

People  
Populus  
\* \*  
\* \*  
\* \*  
\* \*  
Serious  
adversity

The Way  
Via  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
Mixed  
Girl  
Puella  
\*  
\* \*  
\*  
\*  
Increasingly  
mixed

Dragon's Tail  
Cauda Draconis  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\* \*  
Decreasing ill  
luck  
Lesser Fortune  
Fortuna Minor  
\*  
\*  
\* \*  
\* \*  
Decreasing  
good fortune

Dragon's Head  
Caput Draconis  
\* \*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
Increasing good  
fortune  
Greater Fortune  
Fortuna Major  
\* \*  
\* \*  
\*  
\*  
Increasing good  
fortune

Conjunction  
Conjunctio  
\* \*  
\*  
\*  
\* \*  
Mixed, neither  
increasing nor  
decreasing

Prison  
Carcer  
\*  
\* \*  
\* \*  
\*  
Constant  
ill luck

Winning  
Acquisitio  
\* \*  
\*  
\* \*  
\*  
Increasing  
good fortune

Loss  
Amissio  
\*  
\* \*  
\*  
\* \*  
Decreasing  
ill fortune

Joy  
Laetitia  
\*  
\* \*  
\* \*  
\* \*  
Decreasing  
good fortune

Sadness  
Tristitia  
\* \*  
\* \*  
\* \*  
\*  
Increasing  
bad luck

Red  
Rubeus  
\* \*  
\*  
\* \*  
\* \*  
Ill fortune

White  
Albus  
\* \*  
\* \*  
\*  
\* \*  
Increasingly  
mixed

# Geomancy for Beginners

*as first presented at Pennsic War XXXVIII*

While "geomancy" is often used now to describe feng shui and related Asian practices, in medieval Europe it was the earth branch of a suite of divination methods including pyromancy, aeromancy and hydromancy. Astrology was the best-respected technique for telling the future, but required a great deal of study and mathematical sophistication. Geomancy was more adapted for popular use; books of interpretations were available, much like modern dream interpretation books. There were many competing methods of This handout covers a simple adaptation of one school of interpretation based on the astrological houses.

Like many scientific methods (many of which are now considered pseudoscientific, but that's a modern perspective), geomancy came to Europe from the Islamic world. It became popular in the 12th century, probably several centuries after its development. Based on published works on the topic, geomancy was practiced until at least the 17th century. The most famous surviving geomantic prediction was made for England's Richard II in 1394, and is held by the British Museum. References to geomancy also appear in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*.

Geomancy is one of the class of divinations methods that starts with generating random numbers. It gets its name from the original method of generating random numbers by making dots in the dirt. Pen and paper is easier for us. Flipping coins also works. Whatever method you choose, it is important to concentrate on the question of interest while generating the numbers. "[T]he practitioners of the art have found geomancy to be a true science through which things future, present, and past may be revealed, provided the geomancer's judgement is not obscured by the obnoxious influences of the body or the deceitful actions of the senses." (Richard Fludd 1617, in Josten 1964).

## Constructing a Geomantic Tableau

A geomantic tableau comprises fifteen symbols (sometimes sixteen), each made up of four rows with one or two dots (see back page). The first four symbols are randomly-generated, and the rest are derived from those.

1. While concentrating on your question, make 16 lines of dots. If doing a divination for someone else, have them make the dots while concentrating.

. . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . .

. . . . .  
 . . . . . etc.

2. Count up the dots. The only important feature is whether the number is odd or even. The traditional method is to connect pairs with a line, working from right to left. That makes it simple to tell if the number is even or odd. Geomancy is of Islamic origin, so all steps are worked right to left.

. \_ \_ \_  
 . \_ \_  
 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 . \_ \_ \_  
 \_ \_ \_ etc.

3. These 16 odd/even elements combine to form the first four geomantic symbols, the Mothers. If the first element is odd, put one dot in the top right corner of the tableau. If even, put two dots. The second element goes underneath that, then the third, and the fourth. The fifth element begins the top of the second symbol, to the left of the first symbol. Continue until all sixteen elements have been used to make four symbols.

			*			*	*
*	*		*			*	*
						*	*
*			*			*	
*		*	*			*	*
*		*				*	*

4. The elements of the Mothers make up the next four symbols, the Daughters, placed in the same row as the Mothers, to the left. Starting at the top right, read across the top row - here, odd, even, even, odd. Those four symbols make up the first (rightmost) daughter from top to bottom. The second row goes into the second Daughter, etc.

*		*	*		*		*
*		*			*	*	*
*		*		*	*	*	*
*	*	*		*	*		*

5. The rightmost pair of Mothers are used to construct the first of the four signs in the next row, the Nephews. This pair is added together by row. First row: odd + even = odd first symbol; odd + odd = even second symbol; etc (and even + even = even). The second unused pair combines to make the second Nephew. The first and second pairs of Daughters make up the last two Nephews.

*		*	*		*		*
*	*		*		*	*	*
*	*	*	*		*	*	*
*		*			*		*

6. The two pairs of Nephews are added together to make the two Witnesses in the third row, and the two Witnesses are added together to make the Judge in the fourth row. If a sixteenth figure is used, it is made by adding the Judge and the first Mother.

```

      *           * *
      *           * *
    * *           *
    * *           *
                                *
                                *
                                *
                                *

```

A tableau can never contain all sixteen different figures ( $2^4$ ), and it must always have an even number of dots.

## A Complete Geomantic Tableau

4 Daughters/Filiae				4 Mothers/Matres			
VIII	VII	VI	V	IV	III	II	I
4 Nephews/Nepotes							
XII		XI		X		IX	
2 Witnesses/Testes							
	XIV					XIII	
1 Judge/Judex							
XV							

## Interpreting the Geomantic Tableau

Very complex interpretations can be constructed using correspondences between the geomantic symbols, the twelve signs of the zodiac, seven planets and four elements. The simplest method of interpretation relates the first twelve symbols (Mothers, Daughters, Nephews) to the twelve astrological houses, and uses a basic meaning for each symbol. The Witnesses and Judge provide the overall tenor of the tableau, and the symbols in the twelve houses answer more specific aspects of the focal question.

### Astrological houses:

I. Life/Vite - The House of Salchemyoul and Life: Beginnings of life, and of all works.

II. Property/Census - The House of Property and Wages: Substance, traffic, riches,

and other things necessary for life.

III. Brothers/Fratrum - The House of Brothers and Sisters: Brothers, sisters, cousins, kinfolks and associates, Judges, and Prelates.

IV. Fathers/Patrum - The House of Fathers and Mothers: Fathers and mothers, possessions, heritages, houses, treasures hid, and things secret.

V. Children/Filiorum - The House of Offspring and Children: Infants, daughters, nephews, and their inclination, messages, embassies, and profit of heritages.

VI. Illness/Servorum - The House of Illness and Disease: Banishments, bondages, sicknesses, false accusations, and witnesses.

VII. Women/Mulieris - The House of Maturation and Sexual Matters: Marriages, weddings, women, quarrels, wars, and things lost.

VIII. Death/Mortis - The House of Slaughter and Death: Heaviness, sadness, enemies, long torments, imprisonment, and the quality of death.

IX. Journey/Itineris - The House of Movement and Changes: Voyages, navigations, faith, religion, ceremonies, divination, dreams, wonders, and tokens of God's wrath.

X. Authority/Regis - The House of Power and Glory: Honors, dignities, and governments of kings, and of great lords.

XI. Fortune/Fortune - The House of Hope and Expectations: Amity, company, good adventures, favor, aid, and succor.

XII. Enemies/Laboris - The House of Enemies and Jealousies: Secret enemies, prisons, captives, vengeance, treasons, deceits, horses to be sold, and the end of a person.

### **Geomancy only:**

XIII. The House of the Questioner.

XIV. The House of the Object of the Inquiry.

XV. The House of the Result.

XVI. The House of the Result of the Result.

First identify the symbols in any Houses related to your question, or in all of the Houses. Then compare them with the list below to identify a basic meaning. Put it all together to form your interpretation. These very simple meanings come from Cattani (1591). If you'd like to learn more about the interpretations, that's a good source to begin with.

And always remember: "The science of geomancy is very occult and inward; it is difficult to account for it in a rational way. Geomancy transcends vulgar understanding to which it must appear foolish, inane, absurd, and ridiculous." (Richard Fludd 1617, in Josten 1964).

## **The Sixteen Symbols**

## References

Cattan, Christopher. 1591. The Geomancy of Master Christopher Cattan, Gentleman. Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>

Robert Fludd, Robert. 1617/1618. *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris scilicet et Minoris Metaphysica, Physica atque Technica Historia*. In: Josten, C.H. 1964. Robert Fludd's Theory of Geomancy and His Experiences at Avignon in the Winter of 1601 to 1602. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27: 327-335.