



FORTUNE
TELLING
Using
PLAYING
CARDS

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1 • THE DECK OF CARDS

The ordinary deck of playing cards has been used for gaming and fortune telling for centuries. Fortunes have been won and lost, empires have risen and fallen, and gentlemen have “done the decent thing” and committed suicide (or emigrated) when they could not pay their gambling debts. The turn of a card has been seen as the workings of fate itself, and so profoundly has card-play entered our collective consciousness that many phrases associated with it have entered the language. Everyone who shuffles the deck fervently hopes that:

- Luck will be a lady tonight.
- What we want is in the cards.
- We will play them close to our chests.
- We must play the hand that we were dealt.
- It’s up to us to play our cards right.
- We may have an ace up our sleeve.
- And we hope that no one else can trump us.

In recent years fortune telling with cards has become almost the exclusive province of the Tarot. Not too far back into the past Tarot cards were hard to come by and the ordinary, everyday deck of cards, with which we are all familiar, was a far more accessible tool for foretelling the future.

Playing cards may be the descendants of the Minor Arcana cards of the Tarot or they may have developed in parallel to them. There is certainly a

relationship between the two decks. They both comprise four suits. The Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs and Spades easily translate into their Tarot equivalents of Cups, Coins, Wands and Swords. In fact, in the latter two suits, Wands are often called Clubs, Staves or Batons while Spades is a direct translation of the Italian and Spanish for Sword.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book falls into three themes. The first two require inexpensive playing cards that can be found in almost every household, and that can be purchased in every supermarket and many small shops around the world. As you will see, the third section is slightly different, but you can still use ordinary playing cards for this section as well.

The first section deals with the normal, everyday fifty-two-card deck that is used in the game of poker and in numerous other card games. I describe the meaning of the cards, together with their individual symbolism, such as the traditional name, the keywords, astrological associations and the significance of their numbers.

The second and third sections delve into card-reading history and deal with two separate but interrelated strands of interpretation.

TIP

If you want to use cards for fortune telling, buy a new deck and work them in by shuffling them a lot. Before using them the first time, ask for help and guidance from your god, spiritual guides or your higher consciousness so that you use the cards well. When you are not using the cards, keep them in their packet and within a bag or a box that you keep in a safe place. Never use your fortune telling deck for card games and don't allow others to play around with it. Respect your tools and they will respect you – even if the tool in question is no more than a humble deck of playing cards.

The second section is concerned with the Romany Method of card reading and it uses a reduced deck of thirty-two cards. This system was popularized in France in the latter part of the eighteenth century by Jean Baptiste Alliette, who is better known by his pen name of Etteilla.

The third section has a totally different slant on the subject of cartomancy. It derives from the work of Mlle Marie Adelaide Lenormand, who read the cards for the Empress Josephine, Napoleon and many other powerful figures of the day. This system also uses a reduced deck, this time with thirty-six cards, and it is more correctly known as the “Petit Lenormand.” This deck was developed in the early nineteenth century. A Lenormand deck shows the familiar playing card set into a beautiful Victorian illustration. If you want to buy a set of these for yourself, you can find them via the Internet. They are produced by a famous card firm called Piatnik of Vienna. The fact that each card carries an illustration of an ordinary playing card means you can still use this system with a standard playing card deck, unless you decide to treat yourself to a real Lenormand deck.

A series of spreads or card layouts are given at the end of each section. However, as with so much in card reading, the spreads are fluid. So if you wanted to use the “poker” deck but fancied trying one of the spreads given in the sections that deal with the Romany deck or the Lenormand Method, there is nothing to stop you. The secret of successful card reading is experimentation and discovering what works best for you. There are no hard and fast rules. In fact, as you

TIP

Throughout the book I have tended to use the terms “he” and “him” when referring to the questioner. This is simply to avoid the clumsy terminology “he or she” and “him or her.” As it happens, while card readers may be of either gender, those who wish to consult them are frequently female. No inadvertent sexism is implied.

gain experience you will find your own meanings and ways of reading the cards, and these may be completely divorced from anything that has gone before. If you asked the question “how many ways of reading cards are there?” the answer would have to be, “how many people read the cards?” because I can guarantee that every single practiced card reader has a unique method of his own. There is no reason why you should be any different.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CARDS

There is a charming fable that probably originates in the early days of card reading in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The story’s setting could be fabled Atlantis, the faded glory of Ancient Egypt or Rome as its empire crumbled. Anyway the point is the barbarians are at the gates and the city is about to fall. Within the most holy temple the wise men meet, knowing that all their knowledge and wisdom, their books, their writings will be burned because these will be worthless as loot to the cruel invaders. In their great wisdom, the aged philosophers agree that their knowledge must be preserved for the ages, but how? Then the oldest and wisest of the company suggested that since they cannot rely on the highest and most noble side of man, they should appeal to his vices. So the deck of cards was created to hide the highest virtue within vice. For as long as man exists he will want to gamble, little knowing that in that small deck of cards exist many secrets of the past, the future, the nature of existence and of time itself.

Although this story is a complete fiction, as with so many legends, there is an element of truth about it. Playing cards are complex. They seem to be simple with their four sets of symbols, numbers from one to ten, a few picture cards and nothing more...but when one examines them closely a curious pattern begins to emerge. The pattern is connected to time.

- There are 52 cards in the deck. This is equivalent to 52 weeks in the year.
- The suits are divided between black and red. This equates to day and night.

- There are 4 suits which are equivalent to the four seasons:

• Clubs	Spring
• Diamonds	Summer
• Hearts	Autumn
• Spades	Winter
- There are 13 cards in each suit. Not only are there 13 weeks in each season, but 13 is also the number of lunar months in one year. Astrologers will also notice that the moon moves 13 degrees in the course of one day.
- If the individual numbers of each card in a suit are added with aces equaling 1, Jacks, 11, Queens, 12, and Kings, 13, the sum looks like this:
 $1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9+10+11+12+13 = 91$. This is the number of days in a season.
- $91 \times 4 = 364$. This is the exact number of days in the fixed lunar year.
- Some would argue that the new addition of the Joker makes the calculation complete bringing the total up to 365. However this is missing the point. The cards are a lunar calendar which was created for an agricultural society. They do not relate to the sophisticated solar system created by the Romans for their urban civilization, which (with minor variations) is the calendar that we use today.

THE DEVIL'S PICTURE BOOK

As part of the research for this book I came across a website called "To play cards is just a fun game.... Or is it?" It opens with the question, "Isn't card playing in itself harmless if it doesn't become a passion?" The answer is predictable enough... "Whoever is familiar with the origin of playing cards can well understand why such devilish things as fortune telling are carried on with playing cards."

The article then flatly states that playing cards were invented for the use of the mentally ill King Charles of France in 1392. The designer of the cards was a “degenerate, wicked man who mocked God and His commandments” and for his evil creation he chose Biblical personalities. Continuing the theme, the King represented the devil, the Queen, Mary, the mother of Jesus, while the Jack blasphemously represents Jesus himself. Hearts symbolize the blood of the Lord, while Clubs represent the persecution of the saints (I wonder what happened to Diamonds and Spades). In short, according to this writer it’s not surprising that so much wickedness is associated with gambling and fortune telling, because the very symbols on the cards are diabolical and were created by a mad, possessed craftsman for an equally mad king. The article ends with another question: “Do you really want to play with the Devil?”

PLAYING DEVIL’S ADVOCATE

Let’s put a few things right! Poor old mad Charles VI of France was indeed in a sorry state when one Jaquemin Grigonneur was commissioned to produce two decks of playing cards for him in 1392 but he did not invent them. Playing cards had been known in Europe for at least twenty years before he put brush to parchment. Almost nothing is known of Grigonneur’s character, sanity or beliefs—or indeed of the standard of his work—because none of his cards have survived. The so-called “Charles VI” deck that is attributed to Grigonneur, which is in the Bibliotheque National in Paris, has now been proven to be Italian in origin and of a later date.

Equally, there has never been a suggestion that the Queen represented the Virgin Mary or that the King represented the Devil. The role of the Prince of Darkness has traditionally been assigned to the Jack. However, there are Biblical references to be found throughout the entire deck.

CARDS SPIRITUALIZED

No history of playing cards would be complete without a mention of the ballad “Deck of Cards,” which has been performed by many people such as Tex Ritter, Ernest Tubb and particularly as a Country and Western song by Wink Martindale in 1959. The song is set during the North African campaign of the Second World War. It concerns an American soldier who is caught with a pack of cards during a church service. The soldier is then hauled before the Provost Marshall and told to explain himself. He does so by explaining the Biblical symbolism of the cards.

The oldest existing version of this ballad dates from 1778 when it was published in Newcastle, England as a religious tract called “Cards Spiritualized; or, the Soldier’s Almanac.” The original soldier, Richard Middleton, is Scottish, and the setting is Glasgow. For his apparent blasphemy, Middleton is taken to the mayor who demands an explanation for his scandalous behavior. Middleton replies that his cards are a Bible, a prayer book and an almanac and he goes on to describe each of the cards in turn.

The Ace reminds him that there is one God, and the deuce of the Old and New Testaments. The trey is the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, while the Four is a remembrance of the Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Five represents the five wounds of Christ, while the Six symbolizes the days that God took to create heaven and earth. The Seven is the Sabbath when God rested. The Eight are the eight righteous persons saved from the deluge, Noah, his wife, his sons and daughters-in-law. The Nine symbolizes the nine lepers cleansed by Christ; then, of course, come the Ten Commandments given to Moses. The Queen is the Queen of Sheba, while the King is God himself, and also a reminder to loyally pray for His Majesty King George III. The Knave then became the devil who reported Middleton to the mayor, “The greatest knave that I know.”

The “Cards Spiritualized” song also contains a description of the calendar concealed within the deck of cards.

THE ORIGIN OF PLAYING CARDS

Although it has been claimed that playing cards were invented in China, Korea or India, no one really knows for certain. Some believe that the cards came to the Western world via the Gypsies. However this is unlikely, since the first of the wandering Romany people did not arrive until 1398, and it is known that playing cards were familiar in Europe since at least 1377. A German monk named Johannes of Basel wrote about them in a manuscript, describing them in detail. For the next twenty years various states made laws to prohibit card play among the lower classes.

It seems likely that the cards known in Europe were a fusion of Western and Islamic symbolism that had been brought home by returning Crusaders. An ancient deck of forty-seven cards in the Topkapi Sarayi Museum in Istanbul bears a resemblance to modern playing cards. It has suit symbols similar to those found in the Tarot, with Swords, Cups, Coins and Polo-sticks. Here the similarity ends because the deck has no picture cards, probably due to a prohibition against the depiction of people in Islamic culture. Obviously there was no prejudice against gambling with cards in Moslem countries, because the heir to the Turkish throne, Al-Malik Al-Mu'ayyud was recorded as winning a considerable sum in a card game in 1400 AD.

European rulers like King Charles VI of France were soon captivated by card games. Following the king's lead, other nobles wanted playing cards of their very own. In 1408 an inventory of the possessions of the Duke and Duchess of Orleans included "one pack of Saracen cards; one cards of Lombardy." In the same year comes the very first recorded instance of cards being used to con the public in a court record of two plausible rogues and a game of "Find the lady"!

It is very likely that playing cards (in their guise as the Minor Arcana of the Tarot) existed before the invention of the Tarot Trumps (the Major Arcana of the Tarot), which was probably created sometime between 1420 and 1450 AD.

It is certain that the cheaper, woodblock printed cards had become the familiar red and black suits by 1448. The suits of Clubs, Diamonds, Spades and Hearts made their first appearance in France in the same era, and over the succeeding centuries made their way across the world, first to Britain and eventually to the Americas. Other European countries preferred their own variations: Spain and Italy stuck with the Batons, Coins, Swords and Cups of Tarot tradition, while Germany opted for Bells, Acorns, Leaves and the familiar Hearts.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CARTOMANCY

The origins of card reading can be said to go back a very long way, right to the early days of the Roman Empire. An oracle known as the Sybil of Cumae drew prophecies from the random movement of marked leaves on the floor of her cave as they swirled in the draught. However, it took a very long time before our familiar card deck evolved, so fortune telling with either Tarot cards or playing cards was unknown before the latter part of the fifteenth century.

The Gypsies may not have introduced playing cards, but they were almost certainly the first to use them for a form of fortune telling, and they are rightly credited with the swift spread of the practice across continental borders. The first ever book about using the cards for the purposes of divination appeared in Germany sometime in the 1480s.

By the 1540s French card makers had begun to give the picture cards names and identities, usually of great heroes, kings and legendary beauties. In the same era, another book on fortune telling appeared. This volume, by Marcoloni da Forli of Venice, concerned a parlor game played with dice to identify the card that should be interpreted. However the first custom-made deck, complete with occult imagery, for the purposes of divination did not appear until 1685 in London. Reprinted by John Lenthall in 1712, the deck was advertised as “Fortune Telling Cards, pleasantly unfolding the good and bad luck attending human life. With Directions of the Use of the Cards.”

CASANOVA AND THE CARDS

The first ever record of a card reading as we would understand the term, occurs relatively recently, historically speaking. In Chapter Twenty of the monumental *The Story of My Life*, the notorious libertine Giacomo Girolamo Casanova (1725–1798) tells of an episode that occurred in Moscow in 1765. One of his many mistresses, a young Russian peasant girl, whom Casanova called Zaira, consulted the cards with unfortunate results. Here is what Casanova wrote about the episode...

I got home, and, fortunately for myself, escaped the bottle which Zaira flung at my head, and which would infallibly have killed me if it had hit me. She threw herself on the ground, and began to strike it with her forehead. I thought she had gone mad, and wondered whether I had better call for assistance; but she became quiet enough to call me an assassin and a traitor, with all the other abusive epithets that she could remember. To convict me of my crime she showed me twenty-five cards, placed in order, and on them she displayed the various enormities of which I had been guilty.

This discovery of Casanova's many infidelities led to Zaira's deck of cards being thrown on the fire. Understandably, they parted the next day.

THE MYSTERIOUS ETTEILLA

Five years later, in 1770, the world of card reading changed forever with the publication of "*Etteilla, ou Maniere de se Recreer avec un Jeu de Cartes*" or "Etteilla, Or a Way to Entertain Yourself with a Deck of Cards." The author was Jean Baptiste Alliette (1738–1791) who preferred to reverse his surname to become the mysterious Etteilla. Little is known of his early life, save that he was born in Paris and that he was the son of a cook. His later writings suggest that he had

little formal education and that he was most probably self-taught. He married Jeanne Vattier in 1763, but they separated six years later. In his married days, he worked as a seed merchant. Tradition has it that he went on to become a dealer in antique prints and finally a barber and wig maker, although no evidence has ever come to light to confirm this. However, this career change would go a long way towards explaining his popularity as fortune-teller with aristocratic ladies in an age of such extravagant fashion.

Etteilla later popularized the use of Tarot cards for divination, but in his first book he concentrated on the popular playing card deck. More specifically a reduced deck of cards with the numbers 2 to 6 removed. Etteilla's reduced deck soon became popular with the Gypsies and thus has been called the "Continental" or "Romany deck." At no time did Etteilla ever claim that he had invented the system for reading the cards in this way. In fact he stated that he had learned the art from an unnamed Italian. However he did invent a new word "cartomancy" to describe the art of reading the cards.

In his book, Etteilla became the first to introduce the concept of reversed cards, thereby taking the basic interpretations of the Romany deck from thirty-two to sixty-four. He later published a deck of playing cards that were commonly known as the "Petit Etteilla." In his deck, the card picture or symbols were within a central border with keywords on all four sides. For example, when the King of Spades was upright, it meant a lawyer, and when reversed, a widower. Likewise the King of Clubs was a country gentleman, and when reversed, a laborer and so on.

Etteilla also has a place in Tarot history, as he was the originator of some of the more outlandish theories concerning the origins and true meanings of the cards. Details of this aspect of his career can be found in my book *Tarot Mysteries*.

It could be said that after enjoying a considerable vogue in the France of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, history finally caught up with Etteilla with the coming of the French Revolution in 1789. Etteilla died in 1791 just after

the publication of his playing cards.

The turbulent revolutionary fervor swept away the genteel bewigged world of Etteilla but now the stage was set for the appearance of another extraordinary character, one who was to have a profound influence on both the direction of card reading and possibly of the world itself – this was Mlle Marie Adelaide Lenormand.

M L L E D E L E N O R M A N D

One of the most extraordinary figures in the history of card reading was Madame Marie Ann Adelaide de Lenormand, known as the “Sibyl of the Faubourg St. Germain.” Born on May 5, 1772, she was the daughter of a wealthy cloth merchant of Alençon in France, and she was one of three children. Always a difficult child, Marie became the bane of her respectable father’s life. His answer to the problem was to confine his rebellious daughter to a convent boarding school and then try to forget all about her. Fate then played a card which ended both Marie’s father’s life and the family fortune at one stroke. No longer able to afford to eat, let alone pay her high school fees, at the age of fourteen, Marie found herself working as a laundress alongside a certain Madame Gilbert. This lady’s skills as a laundress have not been judged worthy of a historical mention, but her other talents lay in the direction of the occult. Madame Gilbert was considered an expert fortune-teller, so under her maternal tutelage, young Marie became adept at the arts of palmistry, numerology and the one that would eventually make her famous—cartomancy.

The next episode of Marie’s life remains something of a mystery. It is said that she spent her fifteenth year in London studying all manner of mystic arts such as astrology and the Qabalah, although how a penniless young laundress could have managed this is open to speculation.

Marie was certainly in Paris at the onset of the French Revolution in 1789, a fact which brings us back into the realms of the known. It is said that in

times of uncertainty and fear, those who can look past the obvious and provide a glimpse of what is to come will always do very well, and Marie prospered when many others did not. Her clientele grew to include some of the most notable revolutionaries, such as Danton, Desmoulins, Marat, Saint Just and even the “incorruptible” Maximilien Robespierre himself. Of course this was not without its risks. Most of her prominent clients met their ends beneath the blade of the guillotine, although in the case of Marat, he was knifed while having a bath. Indeed most were sent to their deaths by a stroke of the implacable Robespierre’s pen. The risk to Marie was multiplied when she rashly told Robespierre that he would go the same way within a year. This prediction was to cost Marie her freedom and ensure her a place in history.

During her confinement, Marie made the acquaintance of a young aristocratic widow from the French colony of Martinique who, like Marie, was destined for the guillotine, her husband having been beheaded some time previously. The lady’s name was Josephine Beauharnais. The two became firm friends. Josephine had always been fascinated by divination and had some knowledge of the Voodoo that was practiced in her native island. She was equally fascinated by the attitude of Marie Lenormand, who seemed unperturbed by the threat of death which hung over them both. As it turned out Marie’s prediction to Robespierre soon came true and he followed so many of his victims to the blade. With his execution the Terror ended and the two women were freed.

The next episode of French history is called the Directoire, and this was a time when the revolution entered a calmer phase. Josephine, always the social climber, rapidly became the mistress of the chief of state. In the process, she met her future husband, a young Corsican general named Napoleone Buonaparte. With the increasing influence of her friend Josephine, Marie Lenormand’s reputation grew. She was introduced into the upper echelons of post revolutionary society, many of whom wanted to employ her services. During the Napoleonic consulate and the empire that followed, Marie accurately read the cards for such

worthies as Marshall Bernadotte, predicting that he would become a king. He did—and he founded the ruling dynasty of Sweden.

Eventually, Marie's close association with the Empress Josephine was to cause her second period of imprisonment. In 1809 Napoleon (now spelling his name in the French manner) decided that Josephine was too old to give him the heir that he craved. He now wanted a younger, better-connected princess to be the mother of his future dynasty. He secretly entered negotiations with Austria for the hand of the Arch-Duchess Marie Louise. These events were clearly seen in the cards by Lenormand, who told Josephine of the impending divorce. Napoleon was so angry that he had Marie imprisoned until the deed had been done. At least, that's the official version. According to Lenormand herself, she confronted Bonaparte with her knowledge but he met her furious outburst with one of his own, and the outraged seeress threw a deck of cards in the emperor's face. Either way, Marie Lenormand ended up "doing time" again!

The Occupation of Paris by the allied forces of Britain, Russia and Prussia in 1814 did nothing to harm Lenormand's reputation. Indeed she was consulted by no less a figure than the Tsar Alexander I, who immediately recommended her services to the Duke of Wellington.

Shortly after this Marie considered it prudent to remove herself to Brussels; taking advantage of the invitation of the Prince of Orange (she accurately predicted that he would become king of the newly founded kingdom of Holland). However her luck then ran out. She was arrested for cheating the customs and was again imprisoned.

On her eventual return to Paris, Marie established a salon and there she continued to read the fortunes of high society. However her glory days were past, and by the time of her death in 1843 she had quietly slipped into obscurity.

Marie's great niece, Mlle Camille le Normand (she had altered the spelling slightly) published a book called *Fortune Telling by Cards* outlining her relative's

methods. Over the next hundred and fifty years or so, many versions of her symbolic personal deck were published, usually entitled “Lenormand Fortune Cards,” often with an extremely misleading “blurb” which went something like this:

In the early years of the nineteenth century, there was a powerful gypsy fortune teller who predicted the victories of Napoleon as well as his eventual defeat. The secrets of this gypsy witch are now yours.

The fact that Marie Ann Adelaide Lenormand was neither a witch nor a gypsy made no difference whatsoever to the card manufacturers.

Although cards of this type can still be purchased reasonably cheaply today, often with a little poem explaining the card’s meaning inset into the design, it is not strictly necessary to have a fully illustrated deck of cards to read in the Lenormand way. After all, the great lady herself was content with an ordinary deck of thirty-six cards (exactly the same number as is used in the ancient card game of Piquet which was extremely popular in Lenormand’s day).

It is certain that the process popularized by Etteilla and Lenormand found its way into middle-class parlors around the world. Card oracles as a game or pastime became very popular throughout the nineteenth century, and they received another boost with the vogue for Spiritualism in the 1850s. This new movement gave everything with an esoteric flavor an added excitement and led the way to the “occult revival” of the latter part of the century.

THE STAR-CRAFT OF THE GOLDEN DAWN

The grandly named Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was a very well-heeled, upper class offshoot of the Masonic order that was established in 1887. Its founding fathers, Dr. William Wynn Wescott (1848–1925), Dr. Robert Woodman (1828–1925) and Samuel Mathers (1854–1918) were convinced that

they had found many of the secrets of the universe by the study of ancient occult lore. The Tarot deck in particular was an object of fascination to the members who considered each card to be a “key” to unlock cosmic truths. Consequently, a great deal of effort was made to both come up with a system to tie in the 22 pictorial cards of the Major Arcana with the Hebrew Qabalah, numerology and astrology. After this monumental exercise was completed, the order turned its attention to the Minor Arcana with its suits of Clubs (now renamed Wands), Coins (now renamed Pentacles), Swords and Cups. These now received an astrological treatment, with planets and signs allocated to each of the pip cards while whole star-signs were granted to the courts (details of this can be found in my book, *Tarot Mysteries*).

The final outcome of this was a coherent system of astrological attributions for the Minor Arcana of the Tarot. There is a small problem in that there are twelve signs of the zodiac, each representing a character type, while the Tarot has four court cards per suit, making sixteen in all, rather than the more usual three court cards in a playing card deck. The upshot of this was that the Pages, the equivalents of the Jacks, fell out of the system, giving the Tarot a rather awkward correspondence to traditional astrology. On the other hand, the system devised by Mathers does fit a standard playing card deck rather well, although it is unlikely that this fact ever occurred to him.

In this system of attributions, the first point to bear in mind is the association of the suits to the four traditional elements of Fire, Water, Air and Earth. Clubs are identified with Fire; with Hearts with Water; Spades with Air and Diamonds with Earth.

As we all know, the zodiac consists of twelve signs, namely Aries the Ram, Taurus the Bull, Gemini the Twins, Cancer the Crab, Leo the Lion, Virgo the Maiden, Libra the Scales, Scorpio the Scorpion, Sagittarius the Archer, Capricorn the Goat, Aquarius the Water-Carrier and Pisces the Fish. These signs are sub-divided among the four classical elements so that Aries is a Fire sign,

Taurus is governed by Earth, Gemini by Air, Cancer by Water and so on in a never ending sequence.

Fire (Clubs)	Earth (Diamonds)	Air (Spades)	Water (Hearts)
Aries	Taurus	Gemini	Cancer
Leo	Virgo	Libra	Scorpio
Sagittarius	Capricorn	Aquarius	Pisces

The Golden Dawn did not consider the signs of this familiar form of astrology to be the oldest type of zodiac in existence. The members of the mystical order were enamored of the magic and mystery of Ancient Egypt, so they also adopted the system of decans from the civilization of the Nile. To put it simply, a decan consists of ten degrees (a sign of the zodiac being thirty degrees, or one twelfth of a circle). So each sign of the zodiac is made up of three decans, making thirty-six decans in all. All that remained was to find the right card for the right decan.

The first step in this process was to remove the Aces from each suit, because it was considered that they represented the purest or archetypal forms of their respective elements. Thus the Ace of Clubs was given the esoteric title of “The Root of the Powers of Fire”; likewise the Ace of Hearts was considered to be “The Root of the Powers of Water” and so on. It is for this reason that the Aces do not appear in the zodiac arrangement of the minor cards, but are represented by all three signs of their respective elements. Hence the Ace of Clubs is associated with the three Fire signs of Aries, Leo and Sagittarius. The Ace of Hearts is allocated the Water signs of Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces; the Ace of Spades gains the attributions of the Airy signs of Gemini, Libra and Aquarius while the Ace of Diamonds connects with the Earthy signs of Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn.

The twelve picture cards, Jack, Queen and King, did not quite fit the scheme either, so these too were removed from this system and granted a star sign each.

Clubs (Fire)	Diamonds (Earth)	Spades (Air)	Hearts (Water)
King Aries	King Capricorn	King Libra	King Cancer
Queen Leo	Queen Taurus	Queen Aquarius	Queen Scorpio
Jack Sagittarius	Jack Virgo	Jack Gemini	Jack Pisces

With the aces and court cards now removed, we are left with thirty-six numbered cards providing a perfect fit for the thirty-six decans. After a fierce dispute, the Two of Clubs became associated with the first decan of Aries. The Three was identified with the second decan, and the Four with the third, all being found within the element of Fire. For the Five, Six and Seven of Clubs, the three decans of the next Fire sign, Leo, were used. Finally the Eight, Nine and Ten were given the three decans of Sagittarius. The same formula was followed for all the remaining minor cards.

Now the problem became “How to individualize the cards so that they arrived at a coherent divinatory meaning?” To address this problem, Mathers proposed a sequence of the seven astrological planets in the following order: Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, the Moon, Saturn and finally, Jupiter. This particular order of the planets is based on a medieval system known as the planetary hours, which in its original form was used to help magicians and those involved in witchcraft to invoke suitable powers for their spells. Be that as it may, the order of the planets was then combined with the decan system to provide an individual meaning for each card.

THE DECK OF CARDS

Card	Planet	Zodiac Sign	Decan
2 Clubs	Mars	Aries	1
3 Clubs	Sun	Aries	2
4 Clubs	Venus	Aries	3
5 Diamonds	Mercury	Taurus	1
6 Diamonds	Moon	Taurus	2
7 Diamonds	Saturn	Taurus	3
8 Spades	Jupiter	Gemini	1
9 Spades	Mars	Gemini	2
10 Spades	Sun	Gemini	3
2 Hearts	Venus	Cancer	1
3 Hearts	Mercury	Cancer	2
4 Hearts	Moon	Cancer	3
5 Clubs	Saturn	Leo	1
6 Clubs	Jupiter	Leo	2
7 Clubs	Mars	Leo	3
8 Diamonds	Sun	Virgo	1
9 Diamonds	Venus	Virgo	2
10 Diamonds	Mercury	Virgo	3
2 Spades	Moon	Libra	1
3 Spades	Saturn	Libra	2
4 Spades	Jupiter	Libra	3
5 Hearts	Mars	Scorpio	1
6 Hearts	Sun	Scorpio	2
7 Hearts	Venus	Scorpio	3
8 Clubs	Mercury	Sagittarius	1

9 Clubs	Moon	Sagittarius	2
10 Clubs	Saturn	Sagittarius	3
2 Diamonds	Jupiter	Capricorn	1
3 Diamonds	Mars	Capricorn	2
4 Diamonds	Sun	Capricorn	3
5 Spades	Venus	Aquarius	1
6 Spades	Mercury	Aquarius	2
7 Spades	Moon	Aquarius	3
8 Hearts	Saturn	Pisces	1
9 Hearts	Jupiter	Pisces	2
10 Hearts	Mars	Pisces	3

So now each numbered card contained the symbolism of a number, an element, a planet and a sign of the zodiac. This is fertile ground to establish the modern meanings of the individual cards.

Of course, the Golden Dawn system of card attribution is not set in stone. Many card readers have developed their own methods and most probably ignore these astrological attributions. Nevertheless, for the sake of completeness, the Golden Dawn astrological attributions are included in the sections that describe the individual cards.

THE CARDS OF THE “POKER” DECK

The following pages give the meanings of each of the fifty-two cards in the standard deck. They are arranged by their respective numbers or names, together with their significance in terms of numerology, their astrological correspondence according to the Golden Dawn and their traditional nick-names or relevant keywords. In addition, the curious symbolism of Mlle Lenormand is mentioned,

together with her equally unique numbering system. More details of this can be found in the third part of the book.

In the case of the court cards there is also a description of their traditional appearance and of the legendary or historical characters each is supposed to represent. In most cases, these identities are French in origin and they were assigned to the cards in the middle of the sixteenth century.

Each card is preceded by a four-line verse dating from the nineteenth century as part of a fortune telling parlor game, in which the cards were shuffled and laid out face downwards on a tabletop. Each person would then close his eyes and choose a single card. The verse was then read out for the amusement of all who were assembled. For more games of this sort see the chapter on “Traditional Romantic Games and Readings” in this book.