symbolism of the cards interpreted [...] discern inner psychological states and unconscious 'blockages' that could prevent an individual from reaching his or her potential" (Farley, 2009: 157). The close relation of tarot with the "New Age" movement in particular, as stated earlier, has also given the chance to tarot designers to experiment, improvise, and re-imagine tarot; among these experimentations and re-imaginings, one could find efforts fulfilling roles "other than divination" (Farley, 2009: 151), just like Mace intends with his *Oracle*. These new creations have blended influences from an extended and multi-faceted plateau: spiritual worlds, psychology, necromancy, the supernatural, religion, ecology, astrology, revolutionary ideas, or even science can all be found in recent decks. A notable example of this shift is Knutson's and Wanless' *Voyager Tarot* (1984). The two creators used unconventional images that included vegetables, animals, forms of art, or alien world systems for their cards. When asked about their creation, Knutson and Wanless responded: "We are creators of our own

<sup>2</sup> Newsletter by Terry Mace, 11 November 2016. Published publicly on Facebook (published with permission).

reality through our beliefs and expectations and that by accessing visual symbols, we were able to reach these deep levels of belief and effect a transformation” (Pollack 1989: 126), emphasising, therefore, the high significance of symbolism and imagination in contemporary spiritual lives.

When it comes to the *Oracle* as part of this trend, Mace asserts that his creation can be seen as a contemporary adaptation of the pre-Christian oracles, who served as elders sought out for advice or guidance, or as the wisdom keepers of their communities. However, instead of using words of wisdom or riddles, like the ancient oracles, Mace’s *Oracle* gives advice through its depictions and images. In addition, according to its creator, his deck “tells a story”; it is a storytelling tarot. Mace believes that this storytelling character of the *Oracle* has a “two-folded” value: it emphasises the oral narrative component, highly important among traditions of the past, and also brings the *Oracle* closer to the concept of the original tarot decks which had a main storyline behind them. Its narrative is of socio-political content and context though: it narrates and depicts the struggles of the contemporary Greek society as seen and recorded by an outsider. However, at the same time, it also “speaks” and relates to the worldwide issue of everyday, tangible, or intangible, individual, or communal, struggles that contemporary people face.

Mace believes that his deck can provide its users with a solution to those struggles: it can become a means, a tool, for self-awareness and individual growth. By using the deck, the users (and/or readers) can become “*shamans*” –therefore, men or women with inner wisdom– of their own selves. Moreover, when they do eventually reach this level of inner wisdom, they will be able to self-heal and find their “sacred” place within the contemporary world.

To manifest this, Mace asked some of his clients or former disciples, to “connect” with the deck and its cards. Sanni Vanttaja, from Finland, who used to be a disciple of Mace while still studying in Aberdeen, and who still communicated with Mace seeking for his advice after she had moved out to her home country, was asked to reflect on her experience with the deck:

*I compare this deck to the ‘outer planets energy’. Powerful and archetypal, but not within the reach of everyday consciousness. That’s why some might find it difficult to grasp it. Their nature seems very Uranian, rebellious, challenging, mind-opening, bringing change and insight.<sup>3</sup>*

Sanni essentially confirms Mace’s own thoughts on his deck: she finds the ‘*Oracle*’ powerful and also capable of reaching the reader’s subconscious, and transmit some, sometimes challenging, but typically profound, messages. As for her comparison to the “outer planets energy,” I asked Adrienne Salmon, a solitary (witch)craft practitioner, to analyse this for me. “The outer planets, like Uranus, [the others are Jupiter, Saturn, and Neptune] because they are farthest from the sun, they affect our lives mostly at an unconscious level,” she told me, adding that “They [the planets] are said to give us knowledge and experience to be able to be part of the bigger picture. [They] also provide a sort of Karmic energy for

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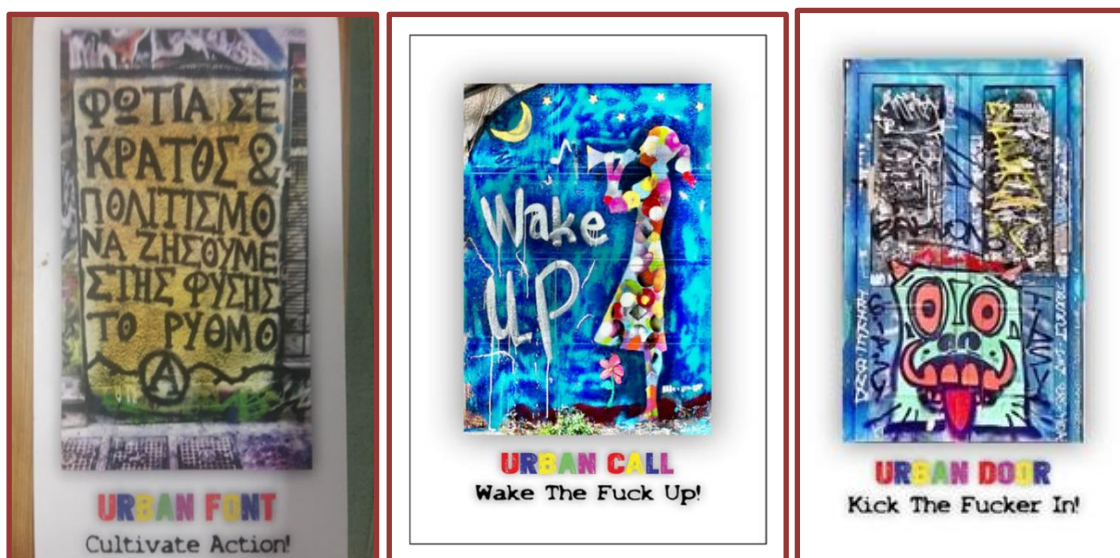
<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Sanni Vanttaja via email, March 2016.

each generation that influences how that generation will unify and impact the world,”<sup>4</sup> confirming, therefore, Sanni’s notion of an interconnection between the *Oracle* and the outer planets, as both help people reach inner knowledge through a subconscious level, while also having a deep overall impact on each generation.

## 7. The Creation Process of the *Oracle*

When it comes to its actual creation, the *Oracle’s* central concept is based on duality, polarity, and contradiction; themes that are expressed, and reflected, on the cards themselves. All cards carry a digitalised version of the original photo, as taken by Mace, with a main title right underneath the picture, accompanied by contradictory, challenging, provocative, and sometimes even profane, messages as subtitles (see Figures 3–5). The main function of the subtitles is to serve, act, and be interpreted as a wake-up call for the person for whom the reading is intended.

Semetsky (2011: 249–50) is among the scholars who have dealt with the hermeneutic interpretation of the cards; she asserts that “tarot readings can contribute to the development of the three I’s of informal education – insight, intuition and imagination,” leading the individual to a lifelong learning, and a self-exploration process. Sosteric also shares a similar idea, adding that tarot is “so powerful that it might help heal the inner child and rework toxic socialization” (Sosteric, 2014: 363).



Photos 3, 4, and 5: some of the more provocative and profane *Oracle* cards (used with permission).

Mace also offered his opinion on the interpretative aim and purpose of his cards. He emphasised that, while most of the other decks only have an affirmative function, promoting the light side of humanity and an inner peace, his deck deals with the dark side via the imagery of its challenging and

<sup>4</sup> Personal communication with Adrienne Salmon via Facebook, March 2017.

poignant messages. “*The other decks only give an affirmation and a platitude. To be in peace or find your peace. What they lack is a dark side,*” he said and added:

*Someone deeply traumatised from his childhood who has no self-worth at all, who feels like shit, they could see that Angel card for three-hundred-sixty-five days, and it will have about that much affect upon their positivity of their life. They absolutely cannot hear the message: ‘The angels love you’.* (EI2016.028).

One of the deck’s testers, who wished to stay anonymous, verified Mace’s claim regarding the Oracle’s challenging nature:

*At first, I felt there are not enough positive cards. Too many negative ones, but this actually made me reassess myself, as there’s no negative, just questions, soul searching, and working through emotions.*<sup>5</sup>

She even gave the example of a particular card she drew while testing the deck, to validate her argument. The card is titled *Urban Sphinx*. The card depicts a graffiti with a rectangular-shaped cat, while the message underneath says: “You’re A Pussy!”

*I was shaken up, like, ‘What do you mean I’m a pussy?’ And I found myself saying, ‘It can’t mean that! That’s so blunt!’ Yet maybe it does. And that’s the card I need to bloody hear.*<sup>6</sup>

Farley argues that people nowadays “see the symbols of tarot as representing differing emotional or spiritual states,” confirming, therefore, the anonymous contributor’s claims about her own emotional reactions to the card. Farley (2009: 15) continues: “By learning the lessons of the symbols and incorporating that wisdom into their worldview, the querent may hope to divulge themselves of ‘negativity’ or ‘emotional baggage’.” Scholars have concluded that, in fact, the main function of many of the contemporary tarot decks is to fulfil some essential human needs: among them, the need for “self-actualisation and transcendence” (Maslow, 1943; Sosteric, 2014: 381); the need for a quest for different spiritual paths and for alternate answers to questions that cannot be fully answered by science and religion. Sosteric (2014: 381) in fact, accuses science of trying to dismiss “the collective experiences of people through history who have believed in mystical realms beyond the mundane.” Semetsky (2011: 252) agrees with Sosteric, claiming that the symbolisation behind the images in tarot promotes individual imagination and challenges scientific rationality, and can also “educate and strengthen the human intuitive function invaluable for meaning-making” (Noddings & Shore, 1984: 27; Semetsky 2011: 253). And finally, they promote the need for a “real experience representation,” which refutes the taken-for-granted reality and normality of the modern world (Farley, 2009: 157). As for the profane character of the *Oracle* cards, it seems to fit into Steven Pinker’s idea (2007) that swearing has five different functions: among them, the *emphatic*. According to Pinker, emphatic swearing aims to draw some extra attention to a phrase, or a meaning, that is considered worthy of additional attention.

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication via email with anonymous contributor, March 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication via email with anonymous contributor, March 2016.

Therefore, in the case of the *Oracle*, the use of profanity in the subtitles draws some extra attention to the card so that the reader comprehends its profound meaning and underlying message, as shown in the case of the *Urban Sphinx* card.

## 8. The *Oracle's* Structure

Even though a first draft of the deck has been produced and sent to Mace's close circle of friends, clients, and followers, Mace told me in January 2017 that the *Oracle* project is yet to be finalised. His target is to create a deck of seventy-eight cards in total, keeping therefore the traditional tarot format. However, unlike most of the other decks, the *Oracle* is not traditionally structured; it does not follow the typical tarot sequence of the fifty-six Minor and twenty-two Major Arcana sequence. Instead, it includes one central card titled *The Urban Shaman*, nine *Focus* cards, six *Do Nothing* cards, fourty-two *Urban* cards and twelve *Action* cards, while another group of eight new cards will be added in the future, possibly under the name *Possibility* cards.

While discussing with Mace his cards and their format, our discussion revolved around the central card of the deck, *The Urban Shaman*. The card, which depicts a digitally modified version of Mace's face portrayed as a traditional shamanic healer with an elaborated headdress (see Figure below), was according to Mace, a late addition. Mace told me that the inspiration behind its creation was, to my surprise, me:

*The others describe it as a comfort card, to protect the deck, the reading, but I don't feel comfortable with the card, to be honest. The only reason it exists is because of you; when you told me that there is no shaman in a 'shamanic' deck, for guidance, and, or, for protection.<sup>7</sup>*



Photo 6: *The Urban Shaman* card (photo taken 2 March 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Fieldnotes from 2 January 2017, King Edward, Scotland.



As Mace hints in his quote, the very first draft of the *Oracle* did not include a ‘shaman-related’ card. However, during one of our first discussions with Mace regarding the conception of the *Oracle* and its cards, I pointed out to him that if this is an *Urban Shaman* tarot, then there should be a pure *shamanic* card. This inspired him to create the *Urban Shaman* card as the centrepiece of the deck. Its function is similar to the archetypal community folk healers: to protect, guide, and to give strength and hope to the deck user. Sanni shares the same opinion with Mace regarding the function of the *Urban Shaman* card: “I feel like it’s the beginning and the end, it’s a guide and a grounding point. It seems to include ‘nothing’ and ‘everything’.”

However, although most tarot decks consider the *Fool* or the *Magician* major arcana cards as their central figure, Mace feels that his *Urban Shaman* card relates more to the *Hermit* rather than the other two. Mace’s opinion is interconnected with the fact that shamanic healers display hermitic tendencies throughout their lives: the archetypal healer secludes himself/herself in order to gain wisdom and knowledge, and (re)connect with nature, either during training, and/or after its completion, as they tend to dwell in remote places, usually in the margins of the community (Walsh, 1994:17–21; Winkelman & White, 1987; Yoder, 1972: 204–5).

When it comes to the role of the *Hermit* card in tarot, it is thought of embodying “the ‘Know Thyself’ motto” –which aligns with Mace’s notion that his *Oracle* is designed to raise self-awareness– and “indicates solitude and withdrawal, as part of every mystical teaching. [...] In solitude, one has the chance to come closer to Nature” (Semetsky, 2011: 257), a key characteristic, as described above, in shamanism. Ouspensky wrote about the function of the *Hermit* in tarot; typically depicted holding a lantern in his hand, the *Hermit* is the bearer of profound knowledge, just like the archetypal shamanic healer for his/her community. Ouspensky elaborates:

The lantern of Hermes Trismegistus, [...] this is higher knowledge, that inner knowledge which illuminates in a new way even what appears to be already clearly known. This lantern lights up the past, the present and the future for the Hermit, and opens the souls of people and the most intimate recesses of the hearts (Ouspensky, 1976: 53).

It seems natural therefore, that Mace, a contemporary shamanic healer himself, would consider the *Hermit*, the mystical, secluded bearer of wisdom, as the archetype behind the most powerful card of his deck.

Another important question when it comes to tarot, is related to the card spread; even though the typical three-card reading is the most common spread and reading pattern among tarot users and readers –where three cards, symbolising the past, present and future are chosen to be interpreted (van Rijn, 2017)– Sanni notes that this type of reading “bound to the concept of linearity of time” does not seem

to apply to the *Oracle*.<sup>8</sup> Mace agrees with her. Therefore, he has suggested a five-card reading instead, which he named *Celtic Cross*, as it has the shape of a cross. He proposes that the cards should be,

*laid out in the shape of a cross or crucifix reading as a powerful and psychoanalytical deconstruction of the traditional crucifixion/sacrificial model of the cross people bear, as a burden of traditional religious teachings of the crucifixion or a Christ/saviour like figure within traditional religious context.*<sup>9</sup>

Mace has also proposed a second ‘cross’ spread, this time with eighteen cards. The four directions of the cross will symbolise four different types of inner processes –Mace has divided these types into ‘cognitive’, ‘physical’, ‘spiritual’, and ‘emotional’– while the *Urban Shaman* will be placed in the middle, as a means of protection and guidance. An extra card will be outside the cross, symbolising either the user/reader, or a problem/issue that concerns him/her.

This multitude of spread patterns and reading/interpreting methods in contemporary tarot has, in fact, caused controversy and debate. This has been noted by people that offer their services within the “magical realm” as well. For instance, illusionist and scientific sceptic, James Randi (2006), writes about this issue:

For use as a divinatory device, the Tarot deck is dealt out in various patterns and interpreted by a gifted ‘reader’. The fact that the deck is not dealt out into the same pattern fifteen minutes later is rationalized by the occultists by claiming that in that short span of time, a person’s fortune can change, too. That would seem to call for rather frequent readings if the system is to be of any use whatsoever.

However, even if one agrees that the spread manner and its interpretations vary significantly, what is considered by both practitioners and academics essential in tarot is the presence of three identical steps in every spread: the shuffling of the cards, the cards being laid out in a particular pattern –but with variations depending on the practitioner’s method of choice– and the concluding interpretation and symbolism of the cards (Gregory, 2012: 278–9; Farley, 2009: 177–8).

Another frequent question regarding tarot is related to the efficacy and the prediction accuracy of the spreads: namely, how and whether the cards and their interpretations actually work. Among the people who advocate for the efficacy and the accuracy of tarot decks is Gregory. According to her, tarot works as a combination of three factors: an “unspecified ‘divine’ energy” hidden behind the deck, Jungian psychological paradigms that assert that “the cards are an oracle of synchronicity, whose archetypal symbols sync to universal, human experiences,” and finally, the personal context factor –in particular, the individual’s personal experiences, interpretation viewpoints, and visions (Gregory, 2012: 278). Jung (1954: 232) himself wrote that “the unconscious archetypes [as] [...] structural elements of the psyche” can help individuals “achieve a wider scope of awareness than analytic or rational thinking is capable of,” which can also be suggested for tarot readings. Other scholars such as Semetsky (2011: 252) believe that the card selection is directly connected to the person’s intuition (and not a divine

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<sup>8</sup> Personal communication with Sanni Vanttaja via email, March 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication with Terry Mace via email, 25 April 2016.

source), as they are picked “by their soul, by the unconscious, and cannot be considered random.” J. Bruner (1966: 61) adds that a “developed intuition in conjunction with analytic thinking” are needed to uncover the hidden symbolisations behind the images. Semetsky analyses her viewpoint:

Through the unconscious projected into a layout of pictures we can discover the means for our self-expression, therefore becoming capable of revealing something that sometimes we are unable, subconsciously – or are unwilling, consciously – even to put into words (Semetsky, 2011: 254).

Elaine Bain is a close friend and client of Mace. She first met Mace in 2014 in Cullen as a potential client. Since then, Elaine has attended most of his workshops at the Holistic Ways Festival and also participated in some of Mace’s private gatherings. She told me that Mace was actually the reason behind her decision to follow the path of Reiki and become a qualified master Reiki practitioner herself; she was inspired by Mace, after he told her that he had sensed a natural healing ability in her. Elaine was, therefore, among the first people asked by Mace to do readings for others using the *Oracle* cards and interpret the cards for them.

I asked Elaine about her impressions on the deck. She told me: “The deck is excellent for working in teams, as it allows for great discussion, insight, and a bringing together of different opinions, understanding and also personal experience,” before concluding about the importance of what Gregory describes as the “personal context factor,” analysed above:

*For most readings, the person only saw what they wanted to see or interpreted it only in line with their usual thought process and the action they would habitually have taken, but when challenged or given alternative meanings they found the solution and the answers they were looking for. (EI2017.027).*

Finally, as in all decks, Mace aims to accompany the deck with a guidebook. However, he intends once again to offer something innovative and radical: The accompanying book will be divided in two parts with two different interpretation guidelines – one addressing the light and the other the dark, offering therefore, both positive and negative interpretations. Mace thinks that this concept will be a confirmation of the dualistic, contradictory nature of his deck.

## **9. The *Oracle*'s Function and Role in Context**

One of the first questions I posed to Mace was about his decision to name his creation *The New Urban Shaman's Oracle* and how it fitted the contemporary context. Mace shared with me that he saw the ‘Oracle’ as a response to his lifelong quest to discover what a contemporary shamanic healer offering his/her services in the ‘western’ context might do, think, and feel towards the environment he/she lives in. According to him, after years of searching, he concluded that the healer’s priority should be to find the appropriate way to build a relationship and interconnection with his/her followers and clients; therefore, he needs to adapt to the environment and the settings they all live in, and to offer services that are appropriate to this context.

An important aspect of the discussion was also related to his decision to attribute the adjective 'urban' to his deck, even though he did not reside in a city himself, but instead in the small villages of Cullen at first, and then King Edward. Mace shared with me his thoughts on urbanisation. According to him, urbanisation is not merely a contemporary phenomenon. Instead, it has been a constant ever-evolving process, even before the explosion of urban settlements in modern times. He considers for example, the accumulation of nomadic peoples into villages, and later into towns, as an early version of urbanisation. In addition, he pointed out to me that when it comes to the contemporary world, urban ways are to be found to some extent, or in some way or form, everywhere, whether it is in a city, a town, or a village.

Mace's opinion aligns with T.G. Nefedova's (2016) notion that nowadays, as part of the globalisation and industrialisation phenomena, rural communities go through a constant urbanisation process; they have access to the exact same services and opportunities and to the constantly updated technology as the populations of urban societies; the community's facilities and infrastructure is adapted to the contemporary needs and functions; and finally, they have quick access to the nearby urban areas using the modern means of transportation. Nonetheless, Nefedova notes that in fact, there is also another phenomenon occurring, juxtaposed with the one of urbanisation; namely, counter urbanisation. Counter urbanisation is the phenomenon of cities losing parts of their population to the surrounding rural areas. The improved communication technologies and transportation means contribute to this decentralisation of the city populace, as people nowadays in rural communities can enjoy the same luxuries and conveniences, as already pointed out.

The other major contribution that the *Oracle* offers to its users in relation to the context it is placed within, is that it deals with values that have long been lost in the modern world. According to its creator, values, such as morality, communal work, companionship, solidarity, and empathy have either been devalued or significantly vanished from our society; his deck however, serves as an essential wake-up call to its users promoting the aforementioned values: "This project is needed to cut through most of the current 'New Age' spiritual crap we've found ourselves in to date," Mace posted on Facebook on 15 November 2016, adding: "I know that I have to dare to speak out against the total nonsense and the delusions of 'spiritual bypassing' in the process."<sup>10</sup>

In his quotation, Mace discusses "spiritual bypassing". "Spiritual bypassing" is a psychotherapeutic term first introduced in 1984 by American psychotherapist and Buddhism spiritualist teacher, John Welwood (2011). The term describes the "tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks." Practically, spiritual bypassing is when an individual avoids facing his everyday issues and/or past traumas by seeking out answers in spiritualities that only promote positive healing

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<sup>10</sup> Public Facebook post by Terry Mace, 15 November 2016 (published with permission).

techniques and ideas (Mace in his quote, offers 'New Age' spiritualities as an example). B.H. Whitfield (1995) notes that "this trap entails actively seeking spiritual highs as a means to avoid processing underlying psychological pain."

Even though the concept of "spiritual bypassing" can be found not only in counselling, but also in eastern and western philosophies, and religious thought, as Clarke et al. suggest (2013: 87–9), bypassing has become more prevalent in the modern world, where counselling and individual spirituality co-exist. Welwood (2000: 14) argues that even though a client's spirituality is very frequently used by practitioners in their approach to enhance their client's mental health, what they do tend to do as well, is that they often overlook the shadow side.

Working against "spiritual bypassing" is one of the central mechanisms in Mace's healing methodologies. He would usually tell me in our private discussions that in his practices, "one has to face the dark before finding the light, as facing only towards the light will definitely blind you in the end."<sup>11</sup> Mace found it, therefore, a necessity to integrate his work against "spiritual bypassing" into his *Oracle* deck. The provocative, profane, and challenging messages that the cards carry communicates this intention:

*Once you identify with what the problem is, you need to take an action! Twelve Action cards! No other oracle deck out there is asking you to take action, action to change your own life, and directs you how to do it; to be your own healer, your own therapist, your own psychologist, your own profound coach.*<sup>12</sup>

Mace is not the only tarot deck creator who has incorporated such themes into his creation. A similar case of a card deck promoting social awareness while also prompting to act, is the *Anti-Nuclear Wendländisches Tarot* (1980) created by Waltraud Kremser (Kaplan, 2002: 61, 68; Farley, 2009: 155). It was inspired as a reaction against the German authorities' decision to build a new nuclear power station in the Wendland region. The two creators have decided to illustrate the cards with images of antinuclear slogans and connotations. Two examples of the revolutionary and reactionary nature of this deck are the *Kaiser* (*Emperor* in German) and the *Gerechtigkeit* (*Justice* in German) cards. The former depicts an individual "dressed in a business suit with a top hat with dollar bills stuffed into a band, nursing a large, phallic missile," while the latter depicts a woman holding a set of scales; a bird and a flower are on the one side of the scale, outweighing the other side having a power plant on it (Kaplan, 2002: 69).

Finally, as part of our discussion on the *Oracle's* place in contemporary settings, Mace also attempted to set his deck into a spiritual/religious context. In an email sent to me in November 2016, Mace mentioned that he believes that the *Oracle* can also be seen as a vehicle for personal salvation and liberation from sin, as opposed to the transference of sin to a Christ-like figure, found in traditional

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<sup>11</sup> Fieldnotes from 24 October 2014, Cullen, Scotland.

<sup>12</sup> Public Facebook post by Terry Mace, 15 November 2016 (published with permission).

religious doctrines. Moreover, the symbols within the artwork of the *Oracle* could be used as a reinterpretation or deconstruction of traditional religious iconography, symbology, and art within traditional religious dogmas, teachings, and doctrines. Mace's notion of reinterpreting or deconstructing traditional religion comes in accordance with Farley's notion that tarot emerged as result of a discontent towards religious authorities, as examined earlier in the article (Farley, 2009: 174).



Photo 7 (left): Mace and the author at Syntagma Square (photo taken by Mace, 14 October 2015).

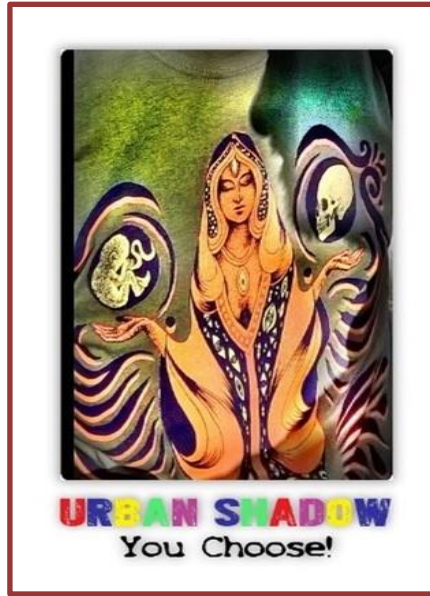


Figure 8 (right): The *Urban Shadow* card that was inspired by the photo in figure 7 (used with permission)

## 10. The Current State of the *Oracle*

Unfortunately, some dramatic changes occurred in Mace's life in 2017, which affected profoundly his healing work and the *Oracle* creation process. His decision not to take regular fees for his services, but instead asking for donations, worsened his financial situation to the point that he could no longer afford his expenses. Consequently, this had its toll on his physical health, as he suffered two major heart attacks, in January and October 2017. This has caused a drastic change both in his life and work, which led to a prolonged period of self-doubt, physical seclusion, and social isolation. Since then, Mace has adopted a more pragmatic, or even cynical, attitude towards life while also finding escape and comfort in song-writing. However, even in the songs he created and recorded, one could still encounter the straightforward and provocative nature that he had demonstrated in the *Oracle*, with song titles such as "I Killed Myself an Alligator," "You Smell Mad to Me," and "Reggae Fuck It Yoga."

Naturally, this situation also had its impact on the *Oracle*, as no major changes had been made since. However, during one of my last visits to his new residency somewhere in woods of Aberdeenshire, Mace told me that he was looking forward to re-approaching some projects he had started before his heart attack; among them the *Oracle*. However, his priority still is to re-discover his self and his spirituality:

*For me, life is now very different. I complete my life daily, moment by moment because I know that my tomorrow is not guaranteed. I absolutely recommend dying before you die for good to everyone who is the least bit interested in understanding the total futility, delusional and childish idea that life has any meaningful reason for existing other than biological replication. [...] So, please yourself, do, say, and act the way you want because everything else is a waste of your life and death.*<sup>13</sup>

## 11. Conclusion

In this article I presented the creation of a contemporary tarot deck titled *The New Urban Shaman's Oracle*, as created by Terry Mace, a contemporary 'western' shamanic healer in North-East Scotland. Apart from describing the creation process of the deck, and the motivations and inspirations behind it, other subjects were explored as well, such as the tarot's historical background, and its shift in function and context. As mentioned in the first part of the article, tarot has evolved from an elaborated playing-card game into a magical tool used for divination and personal growth, as an outcome of the changes of the socio-political and economical settings of the societies within which it was, and still is, found: "It began its life as a game with no purpose beyond providing mental stimulation" (Farley, 2009: 3), and transformed into a "perfectly simple philosophical machine [...] that astonishes by the depth of its results" (Levi, 2002: 85).

In accordance with the above notion, that tarot evolves and adjusts to the needs, beliefs, and context of the times in which it is created, in the current times of both financial and existential crisis that we live within, Terry Mace's *Oracle's* goal is to raise self-awareness and urge people to "take action." The initial inspiration behind its creation might have been contemporary Greece during the financial crisis years, however, Mace, along the crafting process, had observed that issues such as poverty, homelessness, and an overall societal decline can be found in other European societies as well – the British included – thus, realising that some problems actually are pan-European. For Mace, his creation can, therefore, be the link between these cultures; his *Oracle* aims to make people feel empowered to face their own problems and to become more involved in the matters that preoccupy the society they live within, wherever that society is:

You see, when we take full and personal and social responsibility for our lives without blaming another, we begin to learn how to reclaim back our lost, given, or stolen power... With this newly found awareness and knowledge, we can then assist, support and nurture positively those who also need to do the same.<sup>14</sup>

And even though the early 2017 psychosomatic regression affected him so strongly as to provoke uncertainty, self-doubt, estrangement, and a temporary abandonment of his practices, Mace is still eager to get back to working on the *Oracle*, even if that meant extra fatigue for him.

Being there from the beginning since the *Oracle's* conception, and witnessing how it progressed and how the creator's health and financial struggles have affected, and still affect, its completion, I, too,

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<sup>13</sup> Public Facebook post by Terry Mace, 12 October 2017 (published with permission).

<sup>14</sup> Newsletter by Terry Mace, 11 November 2016. Published publicly on Facebook (published with permission).

feel personally attached and emotionally invested to the project. Its finalisation will, therefore, feel as an event that will bring joy to me as well. But, even if its final completion does not eventually occur, the fact that Mace has been able to produce and circulate a first draft of the *Oracle* cards –transforming it, therefore, from an idea, and an intention, to something tangible– does bring a feeling, certainly to me, of accomplishment, and also of nostalgia for my eventful journey with Mace in Greece. As for the Mace himself, he considers the *Oracle* to be part of his own journey and future legacy:

*Hopefully, I shall continue to do so until I no longer exist as I or you once knew. When this happens, all you will have of me is what I have left behind in my words, deeds, and actions.*<sup>15</sup>

Only time will tell whether Mace will return to his previous life and facilitate others with their own healing and self-awareness as he had been doing for so long.

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<sup>15</sup> Public Facebook post by Terry Mace, 12 October 2017 (published with permission).



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### **Personal Communications**

Anonymous Contributor	March 2016	Email
Mace, Terry	April 2016	Email
Mace, Terry	November 2016	Email
Salmon, Adrienne	March 2017	Facebook
Vanttaja, Sanni	March 2016	Facebook

## Short CV

Athanasios Barmpalexis has a Ph.D. in Ethnology (and Folklore) from the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom. His doctoral thesis was on ‘western’ forms of contemporary shamanism and vernacular healing, focusing on shamanic healers residing and practising in the wider area of North-East Scotland. He currently works as a Visiting Lectured at the Elphinstone Institute, giving lectures on Mythological Theories and Vernacular Medicine. His current research interests range from Celtic mythologies and local legends, folk music elements in contemporary subgenres of extreme metal music to traditions of resistance, folk medicine and vernacular healing, and traditional witchcraft.

## Σύντομο Βιογραφικό

Ο Αθανάσιος Μπαρμπαλέξης έχει λάβει το διδακτορικό του δίπλωμα στην Εθνολογία και τη Λαογραφία από το Elphinstone Institute του Πανεπιστημίου του Αμπερντίν, στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο. Η διδακτορική του διατριβή πραγματευόταν δυτικές μορφές σύγχρονου σαμανισμού και παραδοσιακής θεραπείας, εξετάζοντας συγκεκριμένα θεραπευτές σαμανισμού που ζουν και προσφέρουν τις υπηρεσίες τους στη Βορειοανατολική Σκωτία. Αυτήν την περίοδο εργάζεται ως Επισκέπτης Λέκτορας στο Elphinstone Institute, όπου διδάσκει Θεωρίες Μυθολογίας και Λαϊκή Ιατρική. Τα τωρινά ερευνητικά του ενδιαφέροντα κυμαίνονται από τοπικούς Κέλτικους μύθους και θρύλους, παραδοσιακά και λαογραφικά στοιχεία στο σύγχρονο ακραίο ήχο της μέταλ μουσικής σε παραδόσεις αντίστασης, λαϊκή ιατρική και παραδοσιακές μορφές θεραπείας και παραδοσιακή μαγεία.

