

The Game of Tarots

by

Antoine Court de Gébelin

Where we consider its origin, explain its allegories, & demonstrate it is the source of modern playing cards, etc., etc.

1.

The surprising discovery of an Egyptian Book.

If we intended to announce that there exists today a Work of the ancient Egyptians, one of their Books which escaped the flames which devoured their superb Libraries, & which contained their purest doctrine on interesting subjects, everyone would be, no doubt, compelled to know such a precious and extraordinary Book. If we added that this Book was widely spread in a large part of Europe, that for several centuries it has been in the hands of everyone, the surprise would certainly be heightened: would the surprise not be compounded if we declare that it was never suspected to be Egyptian, that we possessed it unknowingly, that no one had ever sought to decipher one page: that this fruit of exquisite wisdom is looked upon as an insignificant pile of extravagant figures? Would it not be thought that the speaker wanted to amuse himself, and play on the credulity of his Listeners?

2.

Such an Egyptian Book exists.

It is unbelievably true: this Egyptian Book, the last remains of their superb Libraries, exists in our time: it is even so commonplace that no Scholar has bothered to notice it: no one before us has ever suspected its prominent origin. This Book is composed of LXXVII pages or compositions, even LXXVIII, divided in V classes, each of which representing objects as disparate as they are amusing and instructive: in a word, this Book is the GAME OF TAROTS, admittedly unknown in Paris, but very well known in Italy, Germany and even Provence, & by the bizarre figures which each one of its cards offers, as well as their variety.

Though the Countries where they are in use are many, we are no more enlightened of the meaning of their bizarre figures: & so ancient is its origin that it has been lost in the obscurity of time. We do not know where nor when it was invented nor the motivation that might have assembled so many extraordinary figures, so little can be made sense of it that it offers in its entirety only an enigma which no one has ever attempted to solve.

This Game has been so overlooked that it never was evaluated by the experts investigating the origins of Cards: they only spoke of French Cards, which are in use in Paris, whose origin is scarcely ancient: & having proven them a modern invention, they believed they had exhausted the matter. Admittedly, we continually confuse common knowledge of a thing in a Country with its original invention: as we demonstrated in the case of the compass [see de Gébelin, *Monde Primitif*, Vol. 8, pg. 54]: the Greeks and the Romans have thoroughly confused these, depriving us of the multitude of possible interesting origins.

But the form, the disposition and arrangement of this Game & its figures are so magnificently allegorical, & these allegories are so congruent with the ancient Egyptians' civil, philosophical and religious doctrines, that we can only identify this work as that of these Wise People: only they could have been its inventor, rivaled only by the Indians who invented the Game of Chess.

Divisions.

We will show the allegories represented in the various Cards of this Game.

The numerical formulas by which it was composed.

How it was transmitted down to us.

Its relation with a Chinese Monument.

How it spawned the Spanish Cards.

And the relationship of the latter to French Cards.

This Essay will be followed by a Dissertation in which it is established how this Game was applied to the art of Divination: it is the work of a General Officer, Governor of a Province, who has honored us with his kindness, & who found in this Game, with a very ingenious insight, the Egyptian principles used in the art of divination with Cards, principles distinguishing the first Egyptian Bands, misnamed Bohemians [Gypsies], who settled across Europe, & of which a few vestiges subsist in our Game of Cards but which lend themselves to it [*i.e.*, to divination] infinitely less, which is apparent in their uniformity & the small number of figures.

The Egyptian Game, on the other hand, is well suited for this purpose as it somehow represents the entire Universe, & the various Estates of the life of Man. Such was this unique & profound People, that they imprinted on the least of their works the seal of immortality, & that others seem hardly able to walk in their footsteps.

ARTICLE I.

ALLEGORIES presented by the Cards of the Game of TAROTS.

If this Game which always remained obscure to all those who knew of it, was suddenly unveiled before our eyes, it was not the effect of some deep meditation, nor of the desire to make sense out of chaos: we did not spend an instant thinking about it. Invited as a guest a few years ago to meet with a Lady of our Acquaintance, Madame la C. d'H., who had arrived from Germany or Switzerland, we found her occupied playing this Game with some other People. We played a Game which you surely do not know. . . Is that possible; what is it?. . . The Game of Tarots. . . I had occasion to see it when I was extremely young, but I did not have any knowledge of it. . . It is a rhapsody of the most bizarre figures, and the most extravagant: here is one, for example, carefully picked as the most highly charged of the figures, & having nothing

to do with its name, it is the World: I there cast my eyes, & at once recognized the Allegory: everyone left their Game & came to see this marvelous Card in which I perceived what they never saw: each one showed me another card: in one quarter of an hour the cards were examined, explained and declared Egyptian: & since this was not a trick of our imaginations, but the result of a deliberate & sensible harmony between this game and all that we know of Egyptian ideas, we promised ourselves to share the knowledge some day with the Public; persuaded that it would take pleasure in a discovery & gift of this nature, an Egyptian Book that had escaped barbarity, the ravages of Time, fires accidental & deliberate, and ignorance which is more disastrous yet.

A necessary consequence of the frivolous & light form of this Book, was that it enabled it to triumph over the ages & to pass down to us with rare fidelity: the ignorance which until now even we have been in concerning what it represented, was a happy safe conduit that allowed it to cross the Centuries quietly without any thought of making it disappear.

It is time to recover the Allegories that it had been intended to preserve, & to show that to the wisest of all Peoples, everything including Games was founded on Allegory, & that these wise Savants converted into a recreation the most useful knowledge, & made of it just a Game.

We mentioned the Game of Tarots is composed of LXXVII Cards, even of a LXXVIII^e, divided into Atouts and IV suits. So that our Readers can follow us, we made engravings of the Atouts; & the Ace of each suit, which we call after the Spaniards, Spadille, Baste, and Ponte [the 4th suit is omitted].

ATOUTS.

The ATOUTS number XXII, and in general represent the temporal & spiritual Leaders of Society, the Physical Heads of Agriculture, the Cardinal Virtues, Marriage, Death & resurrection or creation; games of fortune, the Sage and the Fool, Time which consumes all, etc. One understands thus in advance that all these Cards are as many allegorical Pictures relating to the whole of life, & susceptible to an infinitude of combinations. We will examine them one by one, & try to decipher the particular allegory or enigma each one contains.

Nº. O, Zero.
THE FOOL.



One cannot fail to recognize the Fool in this Card, by the marrotte,¹ & by his hoqueton² furnished with shells & bells: he goes very quickly like the fool that he is, bearing behind him his small pack, & thinking to escape thereby from a Tiger which bites him on the haunch: as for the pack, it is the emblem of his faults that he wishes not to see; & this Tiger symbolizes his regrets which follow him galloping, and which jump in to bite his hindquarters.

¹ Scepter with jester face carved, albeit missing in the diagram.—Ed.

² Jacket.—Ed.

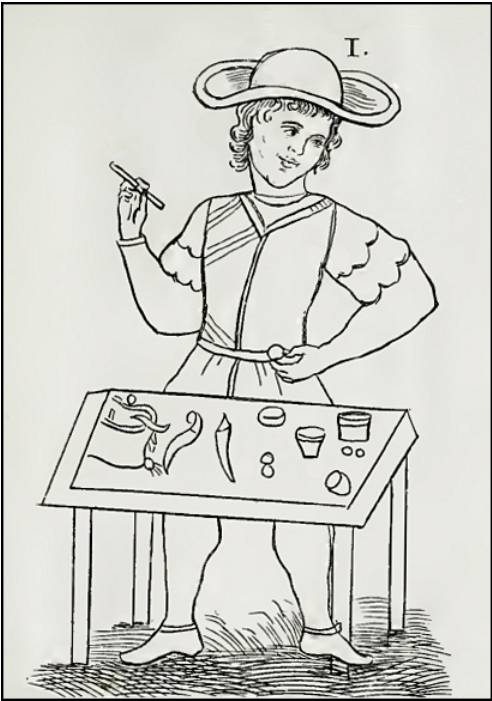
The beautiful idea that Horace framed so well in gold, was not from him, it had not escaped the Egyptians: it was a common idea in a common place; but always found to be true in Nature, & presented with all the graces of which he was capable, this pleasant & wise Poet seemed to have drawn it from his own deep judgement.³

³ He doesn't give the reference from Horace to which he refers: it might be his *Satires*; however, I'm not at all familiar with Horace so I can't say for sure. It obviously refers to something Horace wrote on folly.—Ed.

As for this Atout, we number it ZERO, though we place it in the game after XXI because he does not count by himself, & only possesses the value that it gives the others, precisely like our zero: showing thus that nothing exists without its folly.⁴

⁴ Like so many after him, we see de Gébelin struggling with knowing exactly where to place the Fool in the series. He describes the Fool first and numbers him zero; however, he goes on to say that in the game of Tarots his position is last. Furthermore, as we'll see next, he describes the Bateleur as the card which begins the series. From this, and from statements he makes elsewhere, it's my belief he probably understood the Fool to be at the opposite end from the Bateleur, that is, last.—Ed.

Nº. I.
The Player at Cups, or Bateleur.



We start with nº. 1 and proceed to 21, because the current practice is to start with the least number and continue on to the highest: it appears however the Egyptians began to count with the higher, continuing down to the lower. Similarly, they sang the Octave going down, & not going up like us. In the Essay which follows this one, the writer follows the practice of the Egyptians, & gives the best account of it. There are thus here two approaches: ours which is the more practical when one wants to consider these Cards individually: & the other, useful in better conceiving the set as a whole & their relationships.

The first of all Atouts while counting up, or the last while counting down, is a PLAYER AT CUPS;⁵ this is evident by his table covered with dice, goblets, knives, balls, etc., by his staff of Jacob or rod of the Magi, by the ball which he holds between two fingers & which he will cause to disappear.

⁵ Also known as a Shell Game or Thimblrig; one who operates such a game.—Ed.

The name BÂTELEUR is the title used by Cardmakers: it is the common name for persons of this type: is it necessary to say that the name derives from *baste*, a staff?

At the head of all the Estates, it indicates that all of life is only a dream or fleeting experience: that it is like a perpetual game of chance or a choice of a thousand circumstances we have no control over, & which inevitably exerts a great influence on any general course of events.

But between the Fool & the Bateleur, is Man not in a fine spot?

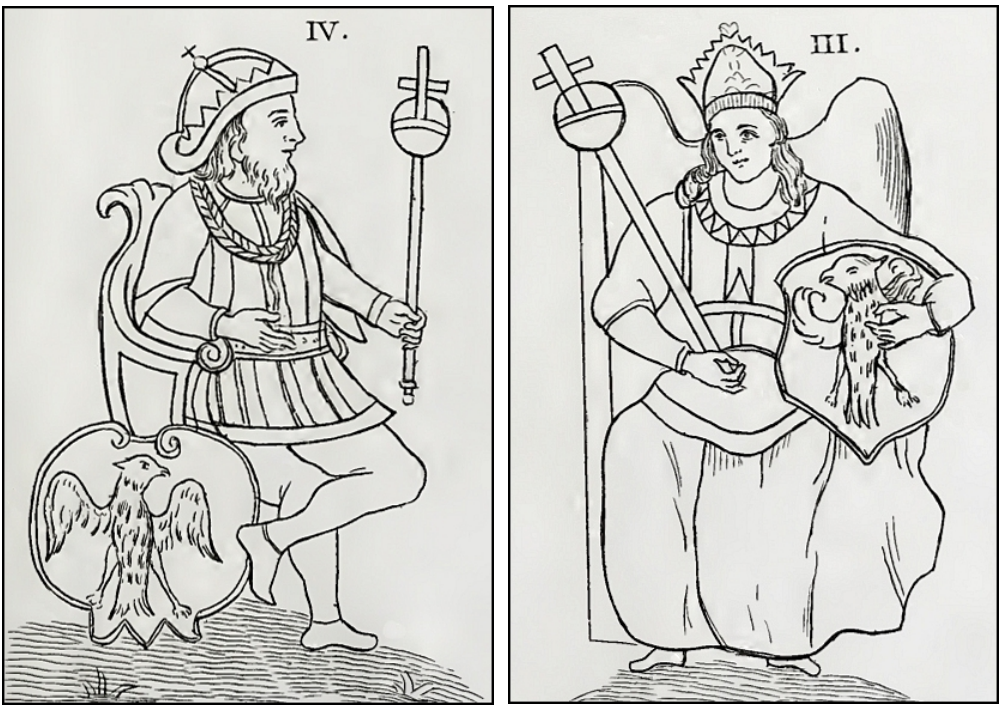
PLATE IV.⁶
Nº. II. III. IV. V.
LEADERS OF SOCIETY.

Numbers II & III represent two women: Numbers IV & V, their husbands: they are the temporal & spiritual Leaders of Society.

⁶ Numbers III and IV actually appear in Plate III; however, de Gébelin groups them together with the High Priest and High Priestess which appear on Plate IV. In the text, Plate VII is incorrectly labeled Plate VIII, which I’ve corrected. I’ve taken certain liberties to organize the headings and make it more clear which pictures are grouped together and to which plates they belong: the original is disorganized and confusing in this regard. In *Monde Primitif*, the plates all appear at the end of the book. The tarot plates start with Plate III. There are two plates before this which belong to previous articles in the same volume.—Ed.

KING AND QUEEN.

Nº. IV. represents the KING, & III. the QUEEN. They have both for symbols the Eagle on a Shield, & a scepter surmounted by a globe which is crowned with a cross called a TAU, the sign par excellence.



The King is seen in profile, the Queen facing. They are both seated on Thrones. The Queen wears a long dress, the back of her Throne is high: the King is in a chair shaped like a gondola or shell, his legs crossed. His Crown is in a half circle surmounted by a pearl with a cross. That of the Queen terminates in a point. The King carries an Order of Chivalry.⁷

⁷ Apparently ancient Egypt had Chivalric Orders.—Ed.

Nº. V. represents the CHIEF Hierophant or the HIGH PRIEST: Nº. II. is the HIGH PRIESTESS or his wife: it is known that among Egyptians, the Heads of the Priesthood were married. If these Cards were a modern invention, there would be no High Priestess, much less still under the name of PAPESSE, as the German Cardmakers have ridiculously named it.



The High Priestess sits in an armchair: she wears long robes with a kind of veil behind her head which comes down and crosses over her stomach: she has a double crown with two horns like that of Isis: she holds a Book open on her knees; two scarves garnished with crosses cross over her chest & form an X.



The High Priest wears long robes with a large coat attached with a clasp: on his head is the triple Tiara: with one hand, he leans on a Scepter having a triple cross: & with the other hand he gives two extended fingers in benediction to the two persons we see at his knees.

The Italian or German Cardmakers, who gained knowledge about this game, made these two characters into what the Ancients called the FATHER & the MOTHER, as we would say ABBOT & ABBESS: Oriental words meaning the same thing [*i.e.*, Father & Mother]; they interpreted them to be, in my estimation, a Pope & a Popess.

As for the Scepter with the triple cross, it is an absolutely Egyptian artifact: one sees it on the Table of Isis, under Letter TT;⁸ an invaluable Memorial which we have already caused to be engraved in all its details in order to present it some day to the Public. It is related to the triple Phallus paraded in the famous Feast of Pamyliæ where one rejoices to have found Osiris, & where it was the symbol of the regeneration of the Plants & all of Nature.

⁸ TT refers to identifying letters used by Lorenzo Pignoria in his *Mensa Isiaca*. In Kircher's version it's a small figure labeled "e" in the lower panel. The figure holds a staff which has three crossbars in its middle section.—Ed.

Nº. VII.

OSIRIS TRIUMPHANT.



OSIRIS advances; he comes in the form of a triumphant King, his Scepter in hand, his Crown on his head: he is in his Warrior's chariot, drawn by two white horses. No one is unaware that Osiris was the great Divinity of the Egyptians, the same as that of all the Sabæan people, or the Sun, the physical symbol of the supreme invisible Divinity, manifested in this masterpiece of Nature. He was lost during the winter: he reappeared in Springtime with a new radiance, having triumphed over all against whom he made war.



A young man & a young woman pledge themselves their mutual faithfulness: a priest blesses them, Love pierces them with its arrow. Cardmakers call this Picture, the LOVER. They seem also to have added themselves the figure of Love with his bow & arrows, to make this Picture more meaningful to them.

One sees in the *Antiquities* of BOISSARD,⁹ a Monument of the same nature, representing the marital union; but it is made up of only of three figures. The Male Lover and the Female Lover who exchange their vows: the Love between them serves as the Witness and the Priest. This image is entitled FIDEI SIMULACRUM, Picture of Marital Faith: the characters in it are designated by these beautiful names, TRUTH, HONOR & LOVE. It is unnecessary to say that truth designates the woman here rather than the man, not only because this word is feminine, but because *constant Fidelity* is more intrinsic in the woman. This precious Artifact was raised by one named T. FUNDANIUS EROMENUS or the likable, to his very dear Wife *Poppée Demetrie*, & to their cherished daughter *Manilia Eromenis*.

⁹ Vol. 3, Plate 36.—de Gébelin

PLATE V.

Nº. VIII. XI. XII. XIII.

The four Cardinal VIRTUES.

The Figures which we have joined together in this Plate, relate to the four Cardinal Virtues.



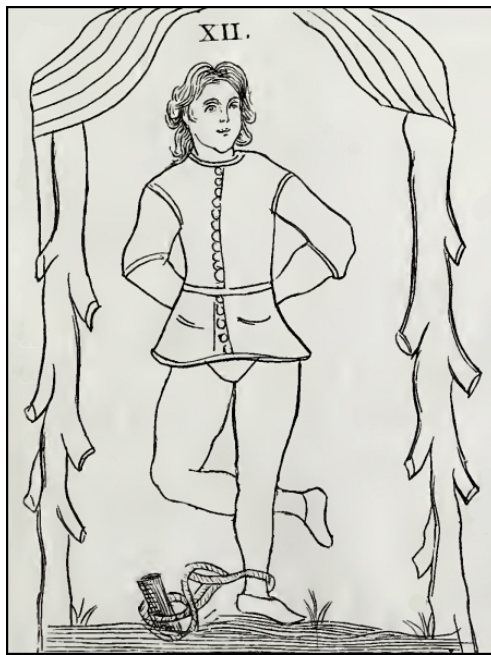
Nº. XI. This one represents FORTITUDE. It is a woman who has tamed a lion, & and who opens its mouth with the same ease that she would open that of her little spaniel; she has on her head the cap of a Shepherdess.



Nº. XIII. TEMPERANCE. It is a winged woman who pours the water of one vase into another, to temper the liquor which it contains.



Nº. VIII. JUSTICE. It is a Queen, it is ASTRAEA sitting on her Throne, holding with one hand a dagger; with the other, a balance.



Nº. XII. Prudence is numbered among the four Cardinal Virtues: could the Egyptians have forgotten it in this portrait of Human Life? However, one does not find it in this Game. One sees in its place under Nº. XII. between Fortitude and Temperance, a man hanging by the feet: but what is this hanged man doing here? It is the work of an unfortunate and presumptuous Cardmaker who, not understanding the beauty of the allegory represented in this picture, took it upon himself to correct it, & thereby has entirely disfigured it.

Prudence could only be represented in a manner sensible to the eyes by a man standing upright, who having one foot set, advances the other, & holds it suspended while looking for a place where he can safely put it. The title of this card was therefore the man with a hanging foot, or the *suspended foot*: the Cardmaker not knowing what this signified, made of it a man hung by the feet.

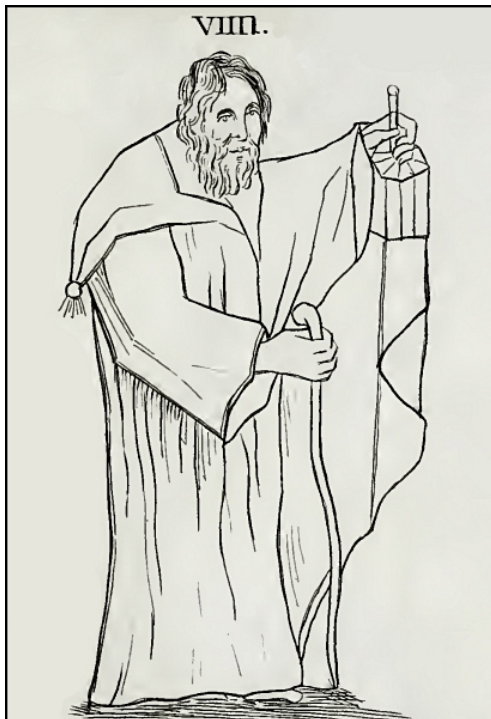
Then we wondered, why a hanged man in this Game? & one doesn’t find it difficult to answer, it is a fit punishment for the Inventor of the Game, to have represented a female Pope.

But placed between Fortitude, Temperance & Justice, who does not see that it is Prudence that was intended & which was originally represented?

PLATE VI.

We have united in this plate all the pictures relating to the light: thus after the dim lantern of the Hermit, we will go on to review the Sun, the Moon & brilliant Sirius or glittering Dog Star, all figures in this game, with distinct symbols.

Nº. XIII. or IX.
The SAGE or the Seeker of Truth & Justice.

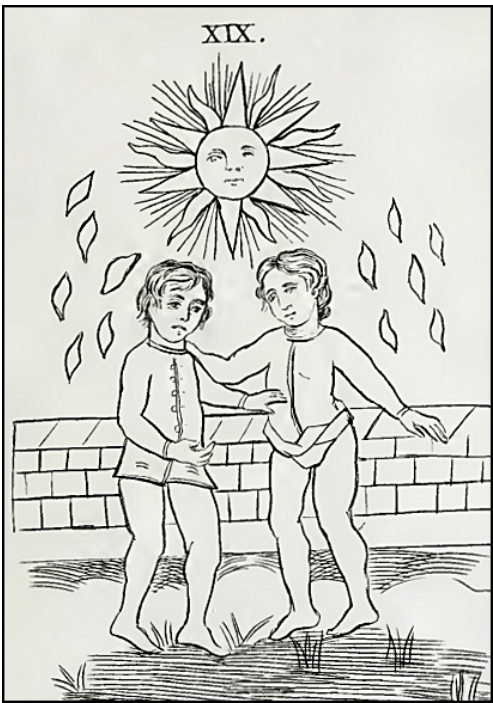


Nº. IX. represents a venerable Philosopher in a long coat, a hood on his shoulders: he walks bent over his walking stick, & bearing a lantern in his left hand. It is the Sage who seeks Justice and Virtue.

One thus imagines, based on this Egyptian painting, the Fable of Diogenes who with lantern in hand searches for an [honest] man in the middle of the day. Inspiring words, especially Epigrams, are of all ages: & Diogenes was the man who put this image into action.

Cardmakers made of this Sage a Hermit. It is rather well conceived: the Philosophers live in voluntary retreat, where they are not subject to the shallowness of their time. Heraclide was thought to be insane by his beloved Countrymen: in the East, moreover, to deliver oneself to the speculative Sciences or to become a Hermit, were one & the same thing. The Egyptian Hermits were not lacking in that respect to those of India, & the Talapoins of Siam [*i.e.*, Buddhist monks]: they all were or are like as many Druids.

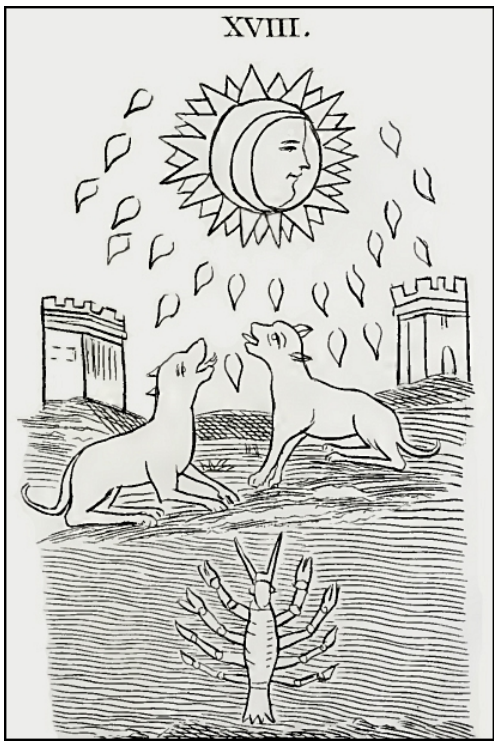
Nº. XIX.
THE SUN.



The SUN is represented here like the biological Father of Man & all of Nature: it illuminates the Societies of men, it regulates their Cities: from its rays are distilled tears of gold & of pearls: such are the favorable influences of this star.

The Game of Tarots is here in perfect conformity with the doctrines of the Egyptians, as we shall examine in more detail in the next essay.

Nº. XVIII.
THE MOON.



Thus the MOON which follows the Sun is also accompanied by tears of gold & of pearls, to mark her equal contribution to the positive influence on the earth.

PAUSANIAS teaches us in his description of Phocide,¹⁰ that according to the Egyptians, it was the TEARS OF ISIS which swelled the waters of the Nile each year & which thus rendered fertile the fields of Egypt. The accounts of that Country also speak of a DROP or tear, which falls from the Moon when the time has come for the waters of the Nile to swell.

¹⁰ *Description of Greece*, Book 10.—Ed.

At the bottom of this picture, we sees a Crayfish or Cancer, either to mark the retrograde motion of the Moon, or to indicate that it is the moment when the Sun & the Moon leave the sign of Cancer: at which time the flood caused by their tears arrives, and the rising of the Dog Star [or heat wave] that one sees in the following picture.

It may even be that the two designs are united: is it not typical to attribute meaning to a series of events occurring together that might otherwise be very perplexing to interpret?

The middle of the picture is occupied by two Towers, one on each side to indicate the two famous pillars of Hercules,¹¹ beyond which these two grand luminaries never pass.

¹¹ Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.—Ed.

Between the two columns are two Dogs which seem to bark at the Moon & to guard it: perfectly Egyptian ideas. These People, unique for their allegories, compared the Tropics to two Palaces each guarded by a dog, which, like faithful Gatekeepers, held these Stars in the middle region of the Skies without allowing them to slip towards one or the other Pole.

These are not only the views of your Commentators. CLEMENT, himself Egyptian, who was of Alexandria, & who consequently knew what he was talking about, assures us in his *Tapestries*¹² that the Egyptians represented the TROPICS under the figure of two DOGS, which, like Gatekeepers or faithful Guards, kept the Sun and the Moon from leaving their designated paths, & drifting to the Poles.

¹² Or *Stromates*, Book 5.—de Gébelin

Nº. XVII.
THE DOG STAR.



Here we have before our eyes a Picture no less allegorical, & absolutely Egyptian; it is entitled the STAR. We can see there, indeed, a brilliant Star, about which are seven other smaller ones. The bottom of the Picture is occupied by a woman leaning on one knee and holding two upside-down vases, from which run two Rivers. Next to the woman is a butterfly on a flower.

It is purely Egyptian.

This preeminent Star is the DOG STAR or SIRIUS: the Star which rises when the Sun leaves the sign of Cancer, which ends the preceding Picture, & is immediately followed by this Star.

The seven Stars that are around it, & which seem to form its court, are the Planets: it is to a certain extent their Queen, since it marks in this moment the beginning of the year; they seem to be coming to receive her orders to regulate their courses on her.

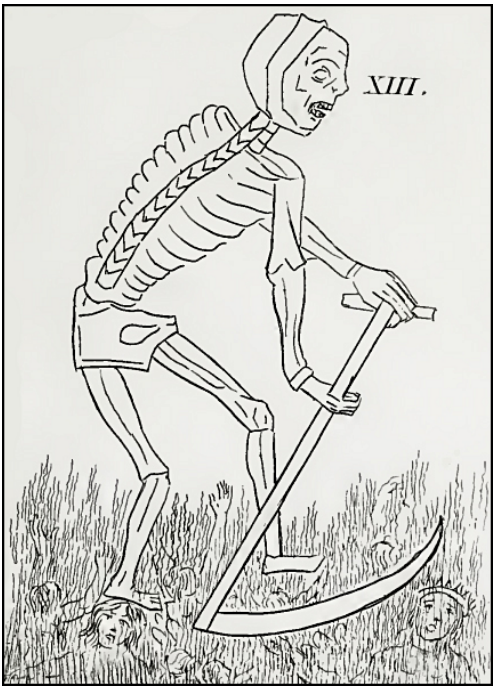
The Lady which is below, & very carefully in this moment dispersing the waters from her jars, is the Queen of Heaven, ISIS, to whose benevolence was attributed the flooding of the Nile, which commences at the rising of the Dog Star; thus this rising announced the inundation. It was for this reason the Dog Star was consecrated to Isis, and that it was her preeminent symbol.

And as the year began simultaneously with the rising of this Star, one of its names is SOTH-IS, the opener of the year; & it is under this name that it was consecrated to Isis.

Lastly, the Flower and the BUTTERFLY which it supports, represent symbols of regeneration & resurrection: they signify at the same time the blessing of the graces of Isis, and the rising of the Dog Star, when the Lands of Egypt, which were completely bare, cover themselves with the new harvest.

PLATE VII.
Nº. X. XIII. XV. XVI.

Nº. XIII.
DEATH.



The nº. XIII. represents Death: it mows down the Humans, the Kings & the Queens, the Great and the Small; nothing can escape its deadly scythe.

It is not surprising that it was given this number; the number thirteen was always looked upon as unlucky. It must have happened that long ago some great misfortune occurred on such a day, & that the memory of it affected all the ancient Nations. Can it be that by a persistence of this memory that the thirteen Hebrew tribes were never counted other than as twelve?

Let us add that it is not surprising either that the Egyptians chose to insert Death into a game—an amusement—which should only call up pleasant thoughts: but this Game was a game of war, Death therefore entered into it: in this way the game of chess ends by checkmate, or to put it another way by *Sha mat*,¹³ that is, the death of the King. Furthermore, we have occasion to recall in the *Calendar*,¹⁴ in their feasts, this wise & considered People made a skeleton appear under the name of *Maneros*, no doubt in order to exhort the guests not to hasten their own deaths through gluttony. Each one has his own tastes, & one must never argue matters of taste.¹⁵

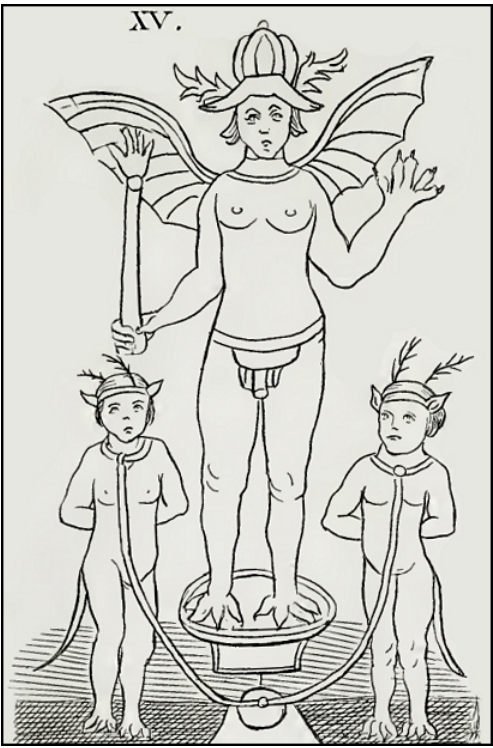
¹³ Arabic, “The King has died” or “the King is helpless.”—Ed.

¹⁴ See de Gébelin, *Monde Primitif*, Vol. 4, “A History of the Calendar.”—Ed.

¹⁵ This appears to refer to the Egyptian custom of introducing a skeleton at the feast.—Ed.

Nº. XV.

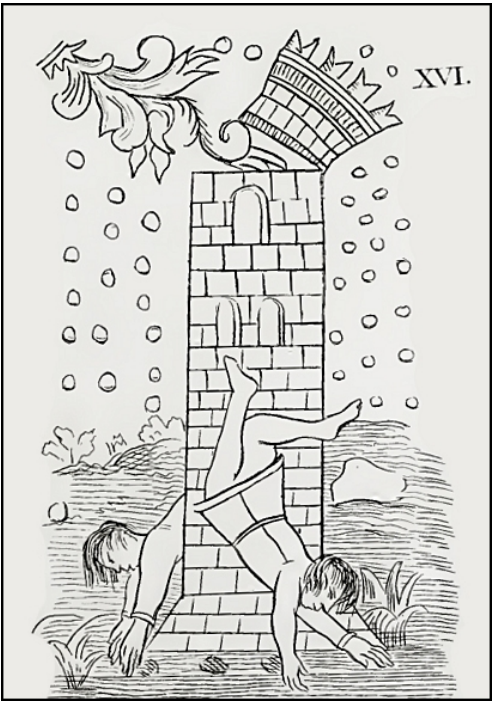
TYPHON.



The nº. XV. represents a famous Egyptian character, TYPHON, brother of Osiris & Isis, the evil Principle, the great Demon of Hell: he has the wings of a bat, the feet & hands of a harpy; on his head, the vile horns of a stag: he is depicted as revolting and as devilish as possible. At his feet are two little Devils with long ears, with large tails, their hands tied behind their backs: they themselves are bound by a cord which passes over their necks, & which is affixed to the pedestal of Typhon: he does not let go of those who are his own; he is good to those who belong to him.

Nº. XVI.

The House of God, or Palace of Plutus.



This time, we have a lesson against avarice. This picture represents a Tower, which is called the HOUSE OF GOD, that is, the House preminent; it is a Tower filled with gold, it is the Palace of Plutus:¹⁶ it collapses in ruins, & its Adorers fall crushed under its wreckage.

¹⁶ Greek god of wealth.—Ed.

In this group of symbols, one can’t ignore the History of the Egyptian Prince about whom HERODOTUS speaks, & which he calls RHAMPSINITUS, who, having built a large Tower of stone to contain his treasures, & of which he alone had the key, noticed however that they were disappearing before his eyes, without anyone passing in any manner through the only door which existed in this building. To discover such skilful thieves, this Prince directed the setting of traps around the vases which held his riches. The thieves were the two sons of the Architect who served Rhampsinitus: he [the Architect] had rigged a stone in such a manner, that it was possible to remove & replace it at will without it being noticed. He taught this secret to his sons who made marvelous use of it as we can see. They robbed the Prince, & then threw themselves to the bottom of the Tower [to make their escape]: thus they are represented here.¹⁷ It is indeed a most beautiful part of the *Histories*,¹⁸ one will find in Herodotus the remainder of this imaginative tale: how one of the two brothers was caught in the nets [the trap]: how he urged his brother to cut off his head [so he could not be identified]: how their mother demanded that her son bring back the body of his brother: how he went with wineskins loaded on an ass to intoxicate the Guards of the body & of the Palace: how, after they [the Guards] emptied his wineskins—despite his artificial tears—& had fallen asleep,¹⁹ he shaved off the right side of all their beards, & removed the body of his brother: how the King extremely astonished, urged his daughter to compel each of her lovers to reveal to her the cleverest trick which they had ever done:²⁰ how this devious youth went near the beautiful one, told her all that he had done: how the beautiful one having wanted to detain him, had seized only one false arm:²¹ how, to complete this great adventure, & to lead it to a happy end, this King promised in marriage this same daughter to the clever young man who had played him so well, as the person worthiest of her; which was carried out to the great satisfaction of all.

¹⁷ This isn’t part of the original story but appears to be an embellishment added by de Gébelin.—Ed.

¹⁸ Herodotus, *The Histories*.—Ed.

¹⁹ In the story, the surviving brother arrived at the palace and pretended to accidentally untie some of the wineskins. The wine was rushing out and he became extremely distressed and wailed because he didn’t know which skins to turn to first. This was all for show however. The guards, seeing what was happening rushed over with vessels to salvage as much of the wine as possible, which they partook of despite the young man’s (pretended) tears, until they passed out—which was his plan all along.—Ed.

²⁰ The King, when he learned the body had been stolen, caused his daughter to prostitute herself. But before transacting her business she would make each one tell her the most cunning thing they had ever done.—Ed.

²¹ He had previously cut off a dead man’s arm and secreted it under his coat so that when she grabbed it and tried to detain him he could get away.—Ed.

I do not know if Herodotus took this fable as real; but a People [the Egyptians] able to invent similar Romances or Milesian Fables,²² could very easily invent any game.

²² A Milesian Fable is genre of fictional story prominent in ancient Greek and Roman literature. Herodotus was a Greek historian; the fable of Rhampsinitus and the Thief was recounted in his *Histories*, but is supposedly of Egyptian origin.—Ed.

This Writer [Herodotus] brings back another fact which proves what we said in the *History of the Calendar*, that statues of Giants that appear in various Festivals, almost always designate the seasons. It says that Rhampsinitus, the same Prince of which we came to speak, caused to be raised in the North & the South of the Temple of Vulcan, two statues of twenty-five cubits, one titled Summer and the other Winter: they adored the one [Summer], he added; & sacrificed, on the contrary, to the other [Winter]: it is therefore as the Savages, who recognize the good Principle & honor it, but who sacrifice only to the bad.

Nº. X.

The Wheel of Fortune.



The last number of this Plate is the Wheel of Fortune. Here human caricatures, in the form of Monkeys, of Dogs, of Rabbits, etc. rise in their turn on the wheel to which they are attached: it is said that it is a satire on fortune, & on those which it elevates quickly, & lets fall down with the same rapidity.

PLATE VIII.

Nº. XX. XXI.

Nº. XX.

Picture badly named the LAST JUDGEMENT.



This Picture represents an Angel sounding a trumpet: we see at once rising from the ground an old man, a woman, a naked child.

The Cardmakers who had lost the importance of these Pictures, & more still their combinations, saw here the last Judgement; & to make it more realistic, they put into it something resembling tombs. Removing these tombs, this Picture also serves to designate the CREATION, manifested in Time; the origin of Time is indicated by nº. XXI.

Nº. XXI.

TIME, badly named the WORLD.



This Picture, which the Cardmakers called the World, because they regarded it as the source of all, represents TIME. One cannot misunderstand this group.

In the center is the Goddess of Time, with her veil which flutters, & which serves her as a belt or *Peplum*, as the Ancients called it. She is in a position of running like Time, & in a circle which represents the revolutions of Time; as well as the egg from which all emerged in Time.

At the four corners of the Picture are the symbols of the four Seasons, which form the revolutions of the year, the same which make up the four heads of the Cherubim. These emblems are,

- The Eagle, the Lion, the Ox, & the Young Man.
- The Eagle represents Spring, when the birds return.
- The Lion, the Summer or heat of the Sun.
- The Ox, the Autumn when one plows & when one sows.
- The Young Man, the Winter, when the community comes together.



Research on the Tarot

by
The Comte de Mellet

FIRST SERIES.

AGE OF GOLD.

Nº. XXI.

The Universe.

The twenty-first, or first Card, depicts the UNIVERSE represented by the Goddess Isis in an oval, or an egg, with the four Seasons in the four corners: the Man or the Angel, the Eagle, the Ox, & the Lion.

Nº. XX.

Judgement.

Twentieth, this one is titled the Judgement: indeed, an Angel sounding a trumpet, & the men coming out of the earth, inspired the Artist, not very well versed in Mythology, to see in this picture an image of the Resurrection; but the Ancients looked upon the men as children of the Earth;¹ & Thoth wanted to express the CREATION OF MAN with a painting of Osiris, a generating God, with the megaphone or WORD which commands matter, & by TONGUES OF FIRE which escape from the cloud,² the Spirit of God reviving this same matter; finally, by men leaving the ground in order to worship & venerate the Omnipotent: the posture of these men does not suggest the guilty who go to appear before their Judge.

¹ The teeth sown by Cadmus, etc.—de Mellet [*i.e.*, in Greek mythology, dragon’s teeth sown by Cadmus, from which a mythical race known as *Spartoi*, or “sown men,” sprang.]

² Painted even by our sacred Historians.—de Mellet

Nº. XIX.

The Sun.

Nineteenth, the FORMATION OF THE SUN which illuminates the union of man & woman, expressed by a man & a woman who give to each other their hands: this sign became, after that of Gemini, the Androgyne: *Duo in carne una*.³

³ Mark 10:8, “The two shall become one flesh.”—Ed.

Nº. XVIII.

The Moon.

Eighteenth, the FORMATION OF THE MOON & the land animals, expressed by a Wolf & a Dog, signifying the domestic Animals & the wild: this emblem is well chosen, in as much as the Dog & the Wolf are the only ones which howl at the appearance of this star, as though lamenting the passing of the day. This impression makes me think that its Picture once announced very great misfortunes to those who practiced cartomancy, as they did not see that it depicts the line of the

TROPICS, that is, of the departure & the return of the Sun, which leaves the comforting hope of a beautiful day & of a better fortune. However two FORTRESSES which defend a path stained with blood, and a marsh which completes the Picture, inevitably suggest difficulties without number that must be overcome in order to subdue so sinister a presage.

Nº. XVII.
The Star.

Seventeenth, the FORMATION OF THE STARS & the Fishes, represented by the stars & the Water Bearer.

Nº. XVI.
The Tower.

Sixteenth, the HOUSE OF GOD overthrown, or the earthly Paradise from which the man & the woman are being hurried away by the tail of a Comet or a FLAMING SWORD, together with the falling of hail.

Nº. XV.
The Devil.

Fifteenth, the DEVIL or TYPHON, the final Card of the first Series, comes to disturb the innocence of man & to bring an end to the golden age. His tail, his horns & his long ears announce that he is a degraded being: his raised left arm bent at the elbow, forming an N, symbol of created beings, reveals him as having been created; but the torch of Prometheus which he holds with his right hand, serves to complete the letter M, which expresses generation: indeed, the History of Typhon naturally persuades us to this explanation; because it shows that, by depriving Osiris of his virility, Typhon desired to encroach on the rights of the producing Power; he was also the father of evils which were spread over the earth.

The two BEINGS chained at his feet indicate human Nature degraded & subjected, as well as a new & perverse generation, whose hooked nails express cruelty; they lack only the wings (the Spiritual or the Angelic nature), to be very similar to the devil: one of these beings touches with its claw the thigh of Typhon; a symbol which in Mythological Literature was always that of carnal generation:⁴ he touches it with his left claw to signify illegitimacy.

⁴ The births of Bacchus & of Minerva are the Mythological Pictures of two such generations.—de Mellet

Typhon finally is often taken for the Winter, & this Picture concluding the golden age announces the bad weather of the Seasons, which the man driven out of the Paradise will experience thereafter.

SECOND SERIES.
AGE OF SILVER.

Nº. XIV.
Temperance.

Fourteenth, the ANGEL OF TEMPERANCE comes to instruct man, to cause him to avoid the death to which he is lately condemned: it is depicted pouring water into wine, to show him the need for diluting this liquor, or for moderating his emotions.⁵

⁵ Perhaps her manner relates in some way to the culture of the Vine.—de Mellet [*i.e.*, to Viticulture.]

Nº. XIII.
Death.

Thirteenth; this number, always unfortunate, is devoted to DEATH, who is represented mowing crowned heads & ordinary heads.

Nº. XII.
The Hanged Man.

Twelfth, the accidents which afflict human life, represented by a man hanged by the foot; which also wants to say that, in order to avoid them, it is necessary in this world to walk with prudence: *Suspended foot*.⁶

⁶ See de Gébelin's description of the Hanged Man above.—Ed.

Nº. XI.
Strength.

Eleventh, the STRENGTH that is assisted by Prudence, & overcomes the Lion, which was always the symbol of the ground uncultivated & wild.

Nº. X.
The Wheel of Fortune.

Tenth, the WHEEL OF FORTUNE, at the top of which is a crowned Monkey, teaches us that after the fall of man, it was no longer virtue which conferred good standing: the Rabbit that goes up & the man who is suddenly brought down, express the injustices of the fickle Goddess [Lady Fortune]: this wheel at the same time is an emblem of the wheel of Pythagoras,⁷ a way of drawing lots by numbers: this form of Divination is called ARITHMANCY.

⁷ A version of this wheel is featured in A. E. Waite's *A Manual of Cartomancy*, 1909.—Ed.

Nº. IX.

The Hermit.

Ninth, the HERMIT OR THE SAGE, lantern in hand, seeking for Justice on the Earth.

Nº. VIII.

Justice.

Eighth, JUSTICE.

THIRD SERIES.

Age of Iron.

Nº. VII.

The Chariot.

Seventh, the CHARIOT OF WAR in which is an armored King, armed with a javelin, expresses the feuds, the slayings, the battles of the age of bronze, & announces the lawlessness of the age of iron.⁸

⁸ The Chariot appears to be the sole representative of the Bronze Age and also serves as the link between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.—Ed.

Nº. VI.

The Lovers.

Sixth, the MAN depicted VACILLATING between vice & virtue, is not led any more by reason: LOVE or Desire,⁹ his eyes covered, ready to release a dart, will make him lean to the right or to the left, whichever way he is guided by destiny.

⁹ Concupiscence.—de Mellet

Nº. V.

The Hierophant.

Fifth, Jupiter or the Eternal accompanied by his Eagle, lightning in hand, threatens the Earth, & will visit its Kings with his wrath.

Nº. IV.

The Emperor.

Fourth, the KING armed with a mace, which ignorance thereafter made an Imperial Globe:¹⁰ his helmet is furnished behind with saw-like teeth, to make known that nothing can satisfy his insatiable hunger for power.¹¹

¹⁰ Osiris is often represented with a whip in his hand, with an orb & a T: all these things together, have created in the mind of a German Cardmaker an Imperial Globe.—de Mellet [the Emperor's mace typically has a globe at its end.]

¹¹ Or his revenge, if Osiris has become irritated.—de Mellet

Nº. III.

The Empress.

Third, the QUEEN, mace in hand; her crown has the same ornaments as the helmet of the King.

Nº. II.

The High Priestess.

Second, the PRIDE of the Powerful, represented by the Peacock, on which JUNON pointing to the Sky on the right side, & to the Earth of the left, announces a Religion of the earth or Idolatry.

Nº. I.

The Magician.

First, the BATELEUR holding the rod of the Magi, making miracles & deceiving the gullible from among the People.

Nº. O.

The Fool.

It is followed by a single card representing THE FOOL who carries his bag or his errors behind him, while a tiger or his regrets, devouring his haunch, delays his march towards wrongdoing.¹²

¹² This card does not have a rank [*i.e.*, it has no place in any of the previous series]: it completes the sacred Alphabet, & answers to the Tau which expresses completion, perfection: perhaps it was intended to represent in its most basic sense the natural outcome of men's actions.—de Mellet [We started with the Golden Age and have seen man's devolution. The Fool represents the final outcome of man's fallen state.]

These twenty-two primary Cards are not only so many hieroglyphics, which when placed in their natural order recall the History of the earliest times, but they are also as many letters¹³ which when differently combined, can form as many sentences; hence, the name (A-tout¹⁴) is only the literal rendering of their general purpose & characteristics.

¹³ The Hebrew Alphabet is composed of 22 Letters.—de Mellet

¹⁴ *i.e.*, *a tout*, “has all” or “has everything.”—Ed.