
TAROT DECORATIF

COMPANION BOOK



by LEE BURSTEN

with foreword by CIRO MARCHETTI

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PREFACE

The Tarot Decoratif is a standard tarot deck with the traditional format of 78 cards, including 22 Triumph cards, 16 court cards and 40 pip cards. The deck is an homage to the Tarot de Marseille, a type of tarot deck that has been produced since the mid-17th century—with some pictorial elements dating back even further. The popular Rider-Waite-Smith™ Tarot (RWS) is based in large part on Tarot de Marseille imagery.

Some of the distinguishing characteristics of the Tarot de Marseille are the rough, blocky linework and cartoonish figures, reflecting the comparatively primitive printing techniques (woodblocks and stencils) used in the early Marseille decks. In contrast, the Tarot Decoratif was created by artist Ciro Marchetti using his signature modern magic-realist style. For this deck, Ciro has also utilized Art Deco, a design style that reached its peak in the 1920s and '30s, which gives the cards a unique look compared to his other decks.

In the classic Tarot de Marseille, the pip cards simply show the appropriate number of suit symbols as well as some decorative elements. For the Tarot Decoratif, Ciro has emphasized the suit symbols in each pip card, but has also provided a small image or vignette that recalls the RWS scenes. In this book, a numerological method is provided for reading the pip cards, which could also be used for classic Tarot de Marseille decks or even playing cards. The vignettes offer a comforting point of reference to readers who are familiar with the RWS, but they are interpreted based on the cards' numerological meanings, resulting in some intriguingly different interpretations.

For those readers accustomed to modern tarot decks, there are some differences in naming conventions used in this deck and book that you will want to keep in mind.

First, the titles on the cards are in French. The card titles used in this book will be English translations of the French titles, as follows:

THE TRIUMPHS

0	Le Mat.....	The Fool
1	Le Bateleur.....	The Juggler
2	La Papesse	The Popess
3	L'Imperatrice.....	The Empress
4	L'Empereur	The Emperor
5	Le Pape	The Pope
6	L'Amoureux.....	The Lovers
7	Le Chariot	The Chariot
8	La Justice.....	Justice
9	L'Hermite.....	The Hermit
10	La Roue de Fortune	The Wheel of Fortune
11	La Force	Strength
12	Le Pendu	The Hanged Man
13	(L'Arcane Sans Nom).....	The Card Without a Name
14	Temperance	Temperance
15	Le Diable	The Devil
16	La Maison-Dieu	The House of God
17	L'Étoile.....	The Star
18	La Lune	The Moon
19	Le Soleil.....	The Sun
20	Le Jugement.....	Judgment
21	Le Monde	The World

THE ROYAL COURT

Valet	Page
Cavalier.....	Knight
Reyne	Queen
Roy	King

THE SUITS

Épées.....	Swords
Batons.....	Batons
Deniers	Coins
Coupes.....	Cups

Note that the 22 allegorical picture cards, called the Major Arcana according to later tarot traditions, are here called Triumphs. The other cards, later called the Minor Arcana, are here referred to as the 16 courts or court cards and the 40 pips or pip cards.

Also note the following differences between the names of the RWS cards and the English names of the Tarot de Marseille cards used in this book:

RIDER-WAITE-SMITH:

The Magician
The High Priestess
The Hierophant
Death
The Tower

TAROT DE MARSEILLE:

The Juggler
The Popess
The Pope
(The Card Without a Name)
The House of God

A final note, in the Tarot Decoratif, as in the Tarot de Marseille, the Justice card is numbered 8 and Strength is numbered 11.

This book begins with a foreword by the artist, Ciro Marchetti, explaining how the deck came to be, including his thoughts on each of the Triumphs.

After that, I provide an Introduction, which discusses the history of the tarot and of tarot symbology. Then, Part One contains my full card texts for the Triumphs and the court cards. Part Two sets forth a complete course on how to learn to read the pip cards numerologically, followed by card texts for each card. Finally, I provide a sample reading using the meanings and systems set forth in the book.

Lee Bursten 2020

FOREWORD

by Ciro Marchetti

In 2013 I attended the Readers Studio tarot conference in New York City and announced my “retirement” from tarot. I still planned to create new oracle decks (e.g., Lenormand, Kipper), but had little desire to produce another tarot deck. Tarot, with its structure and symbolic content, was a category I felt I had personally exhausted.

That remained my position until October 2019, when I attended a presentation by Russell Sturgess, who offered an entertaining and compelling perspective on the Tarot de Marseille. His core premise revolves around Catharism, a Christian Gnostic movement in France and Italy from the 12th to 14th centuries. Viewed as heretics and persecuted by the Catholic Church, the Cathars spread their teachings through tarot decks. The symbolism on each of the Major Arcana cards was code; the imagery was intentionally ambiguous, to avoid persecution by Roman Catholic authorities. Cathar doctrine was hidden-in-plain-sight within a deck of “playing cards.”

Sturgess’ ideas are only theories and are not unanimously agreed upon by other scholars and historians. But I found them quite compelling—enough to rekindle my interest in tarot and motivate me to create another tarot deck. I knew I wanted my new deck to be related, in some form, to the Tarot de Marseille.

“Marseille” is a style of tarot deck comprised of similarly designed cards. The Tarot de Marseille (and its variants) is one of the main pillars of the tarot world, sharing the stage with Rider-Waite-Smith (RWS), including its various clones, and Thoth. (Independent decks also exist but are too varied to be considered a “pillar.”) Many consider Tarot de Marseille to be the “true tarot.” It is the commonly accepted precedent to most tarot decks, and its heritage predates RWS and Thoth by several hundred years.

How did the images and symbolism presented on the Marseille tarot cards develop? How, exactly, should the cards be interpreted? There is no definitive documentation that is directly associated with a primary deck. Over the years, many scholars have proposed a variety of theories and insights. Their conclusions are based on any number of factors, taking into consideration the prevalent political, religious and social circumstances of the period and how the card imagery would have been understood by the mainly illiterate people of those times. There is also a considerable diversity of opinion amongst contemporary Marseille experts (readers, publishers, authors and deck creators), who I consulted with as I developed Tarot Decoratif.

One particular area of contention is color. Many tarot aficionados claim there is a correlation of color with symbolic meaning. I accept that this may be so in part, but not entirely. When you look at the myriad of decks printed over the centuries, you'll see that there are inconsistencies. If color was symbolically important, wouldn't printers have made a concerted effort to faithfully adhere to a particular color system? It seems that variety and flexibility were acceptable, not only with color, but with other features as well.

Some Marseille enthusiasts are able to perceive nuanced expressions and character in the woodcut tarot figures. They see purpose and meaning in every hand gesture and facial expression. Even the decorative content of the lesser-illustrated pip cards are given in-depth analysis, with each petal, leaf and curve perceived as a significant nuance. A subtle line, shape or negative space may be given special consideration and meaning. But in my view, many of the details in the Tarot de Marseille should not be credited with deliberate intent and nuanced meaning. It's one thing to embrace the charm and historical vagueness of the early Marseille illustrations as an opportunity to come up with one's own reading interpretations; it's another to conclude that those interpretations are the de facto meanings that

have to be matched by artists that follow. I have realized, ironically, that vagueness can give an illustration strength, because it allows more room for personal interpretation. The importance of that approach cannot be underestimated.

For my own deck, the Marseille influence may not be immediately apparent. By cross-referencing and comparing imagery from various decks, I was able to "cherry-pick," using what appealed to and made sense to me. I chose what to copy, what to eliminate, what to change. The illustrations are more realistic and more decorative than what is normally seen in a Marseille deck. The Tarot Decoratif card images may leave hardcore Tarot de Marseille purists dissatisfied. However, I believe the cards can still be read as one would read traditional Marseille-style cards. For me, this project was an exercise in achieving balance: respecting tradition in order to be faithful to these early decks, but also not blindly duplicating it.

Below are some notes on the individual Triumph (Major Arcana) cards. For reference, the Tarot Decoratif card and a Marseille image will accompany each of them.

0. LE MAT (THE FOOL)

Is the Fool a holy man, a naive innocent, or a vagabond? The RWS Fool leaping off the cliff, unaware of the inherent "foolishness" of such an act, serves as an analogy for the start of the Fool's journey through the Triumphs. The journey is a metaphor for our own lives, where we gain experience and understanding from the characters and scenarios we (the Fool) will meet and interact with along the way.



The companion dog connects the RWS to its Tarot de Marseille predecessors, yet clearly Pamela's friendly little pooch, willingly following us in our "leap of faith," is not from the same litter, nor does it share similar intentions as his ancestor from the Marseille deck, whose aggression strongly suggests that the presence of the Fool is unwelcome. His tearing of the Fool's legging is aimed at either preventing the Fool's arrival or encouraging his departure.



RWS Fool

The Fool is an enigmatic figure that has been referenced in many cultures and periods in history. A figure of both ridicule and begrudging respect, the Fool—epitomized in Shakespeare's *King Lear*—enjoyed a physical access to and influence on the king, and had the unique privilege of being allowed to question and contradict the king's actions.

In medieval times, wandering "fools" may have been cautiously respected and honored by the populace and considered holy men, who piously and voluntarily rejected material comfort in exchange for a spiritual life. That sounds plausible enough in a general historical sense and thus in the Marseille also, were it not for the symbolism of the unfriendly nipping animal.

No matter who or what he was, the Fool would have been considered different and strange, and he would have been misunderstood, qualities that even today often trigger fear and rejection. I have added a small village scene and pathway in the background in my Fool card to emphasize both a physical distance and this social separation.

1. LE BATELEUR (THE JUGGLER)

Most of what has been written about this card suggests that the items on the table are representations of the suits—Cup, Sword, Coin, and Baton (held in his hand), and are therefore more than just a random selec-



tion of performance props. I have indulged the theory because, intentional or not, they do add some relevance to the Juggler's role. I have given those items on the table much emphasis and clarity.

I have added three dice to the Juggler's accoutrement. Three dice offer 56 combinations of rolls, the same number as the sum

of the pip and court cards. At a time when playing cards were being frowned upon as diversions of the devil, the role of the dice (pun intended) and this numerical "coincidence" made them worth including.

I researched, but couldn't find anything close to the shape of these wide-brimmed hats for that period in history, so there has to be some significance to them beyond a fashion statement or artistic flourish. (Or does there?) Some tarot authors suggest that the Juggler's hat is really a means of portraying the lemniscate symbol of infinity, and I have emphasized it visually on the Tarot Decoratif Juggler (as well as on the Strength card).

2. LA PAPESS (THE POPESS)

The Popess will become the High Priestess in the RWS deck, centuries later. But here she is closely associated with the Church by title and crown. I've used a book she is holding as a visual feature connecting her to her male counterpart, the Pope. Both the RWS and the Tarot de Marseille refer to



her mystery, which is symbolized by her being a semi-hidden, veiled presence.

There are some imaginative suggestions that the Popess was actually Pope Joan, who was said to have come to her position by disguising herself as a man, her gender only being revealed after becoming pregnant and giving birth, during a public procession no less.

Colorful though it may sound, let's consider a more plausible scenario, namely that she may have been Sister Manfreda of the Guglielmitte sect, who managed to achieve such a position of power through family connections with the Viscontis, commissioners of the earliest extant tarot deck. Either way, it's interesting to note that her crown is merely two-tiered, compared to the three-tiered one of the Pope, thus still maintaining the church's gender-based pecking order.

3. L'IMPERATRICE (THE EMPRESS) and

4. L'EMPEREUR (THE EMPEROR)

For the Empress and the Emperor, I've kept a reasonably close color scheme and posture to that of the early Marseille cards. In terms of the shields, I always assumed they were simply eagles, so often used as symbols in regal crests. Some historians claim it's actually a gerfalcon, emblem of Avignon prior to the sale of that city by Queen Jeanne to Pope Clement VI in 1348. Both theories sound plausible, but neither explains why the crest would vary from one card to the other of these matching rulers. Another Marseille inconsistency, or was it deliberate? And if deliberate, what would that mean?

Some suggest the bird is actually a phoenix, which doesn't sound as likely as the previous proposals, but it does provide a possible explanation for the variations in the birds' shapes. In brief, the Empress' bird could be a phoenix in its fledgling infant state and then it appears as a mature, developed creature on the Emperor. In the absence of a better explanation, this worked for me because in the case of the Empress,

this line of thinking reinforces the maternal aspect.

Indeed, I have added a glowing winged shape over her womb and positioned the staff and orb she holds as if it points to or emanates from that point of "conception," whereas the Emperor is shown holding the staff and orb almost as a phallic extension—not my interpretation, I must add, but I have followed along anyway.

I have also maintained the rather strange and, I would imagine, uncomfortable cross-legged pose. Many authors state that this overlap of the legs is a figure 4 shape. Russell Sturgess believes it is in fact another "disguised" Cathar connection, as it resembles the graphic logo used by that group as their "brand" watermark used in their paper-making. As a graphic designer, that seems plausible to me.

To be honest, I have no clue or have read no clear rationale for what is depicted on the Emperor's head in the Marseille. Is it a helmet, a crown? So I simply created something elaborate, admittedly still strange, but at least looking like something more akin to headgear.

5. LE PAPE (THE POPE)

The Pope (RWS Hierophant) represents, to me, official Church doctrine and power, and I have included an image of an open book (as with the Popess) to reinforce that concept.



There are two priests depicted in travel garb, suggesting they have come from afar to pay homage to (and acknowledge the authority of) the earthly leader of the Church. They are shown from the rear in most Tarots de Marseille, and would be almost unrecognizable as clergymen were it not for the circular depiction of their shaved heads. While it works, it's a rather simplistic rendering which would not have worked using my illustration style.

So I modified the imagery and showed the two figures based on the Gringonneur Tarot Pope card, once thought to have been painted for Charles VI of France. In my rendition, it's worth noting that the crown he wears is a three-tiered one. The modified crown was introduced by Pope Boniface to represent his self-proclaimed role as "emperor over emperor" and was intended to symbolize his ultimate rule. Not the most modest of pontiffs, Boniface apparently also described himself as Caesar. Now, I'm not proposing that the figure in this card is Boniface—indeed, the three-tiered crown continued to be used up until 1975—but I felt it was worth including if only as a comparison to the two-tiered crown of the Popess.

6. L'AMOUREAUX (THE LOVERS)

The Marseille-style Lovers card depicts three figures standing on the ground, with Cupid hovering above them, ready to shoot his arrow. (From deck to deck, Cupid seems somewhat undecided as to who his



Gringonneur
Tarot Pope

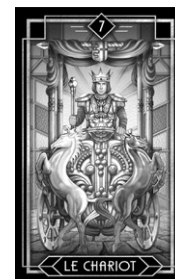
target is.) Clearly, the presence of Cupid indicates some romantic element, which brings up some interesting possibilities to explain the relationships between the three figures. For me it makes sense if seen as a transition. The central male figure is depicted (in most decks) as looking at one of the two females, which suggests that he has made a choice; not a choice between two lovers, but rather, between two variations of love itself.

He has reached a transition point—turning away from a mother's love to that of a partner—and moving forward toward his new life. To better communicate this narrative, I have portrayed the female on the right as a more mature figure (the mother). In many decks she is shown with an outstretched hand touching him. This might suggest her gently and encouragingly letting go, or alternatively attempting to hold on. Nevertheless, he looks towards the younger woman.

It would appear his decision has been made, encouraged this time by a more accurate aim from Cupid's bow directed between the two.

7. LE CHARIOT (THE CHARIOT)

Early Marseille decks almost always portray both chariot horses facing left, but for this deck I've chosen to depict the horses facing opposite directions. Aesthetically, horses are more recognizable from a profile than from head on. Symbolically, it indicates



the conflict and challenge of opposing forces that the charioteer has to overcome and control in order to proceed in his intended direction.

In many of the Marseille decks there is a crest with initials. In some it's "S.M", in others it's "V.T". I have no idea what these are, and I haven't read of anyone who knows. Some ideas are that they are the initials of some ruling figure of the time or even that of the artist working on the deck. The latter makes more sense to me because if it had been a reference to a ruler, someone would have made a corresponding historical connection. Even so, it would not be particularly relevant or necessary to reproduce in this project.

Instead, I have substituted it with a different crest, namely that of the city of Milan. It's an indulgent connection on my part, as the early decks are closely connected to the ruling families of the province of Lombardy, who were often in conflict with the Church authorities in Rome and who provided the Cathars with refuge from that same common enemy. If my connecting of the dots does not work for you, then just treat it as a decorative extra.

8. LA JUSTICE (JUSTICE)

Statues of Justice in courthouse squares show her as blindfolded, presumably as a means of depicting impartiality. But I prefer how we see her in the Tarot de Marseille (as well as the RWS), where Justice is fully aware of the varying argument of any given case. The lack of the blindfold allowed me to depict her with a solemn downward glance towards the scales. With impartial consideration, she balances opposing factors and the letter of the law prior to reaching a conclusion. Via the sword, she sym-



bolically has the authority and power to impose the corresponding decision and legal consequences.

9. L'HERMITE (THE HERMIT)

Most Marseille Hermit cards portray a standing figure against a nondescript background. For this deck, I've added a village scene in the distance—on both the Fool and Hermit cards—which I use to emphasize both the literal and social separation between the two protagonists and their respective societies. In the case of the Fool he is being rejected, whereas in the case of the Hermit, it's his choice. The shape of the pathway in the Fool card leads from him to the village, and his progress is hindered by the unwelcoming dog. On the other hand, the Hermit abandons the path toward the village and instead strikes out on his own.



10. LA ROUE DE FORTUNE (THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE)

The Wheel of Fortune was intended to demonstrate the capricious nature of our fate. Power and material worth are in a constant state of change beyond our control and are decided upon by the fickle nature of the gods. The monkey and hare possibly symbolize the tragic comedy and ultimate futility of our attempts to control our fate.

My only symbolic deviation on this card is the depiction of mechan-



ical cogs and levers, a feature I've also included in my previous decks. It's a personal take on the concept to prompt us to consider that ultimately the wheel is also manmade. It therefore suggests, rather than our lives being solely defined by the random spin of the wheel, that we do, via our own choices and responsibility for our actions, have some influence over the outcome. As I said, though, this is a personal twist; feel free to pass.

11. LA FORCE (STRENGTH)

I recall Rachel Pollack explaining to me, when I was first working with tarot, that the Strength card was symbolic of spiritual strength, not physical. So much for all those classic decks depicting the poor Leo being beaten by a club-wielding Hercules. But I agree with her clarification, and in my previous decks I have always shown a female figure, not just because of the common association and historical depiction of the 'virtues' as females in the older decks, but because a female emphasizes the overall mismatch and underscores her control over the savage beast by forces other than physical strength. This is further implied by her demeanor, an expression of calm confidence rather than fear.



12. LE PENDU (THE HANGED MAN)

The depiction of the Hanged Man is quite similar in the Tarot de Marseille and RWS, and I stayed comfortably close to both—far closer than in my previous decks.

Theories and explanations about the Hanged Man are all over the



place. For me, the “hanging” shown seems to be a means of punishment. Not a death sentence hanging, but more a public humiliation. Some theories connect it with Norse mythology, where Odin, chief of the gods, hung himself from Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life. He spent nine days and nine nights hanging from the tree,

seeking knowledge; a self-imposed period of endurance from which he wished to learn the female-held secrets of written language (runes). I have alluded to the number nine in a “buttoned-down” way.

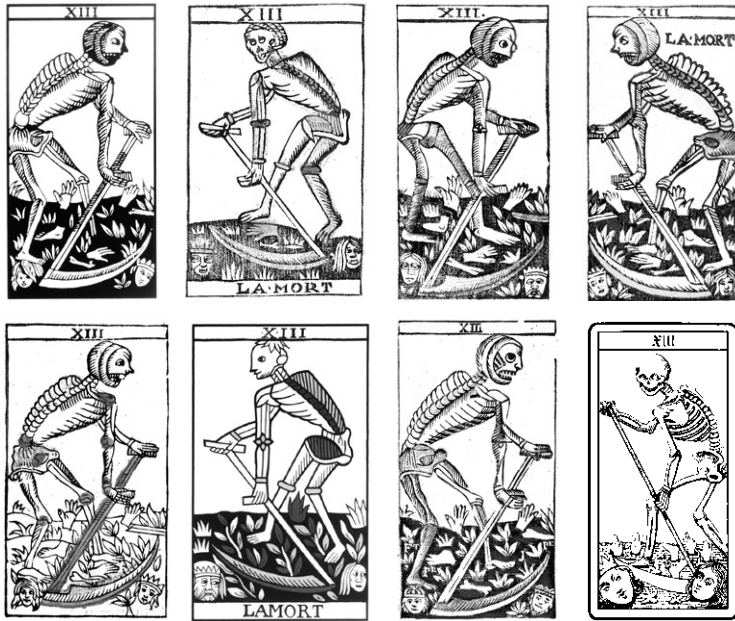
In the RWS, it has often been explained as a pause in the Fool's journey, his physical position a kind of meditative state of reflection, an opportunity for assessment and change in perspective. As such, his facial expression is passive, with no indication of discomfort; an absurd assumption if indeed it is a punishment. So it's a questionable choice on my part, but there you have it.

In this deck, the trees from which he is hanging are simply decorative art nouveau-style forms, although I have maintained in them some Marseille symbolism in the form of the red-tipped evidence of pruning. Note that figure 4 cross-legged position again.

13. (NO TITLE) / LA MORT (DEATH)

Over the centuries, the directionality of the Death card has been inconsistent. The grim reaper has faced both right and left, prompting one to ask, “Is he coming or going?” The jury, it seems, is out. Some have proposed that the irregularity is the result of a mistake in the printing process. I can relate





to that because printing errors have crept into almost every one of my decks. But I don't quite accept it to be the case with Mr. Mort.

If the first occasion of a direction change was simply an error, and if it was considered important enough, subsequent publications would surely have rectified this and it would have been a one-off anomaly. Yet the change in direction continued and was arbitrarily selected in various other editions. So one can conclude that whatever the direction, it was deliberate and considered an optional choice.

I had to decide which way I would have my Death figure face—right or left, forward or back? The card's underlying concept of the skeletal

figure literally cutting through what was, or what existed, suggests to me that it deals with the past, whereas the inclusion of green foliage that is somehow surviving this gardener's deathly weeding suggests life in the future. For me, it made more sense to show the figure looking to the left (to the past and the preceding cards), his cutting scythe clearing the way for what is to come after, the future (cards to the right). But then again, I could be dead wrong.

By showing coffins rather than body parts, I have avoided the rather gory horror B-movie approach. I also didn't feel it was necessary to ram home the obvious by including the rather anatomically incorrect Marseille skeleton. So I limited it to a skull and a flowing cloud-like veil to represent the concept of death, rather than a Halloween-like figure.

14. TEMPERANCE

The Tarot Decoratif Temperance illustration stays reasonably close to the many Marseille depictions of the card, including the strong blue/red coloring of the figure's clothing. I have also maintained the "flower of Venus," the name given to the red five-petaled rose that often appears on the angel's forehead, although I have increased its size and incorporated it as part of the background window.



Of the various theories provided for the pouring of liquid from one vessel to another, the one that made most sense to me was that it represents mixing wine with water. This can be seen as an act of diluting or "tempering" the strength and negative effects of the wine. It's a visual analogy for finding balance and equilibrium in all aspects of one's life. Alternatively, one might consider that if the flow is reversed, it would

have a stronger religious association with Christ's miracle (turning water into wine). Either way, the water/wine connection was a compelling one for me and so I colored the two vessels accordingly.

15. LE DIABLE (THE DEVIL)

Most stories need an antagonist, and tarot of course has the granddaddy of them all, the Devil—the quintessential bad guy, with standard horns, brandishing a flaming sword of unbridled passion and badly in need of a manicure.

If you need a villain in your deck, here is your man. And if you need more evidence of just how bad he is, there are the two figures who we can assume are paying the price for their earthly sins, a warning to us all. Their nakedness was presumably perceived, in those historical times, as the ultimate expression of baseness and fall from God's grace. Their chains affirm their eternal captivity.



16. LA MAISON-DIEU (later known as THE TOWER)

The Tower card usually shows an edifice being destroyed by a lightning bolt, with figures falling, presumably ejected from the structure. It is an illustration of God's wrath; indeed, the card title, La Maison-Dieu, translates to "The House of God."

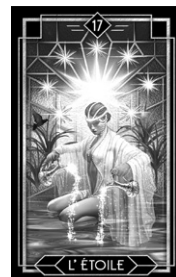
In the Tarot Decoratif, I see the two figures as casualties of destruc-



tion. They fall from whatever positions they held, symbolizing that whatever circumstance preceded it, it was untenable and the destruction has finally put an end to it. But in doing so, it has also opened up new horizons, a chance to start afresh and find a new role or purpose.

17. L'ÉTOILE (THE STAR)

The Star is pretty much the standard depiction, and even includes the hardly noticeable small bird in the background as a token gesture to the Tarot de Marseille. However, this card also serves as a perfect example of my dilemma when considering how faithfully to follow traditional imagery.



The number of stars included on most of the early decks represent the number of planets that were known at the time. So should one stay faithful and keep to that number, or in a new deck should one increase the number of stars to graphically reflect current astronomical knowledge? Doing so would be a break from the imagery of stars shown in the older images, but the underlying concept (to represent the number of planets that we are aware of) would be maintained. Ultimately, I decided to remain faithful to the original number of stars.

18. LA LUNE (THE MOON)

The typical imagery for the Moon card includes two canines, a pool of water, a crustacean, two architectural structures in the distance and, of course, the moon. For the Tarot Decoratif, I replaced the simple moon face with a Madonna and child.

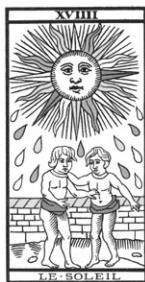
There are countless explanations for the imagery on this card. Most agree that the crustacean stands for the astrological connection of

Cancer and its symbolic crab; but then why is a lobster-shaped creature depicted, rather than an actual crab? With a little research, I discovered that historically the word “crab” referred to any shellfish with pincers; crayfish, lobster and crabs were all astrologically connected to Cancer.

Many cultures saw the moon as a Great Mother figure. It was common for medieval artists to connect the love of a mother with the love of God. Including the Madonna and child adds depth and mystery to the card.

19. LE SOLEIL (THE SUN)

Among the various descriptions for the Sun card, the one that I found personally more appealing was that the two figures are Romulus and Remus, the mythological twins suckled by a she-wolf and credited as having been the founders of Rome. I have matched the poses of the famous sculpture on which they appear, the Capitoline Wolf (*Lupa Capitolina*), and enhanced the plot further by depicting the wall that is included in most Tarot de Marseille versions of this card, with a typically Roman mosaic texture and the monogrammed letters of the city.

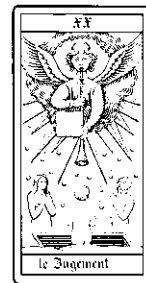


In the Marseille, these two infants are shown wearing a collar. I haven't found a clear explanation of this. But unlike many other details, these collars seem to have been deliberately included and so must have meaning. There may be a connection to the two figures on the Devil card who also wear collars. It may be a candid forewarning of the human condition, that despite the innocent freedom of these infants, their destiny (and ours) is preordained; we will be tempted and will succumb to negative forces, and be entrapped by them.

20. LE JUGEMENT (JUDGMENT)

I used my Tarot Decoratif winged logo as the Judgment card angel. Her trumpet call summons the dead from their graves, resurrecting them in preparation for their final judgment.

There is no consistent color scheme among Marseille decks for the cross on the flag attached to the trumpet. I have chosen to use the colors of the RWS Judgment card; the red cross on a white background has a recognizable Christian association and is also the emblem of St. George.



21. LE MONDE (THE WORLD)

The World, or to be more precise, the material world represented by the four corner figures, the biblical evangelists, plus the central female figure symbolizing the *Anima Mundi* (Soul of the World), is



placed over a mandorla-shaped frame. Together, they are referred to as the quincunx and are the triumphant conclusion to the Fool's journey.



To summarize, I consider that the way I have depicted the Triumphs (Major Arcana) is reasonably close to the Tarot de Marseille. I have gone off script with the pip cards, by including small vignettes of the RWS themes into the simpler standard design of the Marseille pip cards.

Tarot Decoratif echos the broad use of the primary colors, specifically red and blue, that are so prominent in many Marseille decks. In other cases, shallow though it may sound, some choices were made simply because they offered more interesting visual opportunities. These various approaches combine to create a questionable potpourri of content, but I don't think to any greater degree than a myriad of variations that preceded it over the centuries.

Stained glass windows are shown on all 78 cards and serve as a common visual theme that binds the deck together. They are my own adaptations based on the designs of Frank Lloyd Wright and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, both principal artists of the Art Deco movement. They vary slightly in tone from card to card while having an overall commonality within each suit. Patterns are repeated on cards that connect with each other. For example, Triumph cards 2, 12, and the twos of each suit will share the same designs; Triumph cards 5, 15, and the fives of each suit will share the same designs; etc. Also, each royal court rank shares a background. For example, the Pages share one design, the Knights another, and so on.

I have paid homage to the Tarot de Marseille in a number of ways, among the most obvious of which is the use of French for the titles on the cards. The Fool is without number, Death is untitled, the RWS High Priestess reverts to the Popess, as does the numbering and position of

Strength and Justice. Additionally, to distinguish it from my self-published deck, U.S. Games has replaced the original Roman numerals with standard (Arabic) numbers, for a more modern style.

According to the art film director Alejandro Jodorowsky (who with Philippe Camoin published a Tarot de Marseille reconstruction), "all deviations from the Tarot de Marseille are nothing but inglorious bastards." This is a view shared by many; but personally I find such comments both condescendingly dismissive and flawed. They ignore the only real criteria that actually counts for any tarot deck, and one that supersedes any style or system comparison to some nebulous historical accuracy, or the reputation of the artist who produced it. Ultimately, it boils down to how each and every reader responds to the final product; how they in their individual way interact with a deck; and, last but not least, the accuracy of the reading produced with it. That's where the true magic is. The rest is often just a new version of what is being worn by the character in card 4.

The Tarot Decoratif is what it is; certainly a deviation, a hybrid, but hopefully not an inglorious bastard. As its title suggests, a "decorative" variation of the classic older decks, presented in a more detailed illustration style, for an audience that may find it appealing or who may have previously considered the Marseille style less so.

I hope you enjoy it.

Ciro Marchetti 2020

INTRODUCTION

by Lee Bursten

TAROT HISTORY

The tarot deck originated as a variant of the playing card deck. The history of playing cards is fairly straightforward. Packs of cards composed of ascending numerical values and organized in suits, used in game playing and gambling, are thought to have originated in China between the 9th and 10th centuries CE. From there, they spread throughout India and the Middle East.

In the late 14th century, a 52-card, four-suited deck called the Mamlûk deck (named after the then-current Egyptian dynasty), with suits of Scimitars, Polo-sticks, Cups and Coins, traveled from Egypt and Syria to Europe. European decks with suits of Swords, Batons, Cups and Coins, obviously based on the Mamlûk decks, began to appear and were immediately popular. The first written reference to European playing cards is from Switzerland, dated 1367.

As the playing card deck and the games that used them migrated across Europe, many regions developed their own set of suit symbols, still in use today. For example, Italy and Spain use the Mamlûk-derived Swords, Batons, Cups and Coins, while Germany uses Leaves, Acorns, Hearts and Bells. France and England use Spades, Clubs, Hearts and Diamonds. Today, most tarot decks retain the Italian/Spanish suits.

In Italy, in approximately 1420, tarot decks, then called *carte da trionfi* (cards of Triumphs), began to be produced, which added 22 Triumph cards and four extra court cards to the standard playing card deck. In the 16th century, the deck, and the bridge-like game it was played with, began to be referred to as Tarocchi. Today, museums hold examples of late 15th to early 16th century wood-

block-printed decks for common use, as well as luxury hand-painted decks made in the 15th century for the Visconti-Sforza family, the rulers of Milan. (In the Tarot Decoratif, the Chariot card shows the crest of Milan.) It is unknown whether the luxury hand-painted decks were based on earlier printed decks, or if the hand-painted ones came first. The scarcity of 15th century examples of printed decks may simply be due to their fragility and expendability.

There was a great variety in the designs of tarot decks, but in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Tarot de Marseille design became prominent in several countries. Elements of the Marseille pattern can be seen in decks going back to the 15th century, but the first complete deck in the pattern that we know of is the French deck by Jean Noblet in 1650. Marseille decks, used mostly for game playing up to the 19th century, and mostly for divination and occult purposes thereafter, are still produced to this day.

TAROT SYMBOLISM

A natural question when studying the history of tarot is, what was in the creator's mind when deciding on the cards to include in the sequence of Triumphs? Surely, if we knew what the creator had intended to communicate, we could use that as a template for understanding the cards and conducting readings with them; that would be the "correct" interpretation of the cards.

But there are several problems with that approach. For one, we don't know precisely who the creators were, nor do we have any contemporaneous documentation from them as to their intentions for the deck. Also, while there are some examples from the 16th century of writings reflecting the use of tarot for personality description or divination, tarot decks were virtually always used for game playing.

The cards show images and symbols that would have resonated with 15th century Italians. Italy at the time was experiencing an explo-

sion of artistic and spiritual exploration, due to a number of factors, including the temporary relocation of the Papacy from Rome to Avignon in the 14th century, thus relaxing somewhat the hold the Church had had on the medieval mind. There was an enormous interest in unearthing and studying ancient Greek and early Roman writings expressing pre-Christian philosophies, although these writings were now regarded in a Christian context. Interest in ancient mythologies, Platonism, Neoplatonism, mystery religions, various Christian heresies, Jewish mysticism, astrology and alchemy abounded. These ideas were reflected not only in writings from the time, but also in art and graphic design. Tarot-like images are frequently found in 15th century Italian illustrations, and a person in that place and time would likely have recognized and understood all the images in the tarot Triumphs.

At the same time, we must remember that while the Church's grip on scientific and mystical thought and speculation was weakened, it was still the primary paradigm, and new ideas—or new interest in pre-Christian ideas—still had to be expressed within a Christian context. Thus, all 22 Triumphs can be seen as completely consistent with the orthodox Christianity of the time, even the seemingly subversive Popess. A common artistic convention was to illustrate institutions, qualities and virtues as female figures, and in this interpretation the Popess might simply represent the Church as a whole.

The next assumption many people make is that the sequence of Triumphs must therefore represent the teachings of one of the mystical systems that so fascinated the Renaissance Italians. However, tarot historian Robert V. O'Neill, in his book, *Tarot Symbolism*, makes a persuasive case that Renaissance scholars often combined elements from different systems, and that they delighted in obscure symbology that required specialized study to understand. In other words, to these scholars, ambiguity and mixing of sources was a feature, not a flaw.

To this heady brew we can also add the fact that the tarot is not the

only cultural artifact from the time comprised of apparently mystical symbology combined from different sources. Others include non-tarot decks of cards that have different imagery and content; triumphal parades with floats bearing representations of virtues and mythological characters; and Petrarch's poem "Trionfi."

So, in the absence of writings from the tarot's creators, or writings about the tarot from Renaissance scholars, it seems safe to assume that the creators had something in mind when choosing which symbols and allegories they would put in the deck. But we really don't have the evidence necessary to claim that the tarot was an attempt by its original designers to embody any single source, even if that source clearly contributed some elements.

One of the ideas that preoccupied the Renaissance scholars was that of dualism, exemplified by Neoplatonism. Stated simply, this dualism describes God on the one hand, and mankind living in the material world on the other. The spiritual and the material are seen as two completely separate things. The goal of the ideal man or woman is to achieve a mystical union with God, as well as to use spiritual forces to manifest positive change on the material plane; in other words, to bridge the gap between the material and the spiritual. In this light, the tarot Triumph sequence can be seen as a step-by-step description of the journey between mankind (pictured as the Juggler) and the mystical union with God (the World).

Plato proposes that there are three parts to the soul: the Soul of Desire, which represents our physical desires, for food, warmth, sex and survival; the Soul of Will, which includes concepts like honor, the ability to postpone temporary satisfaction for future goals and the ability to place others' needs ahead of our own; and the Soul of Reason, which perceives the non-material realities of philosophy, religion and mysticism. Each of these three "souls" must be experienced and dealt with before we can attain the sought-after mystical union pictured on the World.

As described by tarot artist and historian Robert Place in his book *The Tarot, Magic, Alchemy, Hermeticism, and Neoplatonism*, the Triumphs can be separated into three lines of seven cards each (the Fool is set aside). Cards 1 (Juggler) through 7 (Chariot) represent the Soul of Desire, showing mankind (the Juggler) navigating its way through temporal authority figures and the drama of choice.

Cards 8 (Strength) through Temperance (14) represent the Soul of Will, showing the ups and downs of life on this Earth, alternating difficulties and dangers (Hermit, Wheel of Fortune, Hanged Man, Death) with cardinal virtues (Justice, Strength, Temperance).

Cards 15 (Devil) through 21 (World) represent the Soul of Reason, showing sequentially brighter sources of celestial light (Star, Moon, Sun) as a symbol of increasing wisdom; triumph over death (Judgment); and the final goal of a mystical union with God (the World).

An interesting feature of this analysis is that each of the seven-card sets begins with a problem, and the following six cards of the line represents the solving of the problem. In the Soul of Desire line, the problem is the unpromising vision of humankind personified as a disreputable con man. In the Soul of Will line, Justice shows us a standard that few can achieve, with the remaining cards in this line show us trying (and often failing) to do just that. And the Soul of Reason line begins with a most unreasonable Devil.

This organizing principle provides us with a conceptual framework that can help us understand the Triumphs in a general way, without straying too far from the mindset of a Renaissance Italian. In the individual card texts that follow, we'll return frequently to this principle to see how the individual cards fit into the overall pattern. (In 15th century decks, the Triumphs were unnumbered; however, since we're examining the origins of the images through the lens of the Tarot de Marseille, we'll consider the sequence according to its typical Marseille numbering.)

Another organizing principle we'll use is a simple one—an ascending

set of concepts, valued from lowest to highest, each one vanquishing the previous one. A numerical sequence that starts with a lowly street performer and ends with the entire world clearly suggests a hierarchy of values. It also happily coincides with the bridge-like game played with the deck at the time, in which each Triumph card “triumphed” over other cards (thus the name of the game and the deck, *Trionfi*).

Such philosophical and metaphysical considerations offer plenty of food for thought if we're examining the cards from a philosophical standpoint, or reading the cards to answer philosophical questions. Most readers, though, want to use the cards to explore more down-to-earth topics. In our journey through the Triumphs, we'll investigate possible interpretations from both viewpoints.

Some of the interpretations of the Triumphs in this book may seem strange to those accustomed to RWS and later decks. It is not the claim of this book that a Renaissance Italian would have performed divinatory readings with the tarot using these precise divinatory meanings (for one thing, that Renaissance Italian is much more likely to have used the cards for gaming). But these meanings are probably closer to how that Renaissance Italian would have seen the cards than many of the meanings you would see in modern tarot literature.

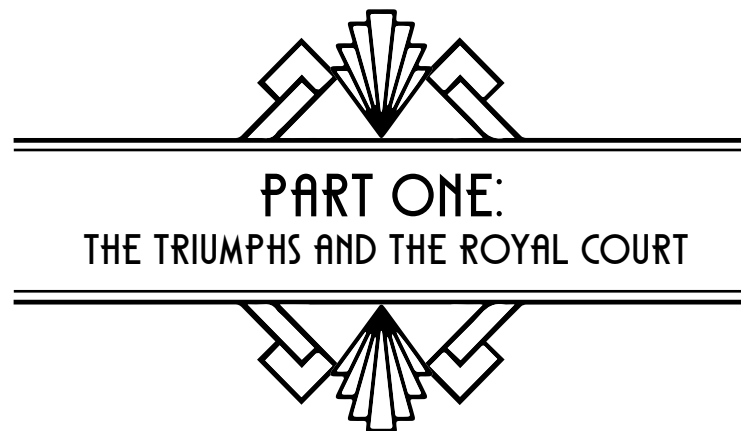
Since the first known complete Tarot de Marseille is from mid-17th century France, why are we interpreting the cards from the viewpoint of a 15th century Italian? For one thing, there are Marseille-like individual cards and card elements that date back to pre-17th century Italy. The Cary Sheet, held at Yale University, is a fragment of an uncut sheet of Italian woodblock-printed Triumphs from around 1550 that contains the earliest known examples of the Marseille Star and Moon images. And a very Marseille-looking Two of Coins card was found at the Sforza Castle in Milan that actually contains the date—1499.

Another reason to look to 15th century Italy is that if we start in 15th century Milan and travel two centuries into the future and 400 miles

northwest to arrive at 17th century Paris, we are now to some degree removed in space and time from the mindset of those who created the tarot, and from those who easily understood the images' significance. A 17th century Frenchman or Frenchwoman would probably have thought many of the cards quaint and intriguing but wouldn't have understood them in the same way or to the same degree as a 15th century Italian. So an examination of the cards from the viewpoint of a 17th century French person would probably yield fewer useful insights.

Of course, while an exploration of how a 15th century Italian might have seen the cards will aid our understanding of the cards in general, it may not always be an effective source for divinatory meanings, especially given the Christian and Neoplatonic ideas referenced in many of the cards. It is impossible to overstate the dominance of the Church over every aspect of people's lives at the time and place of the tarot's creation. So, if we want to be well-informed about the ideas that may have been in the designer's mind, we must consider Christianity as a major source. For those who, like me, are not Christian, or for those who are Christian but don't wish to approach reading the cards from that perspective, we can simply treat the Christian ideas as psychological allegories, which is the approach I have taken when presenting divinatory meanings for the Triumphs.

I believe that the historical, religious, mythological, philosophical and metaphysical considerations described in this book can be mined for invaluable source material for reading the cards in the 21st century. But, admittedly, it's an inexact science with few direct one-to-one correlations. In any case, my decades-long experience of reading the cards tells me that the precise divinatory meanings we use are less important than the act of reading itself, in other words, telling stories with symbols, allegories and metaphors.



► THE TRIUMPHS ◀



THE FOOL (LE MAT)

As we begin our search for divinatory meanings in the Triumphs, the first in the sequence, the Fool, immediately provides us with a clue if we look at his role in the game of Tarocchi. The Fool was a wild card or excuse card that could be played at any time in place of a Triumph card. Thus, when we see the Fool turn up in a spread, we can say that it presents us with an unexpected opportunity. The other most obvious meaning is being foolish or acting like a fool.

The Fool as he appears in the Tarot Decoratif and the Tarot de Marseille is an itinerant jester. While we are more familiar with court jesters as literary figures such as in *King Lear*, itinerant jesters were more numerous, traveling the countryside and performing for common folk at markets and gatherings. He carries his belongings in a bundle on a stick, and a dog is annihilating his pants. On the Tarot Decoratif card, his walking stick becomes a jester's scepter, called a *marotte*, topped with a tiny jester's head. So we can see the Fool as a figure of fun, a comedian with a subversive humor that can communicate pointed social commentary with a dose of laughter.

While he is unnumbered and considered a wild card, he's often seen as setting forth on a journey whose progress is symbolized in the rest of the Triumphs. If the cards are laid out in numerical order from left to right, Fool, Juggler, Popess and so on, the Fool appears to be walking towards the other Triumphs. Thus, he represents journeys, particularly

the beginning of a journey.

Finally, and on a more profound note, our Fool might be a holy fool, exhibiting crazy wisdom or divine madness, denoting a religious devotion that is perceived by others as foolish or mad.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Unexpected opportunity
- ♦ Foolishness
- ♦ Humor, especially subversive humor
- ♦ Beginning a journey
- ♦ Spiritual devotion unconcerned with appearances



1 ♦ THE JUGGLER (LE BATELEUR)

"The Juggler" is the English translation of the common French name for this card, *Le Bateleur*. Like the Fool, he's an itinerant performer, setting up his table and performing magic tricks for the crowd.

During the Renaissance and earlier, traveling performers and theatre troupes had an uncertain social stature. They entertained both common folk and the upper class, but were at the same time seen as immoral influences and were castigated by the Church and

periodically banned altogether.

Adding to his disreputability is the possibility that he's performing a shell game, which is a confidence trick in which the performer takes bets from the crowd on which cup contains the ball, while using sleight of hand to mislead the audience on the actual location of the ball, thus illicitly allowing him to keep the audience's bets. (Three-card monte is

the modern version, performed with playing cards.) So, in our search for divinatory meaning, we can start with deception, tricks and manipulation.

The card might simply indicate dexterity or skill, which sleight of hand certainly requires. While the street corner prestidigitator is the most common illustration for this card, some Italian decks showed a shoemaker or cobbler, wearing an apron and with his implements laid out on a table before him, thus indicating the acquisition of a professional skill.

In our Platonic Three Souls analysis, the first set of seven Triumphs begins with the Juggler. The first card of each set represents a problem, and so the Juggler is the problem in the Soul of Desire line. As a disreputable performer and possibly a con artist, he occupies the lowest social level and represents a willingness to use unethical means in order to satisfy his earthly desires. This doesn't mean we always need to see the Juggler as negative, but there is an implication that at times, his skills may not be put to the highest use.

There are times in our lives when it isn't so easy to determine what is the right or wrong thing to do. Let's say you're trying to get a job that you think you can probably do well but that you haven't done before. Your prospective employer asks if you're confident that you can do the job. Is it deceptive to say "yes" even if you're not completely confident that you can? A "yes" answer may not be entirely true, but a "no" answer denies you the opportunity to try. The Juggler introduces us to a world of ethical ambiguity and challenges us to think through the implications for ourselves.

On the Tarot Decoratif image, the checkerboard design of the table suggests games and strategies, while the Juggler's celestial tunic adds a dash of showmanship.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Skill, dexterity
- ♦ Deception, tricks, manipulation
- ♦ Unethical motivations
- ♦ Consideration of ethical ambiguities



2 ♦ THE POPESS (LA PAPESS)

There are several possible sources for this image that tarot historians and authors mention, and all of them are plausible to some degree. Some of the more popular ones include Pope Joan, a legendary character who entered the priesthood disguised as a man and rose to the position of Pope, only to be revealed as a woman when she unexpectedly gave birth; Sister Manfreda, elected Popess of the heretical Guglielmites and a relative of the Viscontis who commissioned the oldest

extant hand-painted tarot decks; or Venus; or Mary; or Isis. Many of these possible sources have been represented in 15th century art that contains some or all of the major elements of the Popess card.

Another possibility is that she is simply a personification of the Church as a whole, or religious concepts such as Wisdom or Faith, as seems likely given the propensity of 15th century Europeans to use a female figure to illustrate qualities, virtues and organizations (as we can still see today in the statues of Justice in courthouse squares, embodied as a blindfolded woman holding scales).

Whichever the original source was (and there may have been more than one—remember the Renaissance scholars' love of ambiguous and many-layered symbols), it seems clear that 15th century Italians were

accustomed to seeing images of a seated woman wearing religious garments, with a book on her lap, and that the image could have had both positive and negative implications. The common denominator of all these sources is simply a female spiritual power.

So where does this leave us when we try to boil all this down to a divinatory meaning? If we start with the book on her lap, we can think about learning, writing, printing and knowledge. We can certainly consider spirituality; and if we want to apply a yin/yang overlay to gender, we might think of her as representing a more inward-facing, solitary, intuitive form of spirituality, to contrast with the Pope's outward-facing, dogmatic orthodoxy. Alternatively, in keeping with the identification of the Popess with the Church itself, we can interpret her as indicating a religious institution in general.

There are several different Triumphs that indicate different kinds of knowledge. The Popess stands for studying and learning, a quiet understanding, and the esoteric and mystical aspects of major religions; the Pope, for exoteric dogma; the Emperor, for administrative and political knowledge; and the Hermit, for experiential knowledge.

Of course, even in today's Catholic Church, no female clergy is allowed, so a female Pope is a contradiction in terms. When we bring the archetype down to everyday life, the Popess's gender-bending suggests an alliance with a cause but a defiance of its rules. For example, perhaps someone succeeds at their job but only on their own terms, rather than their boss's.

Finally, we must consider her in her position in the Soul of Desire line. If we take a very negative viewpoint of her as a false religious leader, then she belongs with the unscrupulous Juggler at the bottom end of the sequence. If we see her more positively, then she is simply one of the four earthly powers (Popess, Empress, Emperor, Pope) that follow the Juggler and that rule our journey through the world of desire.

In an interesting variation of the traditional Tarot de Marseille image,

the Tarot Decoratif Popess sits behind the veil, instead of before it, and her book, unlike most depictions that show it open, is instead mostly closed. Both veil and book suggest secrets and esoteric knowledge.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Spirituality, particularly in its feminine or yin aspect; quiet, solitary, inward-facing
- ♦ Esoteric or mystical aspects of religious institutions
- ♦ Joining a cause or organization but doing it your own way, not necessarily in conformity with the power structure that rules it
- ♦ Learning, writing, knowledge and quiet understanding
- ♦ Secrets



3 ♦ THE EMPRESS (L'IMPERATRICE)

The Empress is important in the sequence of Triumphs as one half of the Empress/Emperor duo. Duality was important to Renaissance scholars, and here in the first line of seven we have two examples of a male-female pair, along with the Popess and Pope. The Empress/Emperor duo suggest laws, rules and customs that govern our social and civic behavior, while the Popess/Pope combination rules our ethics and our spiritual activities.

However, when the Empress turns up in a reading, we are looking at her individually. Since there is not much to distinguish her from her consort, the Emperor, other than gender, we will need to consider gender when determining her divinatory meaning. If we consider a female ruler in light of stereotypical gender roles, we can say that while the Emperor rules with military might, the Em-

press rules with less direct force, using intelligence and patience rather than aggression to accomplish her goals. While the Emperor is concerned with armies and law enforcement, the Empress would be more concerned with the other things necessary for a healthy nation, such as diplomacy, agriculture, trade, education and health—perhaps recalling the Greek goddess Athena, who, besides being a goddess of war, was also associated with wisdom, medicine, arts, crafts and mathematics.

If we wanted to delve even further into stereotypes (and tarot does often speak in the language of clichés and stereotypes), we could characterize the Empress as emotional and temperamental compared to the Emperor's stolid discipline. Finally, we must consider maternity, since one of the Empress's duties is to bear her consort an heir. Some see the Empress as pregnant, a suggestion that is amplified on the Tarot Decoratif image. As a symbol of motherhood, she nurtures and protects, but can also be overbearing. Such qualities would be relevant regardless of the gender of the querent, of course.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Authority, particularly diplomatic or strategic
- ♦ Encouragement of artistry, craftsmanship and education
- ♦ Protection, nurturance, motherhood



4 ♦ THE EMPEROR (L'EMPEREUR)

The most obvious historical analogues for the Emperor are the Holy Roman Emperors who ruled their Empire from around the 10th century AD until 1806. The Emperor was considered in theory to be under the authority of the Pope, which is why in the tarot the Pope follows the Emperor in the hierarchy of Triumphs.

The Emperor, along with his consort the Empress, are in the Soul of Desire line because they rule the conditions that govern our everyday lives. The Emperor embodies the world of nations, boundaries, wars, taxes, armies, levies; also police, laws and systems of justice.

He was often seen in Renaissance art as a religious figure, either in his role as divinely appointed monarch, or as a representation of God. He was also often used as moral allegory, a warning against hubris, as he succumbs to figures representing Love or Death, illustrating the common medieval theme further explored in the Wheel of Fortune, that no matter how exalted a position one may reach, time and love will defeat one in the end.

His crossed legs have several possible connotations. The most obvious reflects his numbering in the sequence of Triumphs; he is the fourth card, and his legs form the number 4. (In the early Tarots de Marseille of Jean Dodal (circa 1701) and Jean Payen (1713), the artists have inscribed a Roman numeral 4 floating in front of the Emperor's face). The crossed legs may also refer to the glyph for the planet Jupiter, who in Roman myth is the king of the gods (the glyph is thought to represent the Greek letter *zeta* for Zeus, the earlier Greek version of Jupiter). The scepter topped with a globe and cross (the *globus*

cruciger) represents spiritually-sanctioned dominion.

According to the gender roles we relied on with the Empress, the Emperor rules with authority backed by military strength. But he cannot be simply a despot; a good ruler is required to rule with wisdom and mercy. He must have a certain wiliness that allows him to perceive when to force an issue and when to step back and allow his opponents to make mistakes that might lead to their own destruction.

As a ruler, we can associate him with anyone in our lives (including ourselves) who occupies a role of authority or who exerts authority. In the role of father, he becomes the prototypical authority figure and, ideally, also serves as first mentor and teacher.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ A position of authority
- ♦ Someone enacting the role of an authority figure
- ♦ Making decisions based on wisdom and mercy
- ♦ A warning against hubris
- ♦ Fatherhood, mentorship
- ♦ Abusing authority for corrupt ends



5 ♦ THE POPE (LE PAPE)

The Pope is one of two cards, the other being the Emperor, that actually refers to historical personages—the Holy Roman Emperor, and the holder of the office of the papacy. Of course, the cards don't refer to two particular people but rather to all the people who held those offices. They also refer to the positions themselves as distinct from the people who held them. The Pope technically outranked the Emperor. At the time tarot was created, the Pope was the highest spiritual authority.

Together, the two represent the highest authorities that a person was subject to, and in fact they were often pictured together.

The picture shows the Pope with typical papal symbols: the triple tiara, the triple cross and the three-fingered blessing, all representing the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The cross on the hand (some Marseille decks show two crosses, one on each glove or hand) symbolizes the wounds of Jesus.

Historically, popes have always had petitioners, and thus we see two petitioners on the card. The sequence of Triumphs is, among other things, a story about duality, and we can see these two small people as the first representation in the sequence of a duo seen together on a card. We will see other duos on the cards, including the Lovers (two women, or a man and a woman); the Chariot (two horses); Justice (two pans of the scale); and so on. The duos could be interpreted as the Souls of Desire and Will. On some cards they work in concert, on some cards they're in opposition. Eventually, they are reconciled and transcended.

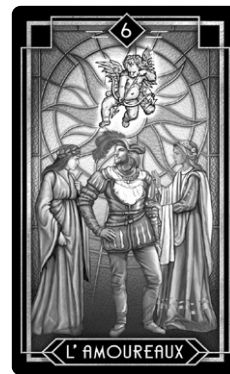
The card is also the first that shows two figures and a mediating third figure between and/or above them, which we also see on the Lovers, the Chariot, the Hanged Man, the Devil, the Sun and Judgment.

On the Pope card, the petitioners' presence indicates that the spiritual authority doesn't exist in a vacuum but rather as part of a social matrix. They come to him; he instructs them or mediates between them. On the card he looms over them, but his power depends, to a certain extent, on their belief in his knowledge and ability.

The Tarot Decoratif image for the Pope contains all the traditional Tarot de Marseille elements. It also includes an open book showing alpha and omega—the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet—which, combined, is a Christian symbol for Jesus or God (or, in some interpretations, both simultaneously). In a non-Christian context, the symbol can mean the unity of God and humans.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Religion
- ♦ Religious authority
- ♦ Teacher, advisor, counselor, mediator
- ♦ Conformity with spiritual or ethical customs and traditions, whether positively, providing comfort, or negatively, enforcing oppression and intolerance
- ♦ Orthodoxy



6 ♦ THE LOVERS (L'AMOUREUX)

When seen as a succession of concepts that each triumphs over the earlier cards in the sequence, the tarot seems to be telling us that love or sexual attraction triumphs over political and spiritual authorities. In affairs of the heart, certainly people tend to follow their hearts rather than the edicts of authority figures. The Popess (representing the Church itself), the Empress, the Emperor and the Pope try to dictate human behavior, but on the Lovers card, Cupid hovers over all and

shoots arrows of mischief, whimsically disrupting plans and creating strange bedfellows.

The card can also be seen as a ribald commentary. The card winks at us and suggests that the temporal and spiritual leaders might not be as virtuous as they might want us to think. After all, history is replete with monarchs and even religious leaders who prove vulnerable to their earthly passions and lust for power.

At his lofty level, Cupid flies and aims, but if we turn our attention to ground level, we see a little soap opera being enacted. A man stands between two women. Are they arguing over him? Is he choosing between them? Is one of the women the man's mother, either welcoming the couple or chastising them? Any of these scenarios could be true depending on the context of the reading. The important thing is that we have a view of human affairs from two simultaneous perspectives—on the macro level, inspired and motivated by forces larger than ourselves, and on the micro level, where our own petty ideas and desires seem much more important.

As Ciro points out in his introduction, different Marseille decks show Cupid aiming the arrow in different directions. If we placed these dif-

ferent versions side by side, we might imagine Cupid buzzing around like a bumblebee, frantically trying to decide where to drop his love bomb. And of course, we don't necessarily need to see this tableau as static. As often happens in these kind of situations, things change, and affections unaccountably shift as Cupid aims his arrow first one way, then the other.

In some Marseille decks, the young man seems relaxed and happy, while the two women seem to be taking the situation more seriously. He seems to be reveling in his position of new-found power, whether he's choosing between two potential sweethearts or bringing his beloved to meet the mom. Coming toward the end of the first line of seven, we might think of him as a callow teenager with an immature ego.

The choice between Vice versus Virtue was a common allegorical theme. Virtue was seen as the more difficult but more rewarding path, while Vice seems much more pleasant but will lead to ruin. In many Marseille decks, including the Tarot Decoratif, one woman wears a laurel wreath, representing Virtue; the other wears a circlet of flowers, symbolizing Vice.

There is a painting by Paolo Veronese called "Allegory of Virtue and Vice," dated circa 1565. In this remarkable work, Hercules is shown between two women, one wearing a laurel wreath (Virtue) and one with a circlet of white flowers (Vice). Hercules turns to embrace Virtue. However, the pretty but vicious Vice has taken a slice out of his hosiery, exposing his bare leg. It's fascinating to compare this painting with the Tarot de Marseille card, which often shows the young man with bare legs. (In the Tarot Decoratif, his low slippers leave the tops of his feet bare.) In the painting, we know the Vice figure is wicked because she conceals a dagger beneath her dress, and holds in her hand a pack of cards!

If we take this allegory and run with it, we might imagine that while our hero is momentarily smitten by the pretty but ill-intentioned Vice, he will eventually get it together and turn to embrace Virtue, thus posi-

tioning himself to emerge from the first line of seven cards as the Charioteer. This interpretation is validated by the fact that, while his body is turned towards Vice, he faces Virtue; and of course, when Cupid's arrow strikes him, he will fall in love with whomever he is gazing upon.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Love and attraction as forces that overpower rationality and social mores
- ♦ Family dramas and romantic triangles
- ♦ Choice in general, and, in particular, a choice between the pleasant road and the harder but ultimately more satisfying road
- ♦ A committed relationship or a marriage
- ♦ A rational thought process overwhelmed by irrational passions



7 ♦ THE CHARIOT (LE CHARIOT)

One of the sources of the tarot sequence of Triumphs that we have mentioned is the triumphal parade. In ancient Rome, victorious armies marched in a hierarchical parade of lowest to highest, beginning with the prisoners of war, followed by the soldiers, the commanding officers, and finally, the general in a chariot.

In the Renaissance customs as seen in art and literature, these parades were reenacted as a form of street theatre, seen at holidays,

festivals and weddings, organized by leading artists of the day. The triumphal parade was a theme in popular art and literature, including Petrarch's poem *Trionfi* (itself seen as one probable source for the tarot Triumphs).

So the Chariot's most obvious association would be as a victorious general or returning war hero. A modern example would be the parade held in New York City on August 13, 1969, for the returning Apollo 11 astronauts. Ticker tape rained down as Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins waved to the crowd from their chariot, a custom-built Chrysler Imperial.

If we want to take a more metaphysical route, we can take a cue from Plato's *Phaedrus*, which describes an allegorical charioteer: "First the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed, but the other quite the opposite in breed and character. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome."

Thus, we can see the two willful horses as representing the Soul of Desire and the Soul of Will, and the driver as the Soul of Reason, trying to harness the other two souls to convey the chariot forward, representing the personality as a whole. Alternately, we can see the two horses as two different base desires that conflict with each other. In that case, both horses would represent the Soul of Desire, making it a fitting card to end the Soul of Desire line, as Desire is now brought under the unsteady control of Will, in preparation for the next line of seven.

In many Tarot de Marseille decks, and in the Tarot Decoratif, the two horses are different colors, illustrating their contentious nature. Also, in many decks, and in the Decoratif, they are depicted in a stylized fashion, encouraging us to view them in an allegorical light.

The horses can also be seen as an example of the duos whose progress we track through the sequence of Triumphs, here harnessed together in an uneasy partnership.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ The conquering hero
- ♦ An organizer, i.e. a "general" of an event
- ♦ Getting everyone on the same page, if not completely in accord

- ♦ Battles and conflict
- ♦ Victory
- ♦ An uneasy or temporary partnership



8 ♦ JUSTICE (LA JUSTICE)

As we have seen, a Renaissance Italian would have been quite familiar with all the images and concepts in the Triumph sequence that seem so mysterious to us now. Justice is an exciting card, because it's one of the few where we can experience that kind of familiarity. The representation of justice as a woman with a sword and scales resonates throughout our culture, from the courthouse square to the opening of the American TV series "Judge Judy."

In our present day culture, Justice is usually blindfolded, signifying lack of bias. The blindfold only began to be used in the 16th century; before that, Justice's eyes were uncovered, symbolizing clear vision.

There is an indirect connection to ancient Egypt, which is interesting in light of the long-debunked theory that the tarot Triumphs have an Egyptian origin. Justice's scales are reminiscent of images of the Egyptian goddess of justice, Maat, who would weigh the heart of the deceased on a scale against an ostrich feather. Crimes, it was thought, would make the heart heavy, so a light heart would indicate a blameless life and the deceased would be eligible for admittance into paradise. The symbol of scales can be traced directly back to ancient Greece; it represents a fair and objective weighing of evidence. The Greek symbol may be based on the older Egyptian one, or it may simply be a coincidence between cultures.

Plato identified four virtues in his *Republic*, which later came to be called the cardinal virtues: Justice, Strength, Temperance and Prudence. The first three are cards in the sequence of Triumphs. (Some believe that the World card represents Prudence.) In the Tarot de Marseille numbering, these three cardinal virtues are all positioned in the second line, which represents the Soul of Will. These three virtue cards share the line with four non-virtue cards: the Hermit, the Wheel of Fortune, the Hanged Man and the Card Without a Name.

The virtues are interspersed evenly throughout the line of seven. Where 1 represents a virtue card and 0 a non-virtue card, the pattern is as follows:

1-0-0-1-0-0-1

The non-virtue cards in the line can all be seen as representing difficulties of one kind or another: the Hermit, solitude and age; the Wheel of Fortune, the ups and downs of life that are outside our control; the Hanged Man, betrayal, shame and embarrassment; and the Card Without a Name, death. By evenly distributing the virtue cards and the non-virtue cards in the line, the Marseille order seems to be suggesting that the difficulties of life can be borne or even overcome by paying attention to the virtues.

If the first line represents childhood, complete with parents, authority figures and first experiences with love, the second line represents adulthood and all the joys and sorrows that come with it.

We have said that the first card in each line presents a problem that the rest of the line solves. In this second line, Justice is the first card. So, besides being a virtue, Justice is also a problem. How do we maintain a concept of justice while on the roller coaster of cruel fate (the Wheel)? Justice can seem a meaningless or naive concept when considered in light of the non-virtue cards in the line. But Justice takes on a new meaning if we consider it in combination with the other virtues of Strength and Temperance.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Fairness
- ♦ Clear vision
- ♦ The act of judging or deciding
- ♦ Being judgmental (for good or bad) about someone else or oneself
- ♦ Feeling that others are judging you



9 ♦ THE HERMIT (L'HERMITE)

As is often the case in the Triumph sequence, a seemingly simple picture can present several layers of meaning. In most early decks, the Hermit is an elderly, bearded man, wearing a monk's robes and hood, carrying a lantern in one hand and a walking stick in the other. Interestingly, the Tarot Decoratif shows the bearded man as young. Of course, actual hermits of the time would have been all different ages. If we see the Hermit as someone who rejects society's distractions to focus on the

immaterial, then a young Hermit is an even more poignant illustration of the concept.

The Hermit is one of two cards—the Fool is the other—where the figure on the card is shown in the act of walking. When we add in the lantern, we have someone who is traveling or questing in search of something. Finally, the monk's robes and hood tell us that what is being searched for is of a religious, spiritual or philosophical nature. Perhaps the best exemplar in this vein is Diogenes, a Greek philosopher who carried a lamp in daylight to show his commitment to his quest to find virtue.

In his book, *Tarot Symbolism*, Robert V. O'Neill points out that the Hermit could have been seen as a completely orthodox Christian symbol on the one hand or as an itinerant preacher outside the Church's control, and possibly heretical, on the other. When we look at the Triumph card sequence as an ascending hierarchy of values, the solitary Hermit is positioned several steps above the Pope, perhaps suggesting a distinct point of view on the part of the tarot's designers. They may have seen in this image the suggestion that wisdom one finds for oneself is more valuable than wisdom received from another.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Solitude
- ♦ Rejecting the distractions of society to focus on a search for wisdom
- ♦ Experiential wisdom as opposed to accepted knowledge



10 ♦ THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE (LA ROUE DE FORTUNE)

Nowadays, the Wheel elicits less of an immediate reaction from people than does Justice, but it's still a potent and easily understood image. We are all, regular folks and one-percenters alike, subject to the whims of fate. We are carried up and down by destiny's wheel, which is turned by a cosmic hand.

We may be top dog (or top lion) at present, but recently we were rising, and soon we will fall. The creature crushed at the bottom of the wheel is implied but not shown. The Tarot Decoratif image includes instead at the bottom the Latin phrase *sum sine regno* (I am without

reign), a reference to medieval depictions of the wheel, which labeled the other three positions *regnabo* (I shall reign), *regno* (I reign) and *regnavi* (I have reigned).

The symbol of the Wheel of Fortune dates back to classical times. By the first century CE it was already considered a cliché, but it remained a popular image in medieval times and in the Renaissance.

This card takes a rather cynical and sardonic view of humanity. The king at the top is clearly pleased with himself but does not seem to realize that his reign is only temporary. All three figures are either part animal (in the Marseille image) or fully animal (in the Tarot Decoratif), suggesting that human beings are just another kind of animal, and that we don't have the free will that we think we do.

The card may have had a spiritual subtext as well, suggesting that temporal power is always subject to change, as opposed to the eternal truths of philosophy and religion.

The Wheel is one of the four non-virtue cards of the second line of seven. We can imagine that the others, the Hermit, the Hanged Man and the Card Without a Name, show the downward descent on the wheel; old age, incapacitation and death. There are many secrets within the tarot. Surely one of them is that any difficulty, even death, is only temporary; the wheel will keep turning, and soon enough we will ascend.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Awareness of the fickleness of destiny
- ♦ Foolishly assuming that success—or that anything—will be permanent
- ♦ Accepting that not everything is in your control
- ♦ If you are low, a promise that things will get better



11 ♦ STRENGTH (LA FORCE)

The virtue Strength or Fortitude was, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, illustrated with a man or a woman wrestling with or aiming a club at a lion. The source of the image may be pagan (Cyrene wrestling a lion to protect her father, or Hercules killing the Nemean lion), or biblical (Samson, David or Daniel). Alternatively, Strength was shown as a woman with a column. The column was a reference to Samson, but the figure is female because of the common practice of portray-

ing the virtues as women. There are some early tarot decks that show the woman-and-column version.

As one of the three virtues shown in the second line, Strength is one of the qualities that will help us endure the capricious Wheel of Fortune or the morbid Card Without a Name. It represents the ability to “tame” difficulties, and for those difficulties that cannot be tamed, the determination and patience to wait them out.

The lady and the lion can be seen as interdependent, sort of like a yin-yang symbol. The lion supplies aggression and energy, while the lady provides patience and gentleness. Together they equal a complete being. The lion without the lady would be too impetuous and aggressive, and ultimately self-defeating. The lady without the lion would be too passive, too willing to avoid confrontation. The card represents a happy medium, where the aggression and patience balance each other and are both used to their best advantage.

The lady and the lion are a particular type of the same duo we see throughout the Triumph sequence. In a later card, the Devil, we will see the lion energy again, but grown monstrous. The Devil is what the lion becomes, without the lady to provide balance to him.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Taming difficulties
- ♦ A patient and gentle approach
- ♦ Drawing strength from the assertive side of your personality while keeping it well under control



12 ♦ THE HANGED MAN (LE PENDU)

From the late 19th century onward, occultists attributed much religious and mystical significance to this image, as did tarot readers who took inspiration from the occultists' writings. Many interpreted it as sacrifice or martyrdom, obviously seeing it as an indirect reference to Christ's crucifixion. A.E. Waite took a more mystical approach, stating that “it expresses the relation, in one of its aspects, between the Divine and the Universe.” Other writers have suggested a voluntary participation in an ini-

tiatory ritual, which then leads to the following card, a symbolic death and resurrection.

A more likely biblical origin for the image is the death of Judas Iscariot, who is said to have betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The image seems to be a conflation of two different stories of Judas' death. Matthew 27:1-10 says he hung himself, while Acts 1:18 tells how he bought a field, where he fell headlong and his body burst open. The image combines the two stories by showing him hanging head down. This interpretation is borne out by some early tarot decks that show the Hanged Man holding bags of money, clearly referencing Judas. Another biblical reference could be St. Peter, who requested to be crucified upside down, because he had betrayed Jesus by denying him in

Gethsemane and thus didn't consider himself worthy to die in the same position as Jesus.

These Biblical antecedents most likely led to the image's most direct source, the shame pictures (*pittura infamanti*) that were popular in 14th through 16th century Italy. If someone guilty of treason or financial crimes was beyond the reach of the law, artists were commissioned by city magistrates to paint the criminal hanging upside down by one foot, and these paintings were displayed in public spaces, just as today we can walk into a post office and see "Wanted" posters of criminals.

There are many examples of religious art of the period depicting sinners in hell being hung by their feet, reinforcing the idea of punishing sinners, criminals and traitors by hanging them upside down. In the 20th century, Benito Mussolini, the fascist Italian Prime Minister, was executed at the end of World War II by Italian communists. His body was brought to Milan and hung upside down from the roof of a gas station—a real-life, modern-day *pittura infamante*.

So, clearly the Renaissance Italians would have viewed the image as representing shame and punishment for wrongdoing. In our Platonic analysis of the second line of seven, the Hanged Man joins the other four non-virtue cards—the Hermit, the Wheel of Fortune and the Card Without a Name—in showing the difficulties of life that are borne or overcome by the virtue cards (Justice, Strength and Temperance).

From a modern psychological perspective, we've all experienced moments in our lives when we're embarrassed after being caught doing something we ought not have done, whether an actual crime or simply filching some pens from the office or treating someone less than kindly. Once caught, our positive view of ourselves is upended, and we feel deeply the helplessness and loss of dignity. If the "crime" we've committed indicates a character weakness or unhealthy behavior pattern, then we may well look to the following card as a goal, indicating the "death" of those unhealthy patterns.

On a less serious note, we might see the card as indicating someone who plays the martyr in a bid for attention. "Don't worry, honey, I'll take out the garbage in the raging snowstorm. I'll be fine, you stay cozy and warm."

I've emphasized an essentially negative view of this card, in keeping with how the image would have been perceived at the time of the tarot's creation. Yet it can't be denied that the image has a power and resonance that transcends its shame picture origins. The Hanged Man's expression is neutral or serene (although, debatably, this may be due simply to the limitations of woodcut printing and the artisans' skills). The man and the two trees seem to form a trio, compositionally similar to trios on other cards like the Pope, the Devil or Judgment. The man's head echoes the hills or mounds that the trees grow out of, with his hair suggesting the trees' roots. The lopped-off branches may simply have been to allow the man's body to hang unimpeded, but they add an evocative touch of helplessness and indignity to the scene.

The acrobat or dancer shown on the Tarot Decoratif card seems to belie the "embarrassed criminal" interpretation, but from a deeper perspective it suggests that the embarrassed criminal is only a role that the soul is playing at the moment, and that therefore the punishment does not represent a permanent sentence.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Being caught doing something unethical or unkind
- ♦ Being accused of something, fairly or unfairly
- ♦ Being made an example of
- ♦ Being embarrassed
- ♦ Playing the martyr
- ♦ A betrayal
- ♦ In a positive sense, a gracious humility



13 ♦ THE CARD WITHOUT A NAME (L'ARCANESANS NOM)

This card is called Death in most modern decks. The reason we refer to it as “The Card Without a Name” is simply because that was the tradition for Tarot de Marseille decks, although there are some Marseille decks that do use the “Death” title. Presumably, in 17th century France, using the title would have been seen as unlucky.

Speaking of superstitions, it's notable that the card is numbered 13. Triskaidekaphobia (fear of the number 13) originated in medieval Europe, although, interestingly, in Italy it's considered a lucky number. In the earliest Italian decks, Triumphs were unnumbered. When Triumphs began to be numbered, there were different numberings used, but in all the numberings, Death is always number 13.

The message of this card is similar to what we have seen with the Lovers and the Wheel of Fortune—even royalty must succumb to natural processes like love, destiny, death and taxes. For the general populace, the image must have served both as a satisfyingly biting satire aimed at the rich and powerful, and as a cathartic representation of the fear of death present in all cultures, including ours. (Nowadays we have zombie movies and TV series to serve that function.)

It's important to remember that for 15th century Europeans, Death wielded his scythe more frequently than nowadays. Outbreaks of bubonic plague (the “Black Death”) were still occurring; only a hundred years earlier, it had killed approximately a third of the world's population. In parts of France, as late as the mid-17th century, only 58% of the population reached their 15th birthday, and average life expectancy

was only 20. Corpses would have been a commonplace sight in everyday life, and Death portrayed as an animated skeleton became a common figure in religious and secular art.

The figure of Death also served the Church's purposes by reminding people that death comes to all, and therefore the Church's precepts should be followed in order to secure one's place in heaven rather than the alternative.

One of our conceptual frameworks for the Triumphs is as an ascending ladder of symbols, each rung vanquishing the previous steps. There are many Triumphs in the sequence following the Card Without a Name, so we can take comfort that Death isn't the end of the story; in fact, we're still only in the second line of seven. Consequently, it wouldn't make sense to interpret this card in a reading as physical death.

The Tarot Decoratif image contains the same elements as the traditional picture, but arranged in a more elegant and subtle composition—Alfred Hitchcock rather than “Night of the Living Dead.”

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Something has come to an end; at great cost, it will continue in a different form
- ♦ Impermanence
- ♦ A warning against hubris: you too can be brought low by fate or natural forces
- ♦ Something has abruptly ended or been excised



14 ♦ TEMPERANCE (TEMPERANCE)

The last of the three cardinal virtue cards is Temperance. The virtues have already counseled us to have a sense of fair play (Justice), and to keep a firm rein on our aggressions (Strength). Temperance inclines us toward moderation in terms of our appetites and our behavior.

The most obvious significance of image and title relates to the idea of tempering or diluting wine with water. The angel, representing our better nature, is encouraging us to moderate our intake of alcohol. By extension, we could apply the concept to any substance or behavior that is appealing but that is also habit-forming and dangerous in excess.

The temperance movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries at first advocated for moderation in alcohol consumption, and later for total abstinence, leading to a temporary prohibition of alcohol in some countries.

There are other intriguing definitions of “temper,” all involving obtaining benefit by combining substances or energies. For instance, we can temper glass by heating and cooling it, which makes it more durable, and we can temper steel to make it harder or softer, as needed. Or, we can make something stronger through hardship, as when we temper troops in battle.

The medical theory of the humors was developed by Greek physician Hippocrates in the fourth century BC. The human body was thought to contain four liquids, called humors, which also had correspondences to the elements and the seasons. These humors were yellow bile, black bile, phlegm and blood. These physical substances were thought in turn to influence human emotions and moods.

In the second century CE, personality types were characterized as four temperaments; sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic, named after the four humors. Of course, medical science no longer supports a connection between personality traits and bodily secretions, but the theory of the four temperaments has had an influence on modern psychological theories. The Temperance image can be seen as a literal combining of humors to equalize the temperaments, resulting in a balanced and healthy personality.

It’s interesting to compare this card with the previous one, the Card Without a Name, which features hard, rigid, unyielding substances—bone, wooden scythe and steel blade (the Tarot Decoratif image also includes wooden coffins). In contrast, Temperance shows a soft, flexible, flowing energy. Even the angel’s stance is curved and flowing, as is the water she pours. Since Temperance follows the Card Without a Name in the sequence, we can conclude that flexibility triumphs over rigidity. From a Buddhist or Taoist viewpoint, we will only suffer from death if we seek to prevent change because of our narrow and inflexible attitude. Of course, preventing change is impossible because life is change; therefore, the better course is to dance and flow with life rather than to desperately grasp at it.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ A healthy balance of personality traits
- ♦ Moderating our indulgences and our behavior
- ♦ Moderation in general
- ♦ Conquering limitation through flexibility
- ♦ Combining factors to create something new



15 ♦ THE DEVIL (LE DIABLE)

At its simplest, this card embodies the main message of the Church in medieval and Renaissance Italy: repent your sins, or the Devil will get you.

The first card of each seven-card line shows the problem that the rest of the line solves. The first card of the line representing the Soul of Reason shows the most problematic figure imaginable, a most unreasonable fellow. Usually shown as an ungainly combination of male, female, and animal parts, he grasps a flaming sword (in many Tarot de Marseille decks, he grips the sword by the naked blade). In some decks he has a face drawn on his belly, indicating that he thinks with his appetites.

The bound imps were a common theme in medieval depictions of hell. Again, the message is clear, given the context of the birthplace of the tarot: this is where you will find yourself if you don't straighten up and fly right. The animalistic elements of the Devil and his captives illustrate the Church's contention that the potential for salvation is what makes us human; without it, we're mere beasts.

The image seems like a grim parody of the Pope card. In that card, the two monks come voluntarily to seek guidance, and the Pope's authority is in his words. The Devil, however, maintains his power with chains, and there is no conversation or guidance between the Devil and his minions.

The trend in modern tarot interpretation has been to see the Devil as a metaphor for that part of ourselves that we try not to think about, the raging emotional infant who will go to any lengths to satisfy his crude desires, and I think that's still the most valuable role for this card to play in a reading.

If we track the progress of the various duos in the previous cards, we see that here they are brought to their lowest point, forced to see themselves as prisoners of their animal appetites. Transcending these appetites will be the theme of the remainder of the Triumphs.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Being imprisoned by our own desires
- ♦ Selfishness
- ♦ Greed
- ♦ Unreason
- ♦ A warning about the consequences of selfish behavior



16 ♦ THE HOUSE OF GOD (LA MAISON-DIEU)

Seen in the light of the orthodox Christianity of the time, the House of God is simply an illustration of the Book of Revelation (itself an extravagant collection of symbols and allegories), particularly Chapter 16, which speaks of apocalyptic earthquakes, lightning and hail.

In 15th century Europe, many believed that the end of the world was swiftly approaching. The Black Plague, which we noted in regard to the Card Without a Name, was still rampant, and the Roman Empire had fallen. Apocalyptic themes were popular in religious art, writings and sermons.

From a Neoplatonic perspective, we have followed the adventures of our guest stars, the duo representing the Soul of Desire (seeking satisfaction) and the Soul of Will (seeking honor and glory), from their introductions in the foursome of the Popess, Empress, Emperor and Pope,

to their marriage in the Lovers; their forward progress in the Chariot; their ups and downs in the Wheel of Fortune; their interplay in Strength and Temperance; their captivity and oppression in the Devil; and finally, their dethronement and ejection from their tower.

In the remainder of the line of seven, we will turn our attention to the Soul of Reason, seeking a mystical union with divine intelligence. The downfall of Desire and Will allows for the supremacy of Reason. Whether you interpret the card positively or negatively will depend on whether you see it from the viewpoint of the status quo (in which case the card is negative), or from the viewpoint of the potential for the Soul of Reason (in which case the card is positive). If seen from the viewpoint of the status quo, then the card will obviously show an abrupt disruption. Or the image could simply represent a pessimist, who is convinced everything will turn out badly.

The origin of the title “The House of God” is obscure. The Tarot de Marseille is the first deck to use the title. There are several references in the Bible to a house of God, but none of them matches the apocalyptic scene on the card. Some authors suggest that “La Maison-Dieu” was simply a misreading or corruption of earlier titles for this card such as “La Maison De Feu” (The House of Fire) or “La Maison Diefel” (The House of the Devil). Other early titles include “The Lightning,” “The Arrow” and “The House of the Damned.” So we can conclude that the title “The House of God” has no weighty significance, or at least not one that we can state definitively.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ A sudden and drastic change of circumstances
- ♦ The end of an untenable situation
- ♦ Freedom from craving for satisfaction and glory
- ♦ A pessimistic viewpoint



17 ♦ THE STAR (L'ÉTOILE)

There are three celestial cards in the sequence of Triumphs: the Star, the Moon and the Sun. Each of these cards was illustrated in very different ways in early decks, leading us to the conclusion that the important thing was the sequence of ever-brighter celestial lights, rather than the particular symbolism used on each individual card.

While the approach of this book has been to give at least some idea of what the images might have meant to early deck designers or

artists, we run a risk in assuming that every single symbol or design had a carefully planned out meaning. In the case of the Star, there is no one image or text from the period that contains enough of the elements of the Marseille image to allow us to point to it as the source.

The clearest and most direct reference on the Tarot de Marseille version of all three celestial cards is the zodiacal signs of astrology. The Star references Aquarius (the water-bearer); the Moon references Cancer (the crab); and the Sun references Gemini (the twins). We can't necessarily assume, though, that there is some overarching reason why those particular signs were chosen for these cards. Cancer for the Moon makes sense, because according to classical astrology, Cancer is ruled by the moon. But that logic doesn't apply to the designer's choice of Aquarius (which is ruled by Saturn) for the Star, or their choice of Gemini (which is ruled by Mercury) for the Sun.

The placement of zodiacal symbols on the three celestial cards may have simply been an effort on the designer's part to have a more aesthetically interesting scene on the cards rather than simply showing a star, a moon and a sun, as indeed we see on a few early decks.

The bird is a symbol of the soul in both Egyptian and Christian art.

The seven small stars and one big star may refer to the seven classical planets (before the discovery of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto), while the large one may represent either the stars in general or perhaps Christ as the Morning Star. The seven planets were thought to be embedded in concentric spheres surrounding the Earth, which served as a pathway for a mystical ascent in search of truth, of the same kind as we see enacted in this final line of seven cards.

The two opposing energies represented by the water vessels can be seen as Desire and Will, who in the previous card were ejected from their comfortable tower. In this card the Star Maiden returns them back to their elemental source, signaling that she has no more use for them as individual and opposing entities.

The traditional divinatory meaning of this card as hope probably arose as an identification with the Star of Bethlehem, which in the Bible story led three wise men from the East to Jesus' nativity. Some early Star cards do in fact show the three wise men.

We cannot ignore the mythic power of the image itself, regardless of its sources. The stars, trees, bird, water and woman all contribute to an alert and expectant yet peaceful mood.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Hope
- ♦ A hint of truth that has yet to be perceived in full; the first step in a search for truth
- ♦ Reconciliation of opposites
- ♦ An expectant peacefulness



18 ♦ THE MOON (LA LUNE)

While the Moon's specific imagery was probably less important than its place in the sequence of ever-increasing celestial lights, we can still find lunar significance in each of the pictorial elements or symbols on the card.

Let's start with the crayfish. First of all, we can easily dispense with any controversy surrounding the differences between crabs, crayfish and lobsters; in classical and medieval times, little distinction was made between them, and an artist's choice of one versus the

other was probably determined by which one was more prevalent in his home town. From an astrological perspective, the crayfish connects the card to the sign of Cancer, which is ruled by the moon.

The crayfish swims in a pool of water, and water drops are ascending or descending towards or from the moon. This references the fact that tides are caused by the gravitational pull of the moon, as well as the belief that the moon affects bodily fluids, including menstrual cycles.

The dogs are moon symbols because they howl at the moon, as they are doing on the card. They may also refer to the Roman deity Diana, a moon goddess whose constant companions were hunting dogs.

The towers may relate to astronomical observatories. Some early versions of the Star card (although not the Moon) show an astronomer in a tower.

Various combinations of the symbols can be seen in Renaissance and medieval art, for example, crayfish with towers, or moon with dogs. But the combination of the five symbols into one image appears to be unique to the Tarot de Marseille.

As with the Star card, the scene has a mythic resonance. Even in the dominant Christianity of the medieval and Renaissance periods, pagan

beliefs survived in the form of folk wisdom and magic, and the moon would have been a powerful symbol in this regard. The lack of human figures and the eerie mise-en-scène probably would have inspired the same unease and sense of mystery then as they do today.

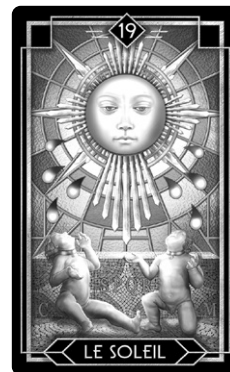
In the Tarot de Marseille, the moon is shown with a face, sometimes in profile and sometimes full face. Both the Moon and the Sun cards bear faces; the Moon card has a face because many cultures have traditions, myths and stories about the Man in the Moon, no doubt due to pareidolia, the tendency to see meaning in abstract and random patterns.

In the Tarot Decoratif, instead of a face, we see a nursing mother and infant within the moon. We might see the nursing woman as a reference to the moon's effects on bodily fluids, but given the Christian context of the tarot at its creation, it seems reasonable to see it as an example of a kind of religious image called the Nursing Madonna, showing Mary and the baby Jesus. There is a long-standing association between the Virgin Mary and the moon in Christian iconography. A common motif is Mary, symbolizing the Church, standing on a crescent moon, which represents the Old Testament, showing that the Church stands on the foundation of the Old Testament but is (from the Church's perspective) superior to it.

From a psychological perspective, the mother and child duo symbolizes the mysterious processes of love and family attachment.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Mystery and uneasiness
- ♦ More going on than meets the eye
- ♦ Events caused by larger forces than human motivations or psychology



19 ♦ THE SUN (LE SOLEIL)

Continuing the theme of astrological symbols for the three celestial lights cards, the Sun shows the symbol for Gemini, the twins. There seems to be no particular reason to assign the sun to Gemini. Perhaps the artist who first used this image to illustrate the Sun card simply found the idea of two children beneath the sun appealing.

Alternatively, the two children may be Romulus and Remus, the mythical twins who founded the city of Rome. A wall is prominently featured in the myth; the two brothers disagree on where to place the foundation of the new city, and each begins to build separate walls. Remus mockingly jumps over one of Romulus' walls, and Romulus kills him. The Tarot Decoratif card refers to this myth with a wall of Roman mosaic, and the letters SPQR, standing for Senatus Populusque Romanus (the Senate and People of Rome), which appeared on Roman monuments, documents and coinage.

Sun symbols with faces began to appear in the late Middle Ages (11th to 14th centuries), especially in heraldic badges and coats of arms. Perhaps the kings and knights who used the sun symbols with a face were emulating Roman emperors who had themselves depicted on coins with the sun god Sol Invictus (Unconquered Sun), a human with solar rays emitting from his head.

Light is a fundamental symbol for knowledge, and the increasing illumination shown in the Star, Moon and Sun represents increasing degrees of knowledge. This fits in with the Platonic interpretation of the entire Triumph sequence as showing a mystical ascent. If a reading contains two or three of the celestial lights cards, you might interpret it as a gradual realization of something.

As with the two previous cards, we should also pay attention to the vivid impression given by the image, in this case of peace, safety, warmth and innocence, a welcome sight after the trials and travails of many of the previous cards.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Clear perception and knowledge
- ♦ Well-being, peace, warmth, security, innocence



20 ♦ JUDGMENT (LE JUGEMENT)

Unlike many of the images in the sequence of Triumphs, the Judgment card is straightforward and unambiguous. It illustrates the Christian belief, based on Jewish belief, that the bodies of the dead will be physically resurrected and united with their former occupants' souls. Over the centuries, there have been differences in belief among Christians regarding the details, including who exactly will be resurrected, when the resurrection will happen, and what such resurrection would

actually entail. Yet there is a long history in religious art of images showing bodies rising out of the earth and angels with trumpets overhead. The Bible itself is full of references to the dead rising up, and to angels with trumpets calling the dead to arise.

As with several of the cards in the final line of seven, their position in the sequence may say more than the individual cards themselves. If we see the entire Triumph sequence as a mystical ascent and union with God, then the final line of seven is concerned with victory over death and time, which clears the way for the final union. Death is represent-

ed, of course, by the Card Without a Name, while time is represented by the Moon and Sun cards because we measure time by the position of those bodies.

In his *Encyclopedia of Tarot Vol. II*, Stuart Kaplan reproduces a German image from about 1450 that shows four angels with trumpets and people arising from coffins. All the people are nude. Four of them are men and women with their hands together in prayer, and the central figure's back is to us, and he has a tonsure (his scalp is shaved for religious purposes). The similarity to the tarot image is clear.

When it appears in a reading, the most direct interpretation is simply a rebirth; either a rebirth of the querent in some way, or something or someone that they know is reappearing, perhaps playing a new role or in some way changed or improved.

Because of the card's title, referring to the belief among some Christians in some periods that God or Christ will judge the dead, we can also see the card as any judgment or determination.

The angel with the trumpet can be interpreted as a clarion call to action—or even an alarm clock, calling us to arise from sleep. The people rising from their coffins can suggest returning to activity after a period of dormancy, or having a renewed sense of vigor or wonder. We might also think about a gardener, who coaxes life to arise from the earth.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ Rebirth
- ♦ Something or someone familiar to you is reappearing, perhaps playing a new role or performing a new function
- ♦ Judging, making a decision or determination
- ♦ Hearing a call to action; feeling called to do something
- ♦ A religious calling
- ♦ A return to action



21 ♦ THE WORLD (LE MONDE)

The image on this card is an example of a popular design in religious art called “Christ in Majesty,” showing an enthroned Christ within an almond-shaped border (called a mandorla), with a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle each occupying one of the four corners. The four animals are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, and over time were also used to represent the four Evangelists and the four fixed zodiacal signs (Aquarius, Leo, Taurus and Scorpio), which in turn represent the four

elements and the four directions.

The central figure on the card is of course female and not male. However, historians have speculated that the figure was originally intended to be male and therefore Christ, mostly on the strength of a deck by Jacques Vieville from around 1650, approximately the same time as the first known Tarot de Marseille decks. The Vieville deck has important similarities with, as well as differences from, the Marseille pattern. Its World card matches the Marseille design in all respects except that the figure on the World card is clearly male, has a halo, wears a cape and carries a scepter, obviously representing Christ.

For unknown reasons, the figure on all known Marseille World cards is female. We must keep in mind that the tarot is a story of evolution that is difficult to trace with the handful of 17th century decks that still exist, which constitute only a fraction of the decks that were produced at the time. Assuming that the image was originally “supposed” to show Christ, did an artist or group of artists decide to change the image for some reason? Did one artist mistake the long-haired male on the World card for a female, and did other artists unknowingly follow his example?

In any case, the image as it appears in Marseille decks fits in perfectly with our Platonic schema for the Triumphs. The woman in the middle represents what the ancient Greek philosophers called the World Soul (*Anima Mundi* in Latin), who infuses the four corner figures (in other words, the material world) with spirit and connects them. This is why, in Marseille decks, the four creatures in the corners bear halos (although in some decks, the ox has somehow lost his.) Quoting Plato: “[...] Therefore, we may consequently state that: this world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence [...] a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related.”

This represents the goal of the final line of seven, the Soul of Reason: to directly perceive the divine, from which we will obtain the quality of reason and thus transcend the challenges posed by the first two lines of seven, allowing us to perceive our own permanent soul and overcome impermanence, death and time, embodied by the Wheel of Fortune, Death and the Moon and Sun cards.

So, to summarize the entire Triumph sequence: the first line of seven, the Soul of Desire, outlines the earthly power structures who govern and inspire our own search for power and satisfaction of desires. The second line of seven follows us as we experience the ups and downs of earthly existence, teaching us the value of the Soul of Will, which drives us to value honor and justice. Finally, with the increasingly brilliant illumination of the Soul of Reason to guide us, we gradually emerge from the darkness of the Devil and the Tower to conquer death and time and arrive at a mystical vision of the World Soul, which connects all in a web of meaning, intelligence and divinity.

During a reading, we can of course make reference to this web of connectedness, but if the reading focuses on more mundane matters, we can speak of completion and destinations arrived at. The World might simply indicate the concepts of “all” or “a large amount.” It might

describe a worldly person, or a person caught up in the material things of this world.

KEY PHRASES

- ♦ The spirit that permeates and connects all things
- ♦ Learning by direct experience (some things can only be learned by doing)
- ♦ Seeing other living beings as sacred
- ♦ Feeling connected to others or to the world
- ♦ A task completed, a destination reached
- ♦ All; a lot
- ♦ A worldly person
- ♦ A person caught up in the distractions of the world

► THE ROYAL COURT ◀

Court cards were an integral part of the playing card deck long before the tarot Triumphs came on the scene. When we examine a tarot deck, the court cards, bearing pictorial representations of people, appear at first glance to have more in common with the Triumphs than they do with the non-scenic pip cards. Of course, the court cards bear suits, so they are indeed a part of the playing card section of the tarot. Perhaps we can think of the courts as an in-between zone, a step down from the Triumphs into the suits, but a step up from the pips.

An older tradition of playing card and tarot divination holds that court cards represent people in the life of the querent, with the age and gender of the card indicating the age and gender of the person. As a further clarifier, the suits indicated hair color and skin tones. Starting in the 1970s, tarot authors began creating lengthy personality profiles for the courts, in some cases based on earlier cartomantic traditions; for instance, interpreting the Queen of Swords as sad or lonely because of an older tradition that says she is a widow.

Both approaches are problematic. In today's diverse and varied societies, interpretations based on gender and hair color are outmoded, and lengthy personality profiles can be hard to memorize. (We will use memorization when we come to the pip cards, but it's a lot easier to memorize a single keyword for a pip card than five or six personality traits for a court card.)

A more fruitful approach is to think of the court cards as stepped-down versions of the Triumphs. If we think of the Triumphs as big issues and the pip cards as small, everyday concerns, then the courts are in-between, where big issues and everyday concerns intersect.

The four Triumphs we will use to interpret the courts will be the Fool for the Pages, the Chariot for the Knights, the Empress for the Queens and the Emperor for the Kings. One might imagine the Queens, for ex-

ample, as mini Empresses that the Empress sends out into the world. The court cards take their cues from these Triumphs and allow us to see the Triumphs from the viewpoint of our everyday concerns.

If you want to find visual connections between the courts and their corresponding Triumphs, you might note that the Pages, like the Fool, are holding things. In the Tarot de Marseille, the Knights feature horses, as does the Chariot. In the Tarot Decoratif, the Knights are not mounted, but the Knights' legs are invisible, as are the charioteer's.

In the following divinatory meanings, we'll focus on the qualities of the Triumph applicable to the suit in question. For example, the King of Cups will embody the Emperor's merciful and compassionate side. These meanings may seem sparse, but remember, you have the broader scope of the corresponding Triumph cards in all their profundity at your disposal. If you want more possibilities for interpreting a court card in a reading, simply refer to the section earlier in this book relating to its applicable Triumph and interpret it through the lens of the court card's suit.

In this book, the court cards refer to personality traits of either people in the querent's life or the querent themselves. The gender of the card is irrelevant to the gender of the person; a Queen can describe an aspect of a man's personality, and a King, Knight or Page can describe an aspect of a woman's personality.

—THE PAGES PERSONIFY THE FOOL—



PAGE OF SWORDS (VALET D'ÉPÉES)

- ♦ Someone who thinks foolish thoughts
- ♦ A daydreamer
- ♦ A humorous person
- ♦ A curious person
- ♦ Someone who thinks outside the box

PAGE OF BATONS (VALET DE BATONS)

- ♦ Someone who acts foolishly
- ♦ A traveler
- ♦ A person who does things to get attention

PAGE OF COINS (VALET DE DENIERS)

- ♦ An unwise investor
- ♦ A wasteful spender
- ♦ Someone who is willing to take some financial risk

PAGE OF CUPS (VALET DE COUPES)

- ♦ Someone who acts foolishly in human interactions—or just thinks they do
- ♦ A spiritual practice that appears foolish to others

—THE KNIGHTS PERSONIFY THE CHARIOT—



KNIGHT OF SWORDS (CAVALIER D'ÉPÉES)

- ♦ An advocate, someone who speaks on behalf of a cause
- ♦ A planner
- ♦ Someone who likes to argue

KNIGHT OF BATONS (CAVALIER DE BATONS)

- ♦ An organizer
- ♦ A fighter
- ♦ Someone who jumps into action

KNIGHT OF COINS (CAVALIER DE DENIERS)

- ♦ Someone who puts money to use
- ♦ Someone who makes financial plans
- ♦ Someone who values action

KNIGHT OF CUPS (CAVALIER DE COUPES)

- ♦ Someone not afraid to take action in matters of the heart
- ♦ Someone who interacts with others aggressively
- ♦ Someone who takes charge in a relationship but is somewhat uneasy or has control issues (because the Chariot doesn't have full control of his horses)

—THE QUEENS PERSONIFY THE EMPRESS—



QUEEN OF SWORDS (REYNE D'ÉPÉES)

- ♦ Someone who takes charge through cleverness and patience
- ♦ Someone who supports and encourages diplomacy and education

QUEEN OF BATONS (REYNE DE BATONS)

- ♦ Someone who takes charge through indirect action
- ♦ A forceful maternal presence
- ♦ A protector

QUEEN OF COINS (REYNE DE DENIERS)

- ♦ Someone with a firm grasp of material things; who works with their hands, an artist or artisan; who gardens or is involved in agriculture
- ♦ A nurturing maternal presence

QUEEN OF CUPS (REYNE DE COUPES)

- ♦ Someone who takes charge through emotional intelligence (or emotional manipulation)
- ♦ A loving maternal presence

—THE KINGS PERSONIFY THE EMPEROR—



KING OF SWORDS (ROY D'ÉPÉES)

- ♦ Someone who takes charge through wiliness
- ♦ An arbiter of justice and ethical considerations

KING OF BATONS (ROY DE BATONS)

- ♦ Someone who takes charge through direct action
- ♦ A user of force
- ♦ A dynamic personality

KING OF COINS (ROY DE DENIERS)

- ♦ A financial leader
- ♦ An upholder of values
- ♦ A builder

KING OF CUPS (ROY DE COUPES)

- ♦ Someone who takes charge through mercy and compassion
- ♦ A gentle discipliner
- ♦ A kindly paternal presence



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