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From Gaming to Divination: The Shifting Role of the Lenormand Deck

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Abstract

This article spotlights the Lenormand deck, from its origins as a playing card for gaming and gambling to its evolving role as a divination tool. By examining the historical context, production techniques, and symbolic imagery, the study highlights the unique cultural and artistic significance of the Lenormand cards. The methodology includes a comparative analysis with the Tarot system, revealing how the Lenormand deck's straightforward and accessible imagery contrasts with Tarot's complex esoteric symbolism. This research underscores the Lenormand deck's reflection of broader societal changes, particularly its role in democratizing art and esoteric practices. The Lenormand's simplicity and universal symbols made itself accessible to the mass. By situating the Lenormand deck within the broader narrative of cartomancy and visual culture, the essay demonstrates its importance as a historical artifact that bridges gaming, art, and divination, providing insights into the intersection of leisure culture, material history, and social transformation.

Keywords: material culture, playing cards, modernism, mass culture, Lenormand, Tarot, esotericism, art and society

Prophecy and divination practices have been documented across various cultures since ancient times, forming an integral part of human history and cultural development. From astrology, runes and cards to tea leaves, turtle shells and coins, divination as an art and medium has always captured the imagination of mankind. Playing cards were introduced to the West during the Middle Ages, and have served as both a popular gaming instrument and a medium for divination.[1] Initially, playing card games was primarily a gambling and leisure pastime for the upper classes, with historical records demonstrating that royalty and nobility throughout Europe indulged in the practice, inventing dozens of game variations.[2] The functioning of cards as prophetic tools came later, with the book *Le Sorti*, published in 1540, being one of the earliest works devoted to card divination.[3] Among all the cartomancy methods, Tarot is probably the most famous system in the world today. Even those who are not interested in divination, have probably seen Tarot featured in various media outlets. As a visual tool for prophecy, it has spawned many different card imagery systems and corresponding interpretation methods over the centuries, such as the Rider-Waite Tarot, the Tarot of Marseilles, and the Thoth Tarot.[4] However, there exists another system of cartomancy that, though generally less well-known than Tarot, is a system with rich history and continues to be actively practiced by many — the Lenormand deck. Named after the famous cartomancer Mme Marie Anne Lenormand, the origin of this deck is related to the German card game *Das Spiel der Hofnung* invented by J. K. Hechtel, a local merchant and game developer from Nuremberg.[5]

Unlike Tarot, which features a complex divination system spanning various cultural and esoteric traditions, the Lenormand deck lacks grandiose myths or a spectacular history beyond its association with the renowned French fortune-teller, and has likely therefore not been widely circulated.[6] However, starting from the late twentieth century, the Lenormand deck, though still niche, has grown in popularity, particularly in recent years, reaching a global audience.[7] Current scholarship on playing cards remains scarce in general, with much of the existing

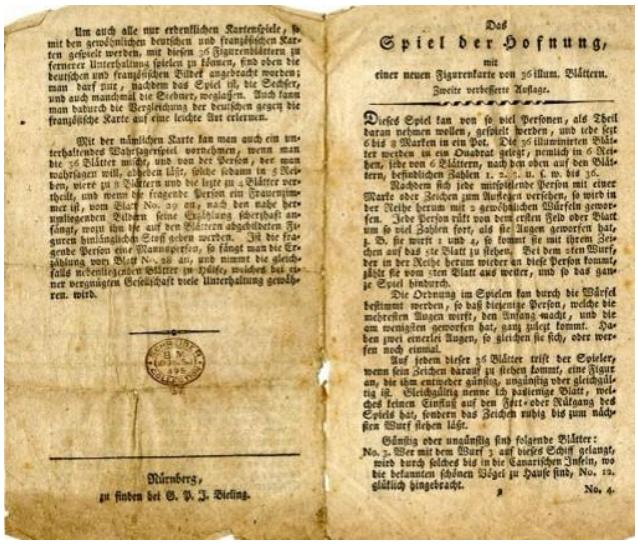
research focusing on the Tarot system, exploring its origins, therapeutic powers, esoteric significance, and cultural impact over time.[8] Far less discourse centers on the Lenormand deck, which is generally mentioned only briefly in discussions about the history of Tarot and card games. Scholarly research treating these cards as valuable visual and material artifacts is even more limited. To quote Michael Dummett, "there is an unthinking mental association of playing cards with frivolity, which leads people to assume that an interest either in them or in what they are used for must likewise be frivolous."[9] This lack of academic engagement underscores the need for a more in-depth exploration of the cultural and artistic value of behind these cards. This article thus aims to explore the various identities of Lenormand deck — as playing cards, as works of art or material culture, and as divination device. It seeks to explore the multifaceted identity of Lenormand cards by drawing comparisons with another cartomancy system, Tarot, to reveal their broader social significance, showcasing how they reflect wider societal changes and shifts in knowledge dissemination influenced by modernism and technological advancements.

Gaming and gambling held significant places in European social life during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with their expansion heavily influenced by the French court, where many popular card games were first invented.[10] Gambling served as a means for aristocrats to display their indifference to wealth, a practice that was also a form of conspicuous consumption.[11] The participation of rulers in games often entailed compulsory participation by their courtiers.[12] Moreover, the growing prominence of these card games was mirrored in their appearance in literature, particularly from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, when published guides on how to play these games appeared throughout Europe.[13] The Lenormand deck was devised against this backdrop. It was originally created for entertainment, socializing and time-passing, with no prophetic agenda. Figure 1 displays a complete set of the original thirty-six playing cards of *Das Spiel der Hofnung*, from the playing card collection donated to the British Museum by Lady Charlotte Schreiber. Figure 2 shows the image of the cardboard case with the title of the game and the information of the manufacturer, G. P. J. Bieling of Nuremberg.

Figure 1. Cards with French suits: complete pack of 36 playing-cards: *Das Spiel der Hofnung — Le Jeu de l'Esperance*. Produced by G.P.J. Bieling, circa 1800, hand-colored etching, Playing card. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum, The British Museum, London. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1172643001

Figure 2. The pale blue cardboard case, with printed label on the outside: "Das Spiel der Hofnung, mit einer neuen illum. Figurenkarte. Neue Auflage. / Le Jeu de l'Esperance, accompagné d'un jeu de cartes a figures." Produced by G.P.J. Bieling, circa 1800, hand-colored etching, Playing card. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum, The British Museum, London. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1613693401

Figure 3 and 4 are pictures of the printed instructions accompanied the deck, offering game-playing rules.[14] These guides detail the number of participants, the initial stakes required, how to roll the dice and calculate the outcome, the significance of each number and its card face value, and the corresponding amounts to be paid or received.[15] According to the manual, the game relies mainly on rolling dice, demanding little skill, akin to the modern game of Monopoly. It is a game that pertains to probability, in other words, luck. Based on a report issued by the *Deutsche Bundesbank*, in nineteenth-century Germany, 1 kilogram of rye bread cost 0.26 marks, 1 kilogram of potatoes 0.07 marks, and 1 kilogram of wheat flour 0.45 marks.[16] It is therefore clear that a game requiring a stake of six to eight marks per session is not intended for the common man, but for the affluent and those with leisure time. However, reports indicate that European aristocrats wagered significant fortunes on games in the eighteenth century, prompting various countries to enact laws limiting the amounts.[17] Therefore, while these stakes were considerable, they were certainly not excessive, allowing the truly affluent individuals to engage in gambling primarily for entertainment and social interaction without risking substantial financial loss. Thorstein Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* discusses that the fundamental appeal of gambling lies in the belief in luck and the curiosity about future luck inherent in prophecy.[18] It is therefore not surprising that card games later incorporated elements of fortune-telling, blending entertainment with the fascination of forecasting the uncharted, which aligned with the leisurely pursuits and cultural practices of the wealthy class.


Um auch alle nur erdenklichen Kartenspiele, so mit den gewöhnlichen deutschen und französischen Karten gespielt werden, mit diesen 36 Figurenblättern zu ferneter Unterhaltung spielen zu können, sind oben die deutschen und französischen Bilder angebracht worden; man darf nur, nachdem das Spiel ist, die Sechser, und auch manchmal die Siebner, weglassen. Auch kann man dadurch die Vergleichung der deutschen gegen die französische Karte auf eine leichte Art erlernen.

Mit der nämlichen Karte kan man auch ein unterhaltendes Wahrsagerspiel vornehmen, wenn man die 36 Blätter mischt, und von der Person, der man wahrsagen will, abheben läßt, solche sodann in 5 Reihen, viere zu 8 Blättern und die letzte zu 4 Blätter vertheilt, und wenn die fragende Person ein Frauenzimmer ist, vom Blatt No. 29 an, nach den nahe herumliegenden Bildern seine Erzählung scherzhaft anfängt, wozu ihr die auf den Blättern abgebildeten Figuren hinlänglichen Stoff geben werden. Ist die fragende Person eine Mannsperson, so fängt man die Erzählung von Blatt No. 28 an, und nimmt die gleichfalls nebenliegenden Blätter zu Hülfe, welches bei einer vergnügten Gesellschaft viele Unterhaltung gewähren wird.

Nürnberg,
zu finden bei G. P. J. Bieling.

Das
Spiel der Hofnung,
mit
einer neuen Figurenkarte von 36 illum. Blättern.
Zweite verbesserte Auflage.

Dieses Spiel kan von so viel Personen, als Theil daran nehmen wollen, gespielt werden, und jede setzt 6 bis 8 Marken in ein Pot. Die 36 illuminirten Blätter werden in ein Quadrat gelegt, nemlich in 6 Reihen; jede von 6 Blättern, nach den oben auf den Blättern, befindlichen Zahlen 1. 2. 3. u. s. w. bis 36.

Nachdem sich jede mitspielende Person mit einer Marke oder Zeichen zum Aufsetzen versehen, so wird in der Reihe herum mit 2 gewöhnlichen Würfeln geworfen. Jede Person rückt von dem ersten Feld oder Blatt um so viel Zahlen fort, als sie Augen geworfen hat, z. B. sie wirft 1 und 4, so kommt sie mit ihrem Zeichen auf das 5te Blatt zu stehen. Bei dem 1sten Wurfe, der in der Reihe herum wieder an diese Person kommt, zählt sie von 5ten Blatt aus weiter, und so das ganze Spiel hindurch.

Die Ordnung im Spielen kan durch die Würfel bestimmt werden, so daß diejenige Person, welche die mehresten Augen wirft, den Anfang macht, und die am wenigsten geworfen hat, ganz zuletzt kommt. Haben zwei einerlei Augen, so ziehen sie sich, oder werfen noch einmal.

Auf jedem dieser 36 Blätter trift der Spieler, wenn sein Zeichen darauf zu stehen kommt, eine Figur an, die ihm entweder günstig, ungünstig oder gleichgültig ist. Gleichgültig nenne ich diejenige Blatt, welches keinen Einfluß auf den Fort- oder Rückgang des Spiels hat, sondern das Zeichen ruhig bis zum nächsten Wurf stehen läßt.

Günstig oder ungünstig sind folgende Blätter:
No. 3. Wer mit dem Wurf 3 auf dieses Schiff gelangt, wird durch solches bis in die Canarischen Inseln, wo die bekannten schönen Vögel zu Hause sind, No. 12. glücklich hingebracht. No. 4.

Figure 3. The game guide inside the case. Produced by G.P.J. Bieling, circa 1800, hand-colored etching, Playing card. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum, The British Museum, London. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1190053

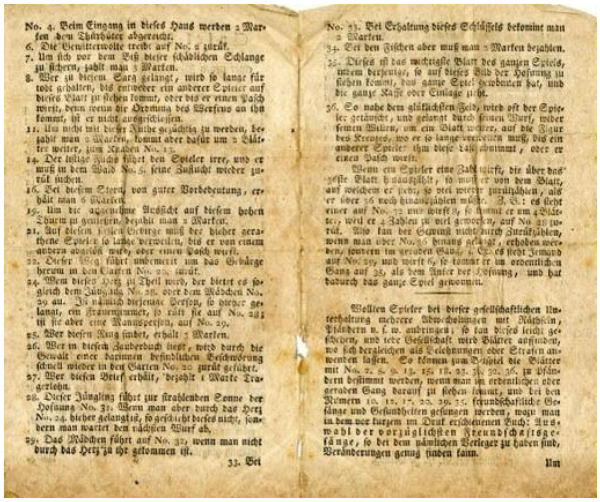


Figure 4. The game guide inside the case. Produced by G.P.J. Bieling, circa 1800, hand-colored etching, Playing card. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum, The British Museum, London. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1190054

Walter Benjamin explores the transformative impact of technological advances on art production and its societal implications in his seminal work "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility."[19] He specifically mentions the shift in printmaking technology that has revolutionized the graphic arts, which is evident in the productions of playing cards.[20] A pivotal moment in the history of playing cards was the advancement of woodblock printing in the fifteenth-century Germany, which had a significant impact on their mass production and circulation.[21] By 1418, the trading of playing cards had become a fully-fledged industry in Germany.[22] This development in printmaking not only contributed to the production and widespread distribution of playing cards throughout Europe, but also highlighted the impact of technological advances on recreational and economic activity. Apart from woodblock printing, various other printmaking techniques were also utilized in the playing card manufacturing business, such as intaglio printing and lithography.[23] The cards in figure 1 are all hand colored etchings, which is a type of intaglio printing that involves using acid to incise the image into the metal plate, where the etched lines are sharp and distinct yet with minor irregularities, evidencing the corrosion of acid.[24] After the printing is complete, the images are then individually colored by hand.[25] Although the technology of color etching, which involves directly wiping colored ink onto the same plate, was available during this period, its widespread adoption did not occur until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[26] Therefore, the creation of this deck represents a combination of mechanized production and artisanship.

The complete set of original Lenormand playing cards presented in Figures 5 and 6, also from the collection of Lady Charlotte Schreiber, showcases an alternative, more streamlined printmaking technique — chromolithography. Chromolithography is a term coined in the nineteenth century to refer to a color lithographic printing process that employs multiple plates.[27] This technique was invented by German actor and playwright Alois Senefelder in 1798, and quickly became popular across Europe.[28] The desired images are created using a greasy substance on a smooth, flat limestone or metal plate.[29] The fundamental principle of this technique is that oil-based and water-based substances do not mix, which enables the selective application of ink to the greased areas while repelling it from the water-moistened sections.[30] The artist first prepares a master drawing followed by separate drawings on the plates for each color, typically beginning with the lightest shade; then, multiple initial prints are produced from these plates, laying the groundwork for arrangements of other colors. A unique pictorial quality is achieved through the application of layers of overprinted colors.[31] This technique was primarily used in the nineteenth century for mass production, especially for reproducing paintings and watercolors, as well as for decorative arts.[32] Compared to the earlier hand-colored etching technique used on the *Das Spiel der Hofnung* deck in Figure 1, this approach eliminates the need for manual coloring, representing a further advancement towards mechanical production and democratizing what used to be a more exclusive device and entertainment form. While the original gaming deck still retains high-art characteristics, as evidenced by the numerous etchings created by many famous painters such as Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt, Edgar Degas, and Mary Cassatt, and hand-coloring adds an artisanal touch, the use of chromolithography on the Lenormand deck further transforms the class and cultural implications of these cards.[33] Chromolithography thus facilitated the transformation of the Lenormand deck into a more integral part of everyday cultural practices, moving beyond its aristocratic gambling origins to wider social use, aligning with Benjamin's statement that "lithography enabled graphic art to provide an illustrated accompaniment to everyday life."[34]

The deck consists of thirty-six cards, each card contains an order number in the upper left corner, a suit sign in the upper-center, and the manufacturer's information printed in a circle in the upper right corner (Figure 5 and Figure 6). The lower half of each card carries a figurative image motif, starting with the number one Rider and ending with the number thirty-six Cross.[35] The suit signs here are French suits, with the four elements in a French suit playing card represent the four classes of society: Hearts for the church, Spades for the army, Diamonds for the merchant class, and Clubs for the peasants.[36] The traditional signature German suits were Hearts, Bells, Leaves, and Acorns, as featured on the cards in Figure 1.[37] While each European country initially underwent lots of experiments and developed its own distinctive suit designs, due to practical economic considerations, the easier-to-produce French suits of Hearts, Spades, Diamonds and Clubs gradually replaced these designs.[38] The earlier *Das Spiel der Hofnung* deck also features French suits alongside German ones, which design, according to the explanation in the guide, was for practical purposes, allowing users to have more choices and be able to "play any conceivable card game with ordinary German and French playing cards, and to further entertain with these thirty-six numbered cards."[39] This measure reflects both the influence of French game and card system, as well as the impact of French courtly culture on the whole of Europe.

Figure 5. Cards with French suits: complete pack of 36 playing-cards: Mlle. Lenormand's fortune-telling cards. Produced by B. Dondorf, 19th century, chromolithograph, Playing card. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum, The British Museum, London. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1399771001

Figure 6. Cards with French suits: complete pack of 36 playing-cards: Mlle. Lenormand's fortune-telling cards. Produced by B. Dondorf, 19th century, chromolithograph, Playing card. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum, The British Museum, London. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1399772001.

Although the designs were developed for practical reasons, this does not mean that there is no cultural and symbolic significance behind them. On the contrary, they hold substantial significance as artifacts, reflecting the socio-cultural and aesthetic tenets of the time. Unlike Tarot cards that, apart from the three most classic imagery systems mentioned earlier, have spawned many variants over the centuries, with different countries, regions, and courts commissioning a version of their own, the imagery of the Lenormand deck has remained largely unchanged throughout the years.[40] A comparison between the original *Das Spiel der Hofnung* deck with the subsequent Lenormand deck shows that, despite variations in artistic style, the fundamental elements of the cards have remained. This enduring consistency is still visible today, as seen in the Lo Scarabeo version currently published by Llewelyn Publishing Company as well as the Old Style Lenormand, which, despite updates in artistic style and the repositioning of manufacturer information with the playing card suits moved to the top right corner, there are no significant changes (Figure 7 and Figure 8).

Figure 7. A complete Lo Scarabeo Lenormand deck. Designed by Lo Scarabeo and published by Llewellyn Publications, 2013, print, Playing card. Photo by author.

Figure 8. A complete Old Style Lenormand deck. Designed by Alexander Ray and published by U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 2019, print, Playing card. Photo by author.

The unchanging content of the Lenormand deck acts as a collective unconscious, mirroring the universality of the messages conveyed by its imagery.[41] These symbols, while not always encompassing all civilizations around the globe, are quite universal within Western society, expressing common human experiences thus eliciting unconscious associations among viewers. The imagery in the Lenormand deck can be categorized into four broad themes: nature, animals, objects, and people. These categories emphasize everyday subjects and notably exclude elements like aristocracy or royalty, as well as legendary or mythological figures and supernatural scenes. This trait is particularly valuable since, from the nineteenth century onwards, people involved in divination spanned all social classes and were found in both urban and rural settings.[42] For example, as the guide notes, when players encounter card number seven, "The Snake," in the course of the game, they are required a payment of three marks.[43] This rule aligns with the symbolic representation of the snake as an evil or demonic influence in the Western context.[44] When later used in divination, this card also carried a predominantly negative meaning, usually representing betrayal, deception, secrecy, or someone with malicious intent.[45] Likewise, card number eight, "The Coffin," represents ending and death, while card number eighteen, "The Dog," symbolizes loyalty and friendship — both interpretations hold universally understood meanings.[46] The universality of these symbols grants them the ability to transcend linear time and conjure similar sensory experiences across eras and cultures, making the deck accessible and relatable to a wide audience, which quality is reminiscent of Benjamin's discourse on the reproducibility of art, transcending its original context and shifting the masses' relationship to it.[47]

Furthermore, the clear, simple and straightforward images have a profound impact on the character of the Lenormand as a divination tool, especially in comparison to its counterpart, the Tarot. Tarot began to be associated with cartomantic and occult practices in the late eighteenth century, influenced by the writings of Antoine Court de Gébelin and Etteilla.[48] Freemasons, especially the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, among other occultists of the time, further propagated this esoteric connection.[49] Their act epitomizes Georg Simmel's concept of the "secret societies," which are interactional units built on certain level of shared secret knowledge, in their case, the Tarot knowledge system, and the initiated maintain their exclusivity and internal cohesion by possessing and controlling the dissemination of relevant and valuable information, creating a social barrier or distinction between them and those uninitiated.[50] One great example is the Rider-Waite tarot, which is directly related to the member of the Golden Dawn. It was designed by Pamela Coleman-Smith upon commission from Arthur Edward White, who also authored *The Key to the Tarot* as a companion volume to the deck.[51] This deck consists of seventy-eight cards, including twenty-two Major Arcana and fifty-six Minor Arcana. Each card is adorned with a wealth of elements, carrying specific symbolic meanings that users need to understand in order to interpret the cards accurately. Moreover, since Tarot originated during the Middle Ages and was initially created for the courts and nobles, its images mainly featured the royalties, the clergy, and the social elites, containing symbolic elements charged with implications of authority and hierarchy.[52] For instance, the Major Arcana includes cards like "The High Priestess," "The Empress," "The Emperor," and "The Hierophant," portraying high-ranking figures. In the Minor Arcana, there are figures of Kings, Queens, Knights and Pages, along with suits of Cups, Wands, Swords, and Pentacles. Thus, the cultural foundations of Tarot are arguably rooted in privilege, as evidenced by these suits and figures that represent tools and roles of authority and service far removed from the everyday experiences of ordinary people. The interpretations compiled by these elites were a hybrid of cultural knowledge, merging astrology, Kabbalistic symbolism, Egyptian culture and Gypsy traditions.[53] Therefore, to enable a clear and thorough Tarot reading, one is required to have extensive background knowledge or to seek the assistance of a professional, namely, an intermediary. This privileging of knowledge effectively isolates the Tarot from a wider, uninitiated audience, enhances its mystique, allure, and even, offers what Mike Sosteric refers to as "a new ideology or power."[54]

In contrast to the Tarot, the Lenormand lacks a "prestigious" background or a sophisticated cultural heritage. Although it borrows the name of Mme Lenormand, who served a diverse notable clientele including Empress Josephine, evidence suggests that Mme Lenormand did not use the divination tool that now carries her name, so the deck was in no means connected to the elitist culture.[55] This may explain the apparent difference in imagery between the Lenormand and the Tarot as they represent the contrasting forms of cultural capital.[56] A comparison of "The Star," "The Moon," and "The Sun" cards, which are present in both the Lenormand and Tarot, reveals the differences between the two systems. Although these cards in both systems are all named after celestials, the Lenormand system simply depicts the celestial bodies themselves, whereas the Tarot features more complex imagery with multi-layered details and often includes human figures. First, Lenormand's "The Star" portrays a scene where a few stars are scattered over the sea, whereas "The Star" in Tarot depicts a nude woman pouring water over the land and sea (Figure 9 and Figure 10). Behind the woman lies a vast meadow blooming with flowers, and a mountain. Dominating the sky is a large golden eight-pointed star, surrounded by seven smaller white eight-pointed stars. "The Sun" presents a similar scenario — Lenormand's deck depicts a radiant sun above a mountain, with two streaks of clouds in front of it; the Tarot version, on the other hand, features a much more complex image (Figure 11 and Figure 12). This Rider-Waite card draws inspiration from the Jacques Vieville Tarot and includes

the walled garden of the traditional Tarot of Marseilles.[57] In the image, a nude youth is riding a horse with a daisy wreath and red feathers on his head holding a red banner in his hand. The sun in the image also has a human face, emitting twenty-two rays of light. Even in the case of "The Moon," which contains no human figures in either system, the Lenormand depiction is much simpler, featuring just a crescent moon in the sky with a backdrop of the sea and mountains, whereas the Tarot version presents a more complex scene: a moon divided into three phases is hanging in the sky between two towers; in the foreground, there is a pool of water leading to land, with rugged hills in the distance; in the mid-ground, a dog and a wolf are howling, positioned on the left and right sides, respectively, while a crayfish crawls out of the water onto the shore (Figure 13 and Figure 14).

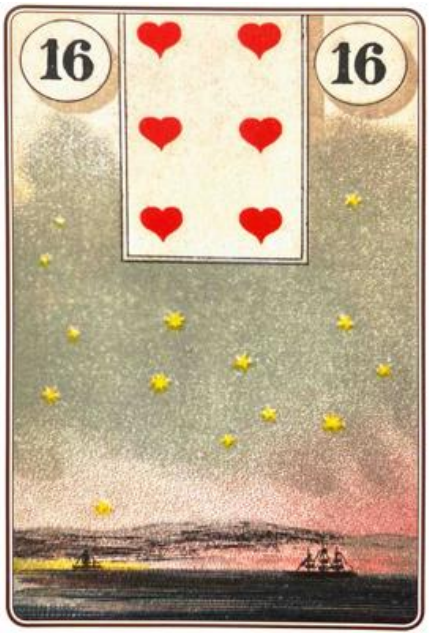


Figure 9. "The Star" from the Lo Scarabeo Lenormand deck. Designed by Lo Scarabeo and published by Llewellyn Publications, 2013, print, Playing card. Photo by author.

Figure 10. "The Star" from the Rider-Waite Tarot deck. Designed by Pamela Colman Smith under commission of Arthur Edward Waite. Published by U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1971, print, Playing card. Photo by author.

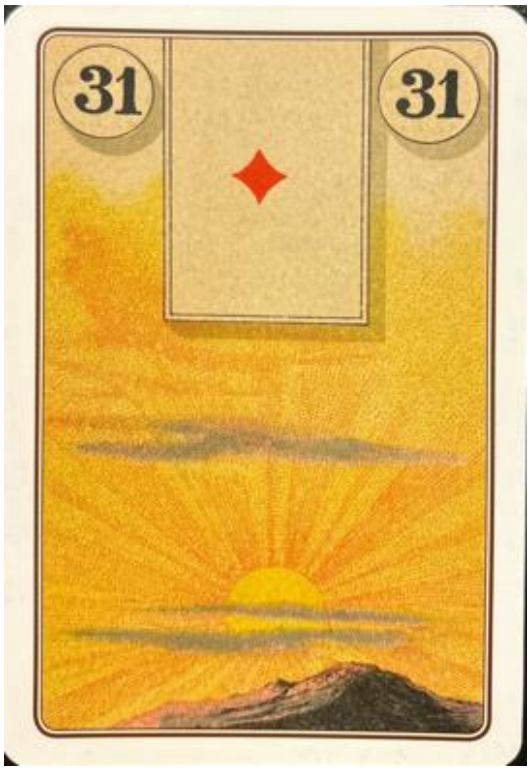


Figure 11. “The Sun” from the Lo Scarabeo Lenormand deck. Designed by Lo Scarabeo and published by Llewellyn Publications, 2013, print, Playing card. Photo by author.

Figure 12. “The Sun” from the Rider-Waite Tarot deck. Designed by Pamela Colman Smith under commission of Arthur Edward Waite. Published by U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1971, print, Playing card. Photo by author.

Figure 13. “The Moon” from the Lo Scarabeo Lenormand deck. Designed by Lo Scarabeo and published by Llewellyn Publications, 2013, print, Playing card. Photo by author.

Figure 14. “The Moon” from the Rider-Waite Tarot deck. Designed by Pamela Colman Smith under commission of Arthur Edward Waite. Published by U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1971, print, Playing card. Photo by author.

The different level of complexity in these two types of card images also mirrors the differences in their interpretation methods. Lenormand readings are straightforward and direct, based on the visible images, and do not incorporate reversals. For instance, “The Star” in Lenormand readings typically symbolizes clearing away

gloom and can directly represent a star, suggesting career success and inspiration, making it a positive card.[58] Similarly, "The Sun" represents the celestial sun itself, while symbolizing outward self, light, and energy, and is considered extremely positive.[59] "The Moon" is slightly more sophisticated, representing emotions, reputation, the inner self, and intuition, and embodies feminine energy.[60] While typically positive, its interpretation is easily susceptible to the influence of neighboring cards, especially if they carry negative energy; however, "The Sun" does not receive the negative effects of the cards around it, but rather mitigates them. Additionally, Lenormand readings are notably straightforward. When more than one card is drawn, the method of interpretation involves stringing together the meanings of the cards, much like forming sentences, to create a comprehensive message. For instance, if "The Moon" and "The Star" are drawn together, the interpretation might be "success that brings fame," while a combination of "The Rider" and "The Star" could be read as "an inspiring message." When addressing yes-or-no questions, the outcome can be determined directly by the energy of the card drawn. For example, drawing "The Scythe" or "The Coffin" could suggest that the matter in question is unlikely to succeed.[61] If analyzed further, "The Scythe" might also imply that a quick resolution is forthcoming, unlike "The Coffin," which doesn't suggest immediacy but does carry connotations of emotional or spiritual distress.[62] However, if detailed analysis is not required and a simple yes-or-no answer is sought, then looking at the images alone, even those with little knowledge can use this universal language to roughly discern outcomes as favorable or unfavorable.

Reading the Tarot, on the other hand, is considerably more complicated. Although single-card readings are possible, even in such cases, the interpretation often connects with other cards from the Major or Minor Arcana. This interconnectedness adds depth and nuance to the hermeneutic process. For example, "The Moon" in Tarot is associated with the sign of Pisces, the element of water, and the Hebrew letter *Qoph*, meaning "the back of the head," signifying the power of the subconscious mind.[63] It is numbered eighteen, representing a higher lever of power from the number eight card "The Strength"; in numerology, eighteen also reduces to nine, thus connecting "The Moon" to "The Hermit", which is numbered nine.[64] The moon in the picture transitions from the crescent, gradually expanding towards the full moon, increasing in size, the center features a woman's face, what Waite refers to as "the side of mercy."[65] The Moon is surrounded by thirty-two rays, symbolizing the Kabbalistic number of the ten "sephiroth" combined with the twenty-two paths of the Tree of Life; the two towers are similar to those in "The Death," representing death and the unknown, symbolizing areas that are difficult to navigate and fathom.[66] A dog and a wolf signify the tamed and untamed bestiality within the human body, respectively.[67]

Moreover, Tarot can have different meanings based on the orientation of the cards. When a card is reversed, it may signify a weakening of its upright meaning, a regression to the previous card, or the unfulfilled meaning of that card.[68] The decision of when to employ a particular interpretation method or a combination of methods thereof relies largely on the practical experience and intuitive insights of the cartomancer — knowledge that cannot be fully acquired from textbooks. Thus, whereas the Tarot model resembles the Catholic tradition, where the clergy act as mediators in interpreting religious texts and doctrines for the community, Lenormand is similar to the Protestant approach where all believers are recognized as possessing direct connections with God without the need for an intermediary and are encouraged to study and interpret the Bible on their own. Through this juxtaposition with religious sects, it can be seen that Tarot and Lenormand epitomize two different ideological systems. The former emphasizes the correlation between the magic and its intellectual origin, creating a complex and esoteric body of knowledge that enhances the legitimacy and authority of the institution behind it; the latter though labeled with mystical connotations, fundamentally remains rooted in mundane everyday life. Although Lenormand's more democratized interpretive framework seems to diminish its magical aura, making the experience of divination appear less unique and mystical, it is precisely this "disenchantment" that emancipates it from former traditional context, offering a gateway for mass engagement.

Many magical practices may trace their origins to pagan rituals or serve as forms of resistance by the less powerful against dominant powers, or, like the Tarot, have been reappropriated by elite organizations and endowed with a complex body of knowledge. However, the Lenormand deck is in no means like this — it is a secular tool imbued with new functions, evolved from material culture, carrying historical tags of mainstream privileged classes and leisure culture. With its lasting design, the Lenormand stands as a testament to history and technological transitions, acting as a universal language model that resonates across cultures. The dichotomy between Tarot and Lenormand is a microcosm of broader occult practices throughout history, which often reflect the culture and social structure of their times.

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[4] Rider-Waite Tarot also has the name of Waite-Smith Tarot to honor the illustrator Pamela Colman Smith; Tarot of Marseilles originates in France and is most prevalent there. Thoth Tarot or *The Book of Thoth* is the system based on Egyptian culture. Alfred Douglas, (1991). *The Tarot: The Origins, Meaning and Uses of the Cards*. London: Arkana, 23, 119.

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[36] Gordon, "Playing Cards," 484.

[37] Dummett, "The History of Card Games," 128.

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[68] Summary based on my personal experience as a practitioner with clients and the collective insights of my colleagues.