Marseille Tarot for Beginners

Learn to read the cards step by step: the Major Arcana, the Minor Arcana and your first reading

Lucien Vauverne

Credits

Marseille Tarot for Beginners

Learn to read the cards step by step: the Major Arcana, the Minor Arcana and your first reading

Lucien Vauverne

Marseille School · Book 1

First edition, 2026.

— Rights —

All rights reserved. The text, the structure of the book, the exercises, the cases and the tables are the original work of the author. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in whole or in part, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Brief quotations for the purposes of review or study are welcome, provided that the book and its author are named.

The cases that appear in the chapters are invented examples. None of them describes a real person, and any resemblance to a particular situation is coincidental.

— Origin of the Images —

The cards in this book come from two antique copies held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF):

- The deck of Jean Dodal, a printer in Lyon, dated between 1701 and 1715. This is the one shown in the card entries and in the layouts.
- A copy by Nicolas Conver, whose activity is placed between 1809 and 1833. It is used only to compare some cards with those of Dodal.

Both works are in the public domain. The reproductions are made from the BnF's digitized holdings.

Two remarks about the objects, so that they do not cause confusion:

- The Two of Coins in the Conver deck bears the inscription "1760." That figure appears on the card, but it is not the printing date, and the book does not use it

to date the copy.

- The reproduced cards carry a small red library stamp. It belongs to the preserved object; it is not a mark added by this edition, nor part of the original drawing. In the black-and-white print edition it will appear as a gray smudge.

— Before You Begin —

This book presents the tarot as a tool for reflection and entertainment. It is a way of looking carefully at an image, putting into words what you see and asking yourself questions. It does not predict the future, and it does not reveal what other people think or will do. A card does not say "this will happen"; at most it suggests a point of view and invites you to ask yourself something.

Nothing in these pages replaces a consultation with a doctor, a psychologist, a lawyer or a financial adviser. If you are going through a health situation, an emotional difficulty, a legal dispute or an important financial decision, please consult a qualified professional. The cards can accompany a conversation with yourself, but they must not decide for you.

If any chapter leaves you with a worry that you cannot resolve, set the deck aside and talk to someone you trust. That, too, is part of learning to use it with good judgment.

— How the Cards Are Cited —

In the images and tables of the book you will see some short keys. These are labels from this edition's catalog; they are not printed on the cards. The Major Arcana run from M00 to M21, with M00 for the Fool. In the suits, the letter indicates the suit (B, C, E and O for Batons, Cups, Swords and Coins) and the number its value, and the court cards carry the numbers 11, 12, 13 and 14 for Page, Knight, Queen and King.

The labels are transcribed between quotation marks and in their old spelling. A square bracket, as in "LA MAI[S]ON DIEV," marks a letter that the red stamp covers and that has been inferred; an ellipsis marks a stretch that cannot be read.

When a key and a label appear to disagree, the label printed on the card rules, and the key is to be understood only as a label of this edition.

Contents

Before you begin

Before You Begin 7
A Deck Named After a City 7
Why an Antique Copy and Not a Restoration 8
A First Glance: The Fool in Two Copies 8
Left and Right: As You See the Card 9
All the Cards Upright 10
How the Book Is Organized 10
How the Supports Are Withdrawn 11
What the Tarot Can Do and What It Cannot 12
How to Work with This Book 13

Part I · Preparing the Eye

1 · Knowing Which Deck You Are Holding 15
Two Copies of One Model 15
Recognizing a Modern Restoration 21
The 78 Pieces: 22 Majors, 40 Number Cards, 16 Court Cards 22
What to Expect from the Book and What Not To 25
Exercises 26
Case: Alice and the "Original" Deck 27
2 · From Image to Sentence 29
Before the First Sentence 29
Inventory of the Visible 30
Plate: The Magician 33
Gesture and Object 34
Direction of the Body and of the Gaze 36
Associating and Checking 38
Exercises 40
Visual Game 1: Matching Details 41
Case: A Neighborhood Workshop 42
Keys to the Exercises and the Game 43

Part II · The 78 Cards 45

3 · The Majors I: From the Fool to the Wheel 46
A Major Is Not a Verdict 46
How the Entries Are Used 48
Numbers and Labels of This Stretch 48
To Begin: The Fool and the Magician 49
To Organize: The Popess, the Empress, the Emperor and the Pope 53
Choosing, Advancing, Measuring 57
Stopping and Turning: The Hermit and the Wheel 62
Who Holds What and on Which Side 66
A Table for the Eleven 66
Visual Game 2: The Intruder Card 68
Case: Coordinating an Amateur Exhibition 69
Exercises 70
Key to Visual Game 2 71
4 · The Majors II: From Strength to the World 72
A Stretch That Commands Respect 73
How to Talk About Strong Images Without Frightening 74
The Eleven Entries 77
Three Pairs That Get Confused 93
A Case: Reorganizing a Choir's Calendar 95
Exercises 96
5 · Batons and Cups 97
Counting Before Interpreting 98
The Batons: How They Are Drawn and How They Are Counted 99
The Cups: How They Are Drawn and How They Are Counted 109
Plate: The Ace of Cups, Looked at Slowly 111
Three Cards to Compare 123
Suit and Number Against a Sample Interpretation 124
Visual Game 3: The Mislabeled Card 126

Exercises 127
Case: Organizing a Reading Club 128
Key to Visual Game 3 129
6 · Swords and Coins 129
Two Suits That Are Counted Before They Are Read 130
The Swords: Arcs That Cross 130
The Coins: Coins Among Flowers 132
Swords, from the Ace to the Ten 133
Coins, from the Ace to the Ten 143
Nine Is Not Ten 152
The Ten Coins at a Glance 155
Swords and Coins Face to Face 156
Visual Game 4: Counting Without a Number 157
Case: Dividing a Theater Group's Materials 157
Key to Visual Game 4 159
7 · The Court Cards as Roles 159
Sixteen Cards with a Face 160
What a Court Card Brings and What It Does Not 160
Person, Action or Attitude 162
No Sex, No Age, No Portrait 163
The Sixteen Entries 164
Comparing So As Not to Invent 180
Exercises 182
Visual Game 5: Each Court Card with Its Label 183
Case: Dividing Responsibilities at a Neighborhood Magazine 183
Key to Visual Game 5 184

Part III · The First Reading 185

8 · Preparing the Question and the Table 186
Before the First Card 186
Questions About What One Can Do 187
Three Cards for Thinking the Question 188
Eight Questions, Eight Versions 190
Consent: Who Is Spoken About and With What Permission 191
Shuffling Without an Obligatory Ritual 193
Fixed Rule: All the Cards Upright 194
Exercises 195
Case: A Disagreement in a Music Group 197
Closing the Table 199
9 · Reading Positions with Supports 199
A Place in the Layout 200
A Spread of Three, and What It Is Not 201
Looking Before Reading 202
The Three-Part Template 204
A Reading with a Table 204
Changing the Order, Changing the Reading 206
Writing a Good Alternative 207
Six Steps, Always the Same 208
Exercises 208
Case: Planning a Family Gathering 210
What Remains to Be Done 211
10 · Joining Without Forcing 212
What Is Joined and by What Right 212
The Layout of This Chapter 213
Repetition 215
Contrast 216
The Card That Doesn't Fit 217
Synthesis in the Conditional 219
Exercises 221
Case: Helen Takes Up Watercolor Again 223
Variant: The Same Layout with Another Third Card 224

Part IV · Practicing with Judgment 225

11 · Mistakes of the First Week 226
Why the Mistakes Come Together 226
First Mistake: Fatalism 227
Second Mistake: Reading in Hindsight 231
Third Mistake: Drawing Cards Without End 232
Fourth Matter: When a Reading Is Sufficient 233
Table of Mistakes, Harms and Repairs 234
Exercises: Repairing Three Alarmist Reports 235
Visual Game 6: Five Associations to Check 236

A Case: The Change of Organization at the Association 236
Key to Visual Game 6 238
12 · Reading with Less Help 238
What Is Withdrawn and What Stays 239
The Whole Layout 240
Minimal Annotation 244
Comparing Two Interpretations 246
Reviewing with the Card in Hand 248
Exercises 250
Case: Choosing a Leisure Activity for a Group 252
Closing the Chapter 254
13 · Closing and Learning On 254
When a Reading Is Enough 254
The Recognition Test of the 78 256
Self-Assessment with a Rubric 258
What Comes in the Other Three Volumes 260
Exercises 261
Case: A Photography Exhibition 263

For reference

Glossary 266
Index of Cards 271
Labels of the Majors and the Court Cards in Dodal 272
How It Has Been Transcribed 272
The 22 Majors 273
The 16 Court Cards 275
What the Table Teaches 276
Further Reading 277
The Cards: The Primary Source 277
Two Nineteenth-Century Texts, for Contrast 278
Modern Works of Reference 278
How to Use These Readings 279
A Month of Readings with a Single Card Open 279

Before You Begin

This book teaches you to read the Marseille tarot by looking at cards printed two centuries ago or more, not at summaries of meanings. Before the first card, it helps to know which deck we are working with, how the book is organized, from which side left and right are counted, and what the tarot can be asked to do and what it cannot.

By the end of this introduction you will be able to

- explain what a Marseille deck is and why an antique copy is used here;
- find your way around the four parts of the book and know what supports you will have and when they are withdrawn;
- describe a card with left and right as you see them;
- fix the reading rule of this book: all the cards upright;
- tell apart what the tarot can offer from what it cannot promise.

— A Deck Named After a City —

When people say "Marseille tarot," they are naming a model of deck, not a brand or a place of manufacture. The name took hold because of the fame of the workshops of Marseille, but the same model was printed in other cities. One of them was Lyon, where Jean Dodal worked at the beginning of the eighteenth century. What these decks share is a layout and a way of drawing, more than a workshop.

The layout is this: 78 cards. Twenty-two are the Major Arcana, cards with a figure, a label and, almost always, a Roman numeral. Forty are the number cards, from one to ten in each of the four suits: Batons, Cups, Swords and Coins. Sixteen are the court cards, four per suit: Page, Knight, Queen and King. If you multiply four suits by ten cards and add the four court cards of each suit, you get 56 minors; with the twenty-two majors, 78.

As for the drawing, the Marseille model has a peculiarity that this book makes great use of. The number cards carry no scenes: on the Five of Cups there is no weeping figure and no shoreline; there are five cups arranged among ornaments. Anyone coming from other decks will often bring along images in their head that do not exist in this model. Part of the work will be leaving them at the door, and Chapter 5 will give you the means to do so.

— Why an Antique Copy and Not a Restoration —

Many Marseille decks are sold today. Some are very carefully made reissues and others are redrawn versions: clean lines, flat colors, a label corrected here and another completed there. None of that is a defect in itself. But every decision of the restorer is a decision that you have not made and that, if you do not know it, you will not be able to tell apart from what the original engraver drew.

This book works with two antique copies held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The main one is Jean Dodal's, Lyon, between 1701 and 1715. The second, by Nicolas Conver, a printer active between 1809 and 1833, serves for comparison. Both are witnesses: in them you can see the lines of the woodblock, the color laid on by hand or with a stencil that spills over the outline, the creases, the stains, the labels with worn letters. These irregularities force you to look slowly and, above all, to say honestly "this can be seen" or "this cannot be seen."

There is a teaching advantage that you will not suspect until you use it. With a clean card, it is easy to take as seen what you already knew. With a worn card, the image resists, and every detail you state has to earn its place. For a beginner, it is good training.

There are also drawbacks, and they should be stated. In the antique copy some labels are incomplete and some details cannot be made out. When that happens, the book will say so and will not complete what is missing. If your deck is a reissue, no matter: almost everything you learn here applies, and Chapter 1 teaches you how to compare your copy with these.

A warning about a detail you will see on almost every image. The cards carry a small red stamp: it is the stamp of the library that preserves them. It belongs to the object and not to the card; we did not add it, nor is it part of the card's drawing. If it appears in the image over a letter of the label, it is simply that the stamp was pressed on top, nothing more.

— A First Glance: The Fool in Two Copies —

The card that follows appears twice, once in each copy. On the left, as you look at it, is Dodal's; on the right, Conver's.

The same figure in two copies



DODAL · "LE FOL"



CONVER · "LE MAT"

On the left, Dodal's Fool; on the right, Conver's. In both the face in profile looks toward the viewer's right.

It is the same figure with two different labels. Dodal's says "LE FOL," and no printed numeral can be made out. Conver's says "LE MAT," and at the top some strokes can be seen that might be a numeral; I do not read them with certainty, so I do not transcribe them. Both cards show a figure in profile with the face turned toward the viewer's right, a pole over the shoulder from which a bundle hangs and, in the hand that hangs down, a red staff. Behind the leg there is a grayish shape that in neither card is clearly identified; I will not say what it is.

Notice that I have just done three things that we will repeat until we are sick of them: transcribing a label exactly as it is, staying silent about what I cannot read and describing objects without giving them a meaning yet. The tarot comes afterward.

— Left and Right: As You See the Card —

This book uses "left" and "right" in only one way: as you see them when you have the card in front of you, face-on. Never according to the hand or the side of the drawn figure.

The reason is practical. If I say "the Fool carries the staff in his right hand," you have to make a mental inversion and may go wrong, and so may I. If I say "the staff is in the hand that hangs down toward the viewer's right," the sentence can be checked with your finger on the image. All the descriptions in the book are made this way. When it is necessary to distinguish a figure's hands, I will solve it with another way of

saying it: the hand that falls on the viewer's right, the one that falls on the viewer's left.

This agreement prevents real mistakes. Other decks show figures that walk or look in the opposite direction, and anyone who mixes memories of one deck with those of another ends up claiming things that their card does not have. In the Marseille Fool you have just seen, the head turns toward the viewer's right. If in your memory the Fool goes the other way, that memory comes from another card.

Try It

Put in front of you the Fool card from the previous page or, if you have a deck, your own Fool. Cover the label with your hand and, without looking at anything else, write in your notebook five things that can be seen. For each one, say which side of the card it is on, always counting from your position as viewer. Then uncover it and check. The ones you could not place with certainty are the ones that interest you.

— All the Cards Upright —

In many reading traditions a card can come out "backward," with its head down, and that turn changes its meaning. That subject has its place, and it is another volume of this series, the third. In this book the rule is simpler: all the cards are read upright.

There are three reasons. First, a beginner already has enough to do learning to look at a card without adding the turn. Second, the habit we aim to form, pointing in the image to the detail that supports each sentence, is harder with the image inverted, because you lose the reflex of reading objects in their natural posture. Third, a fixed rule is learned once: there is no need to decide each time, and without intermediate decisions you learn faster.

In practice, when you shuffle and deal, if a card ends up turned, put it upright again before reading it. Chapter 8 includes this step among the preparations of the table. It is an agreement of method, not a judgment on other ways of reading.

— How the Book Is Organized —

The book has four parts and thirteen chapters, plus four appendices.

Part I, *Preparing the Eye*, covers Chapters 1 and 2. In the first you learn to tell which deck you have in your hands: what distinguishes an antique copy from a restoration, what the three families of cards are and how much certainty each statement about them carries. In the second you learn to move from the image to a sentence without skipping steps: inventory of what is visible, gesture, direction, association and verification.

Part II, *The 78 Cards*, runs from Chapters 3 to 7. Each card has its entry, which teaches you to recognize it, and not its monograph: label, numeral, count, a detail that supports the meaning and a sample sentence. The majors take up two chapters, the four suits of number cards another two, and the court cards a fifth.

Part III, *The First Reading*, gathers Chapters 8 to 10: how to formulate a question that can be worked on, how to read a three-card spread by positions and how to join the three without forcing them. Part IV, *Practicing with Judgment*, with Chapters 11 to 13, deals with the typical mistakes of the first week, reading with less help and the close, with a recognition test of the 78 cards.

Each chapter has its table, its exercises, a fictional case presented as such and, sometimes, warning boxes. There are also six visual games spread through the book, with their key at the end of the corresponding chapter. The appendices are a glossary, an index of cards, a table of labels as they are printed on the Dodal copy and a bibliography.

A final note of organization: the interpretive exercises do not have a single correct answer. What is assessed, and what you will be able to assess on your own, is whether each sentence rests on a visible detail and whether you recognize what remains open.

— How the Supports Are Withdrawn —

Almost all tarot methods fail for the same reason: they give the beginner a table of meanings, and that table becomes a crutch for life. This book does the opposite. The supports are given at the beginning, when they are needed, and are withdrawn gradually, chapter by chapter, until you read with the card in your hand and little else.

Try It

The supports are withdrawn like this. Underline in the table the stretch you are working on and check, at the end of each chapter, whether you can already do without the support of the next one.

Chapters	Support available	What is expected of you
1 and 2	Template "I see · I interpret · another possibility"	Use it for every observation until the separation becomes automatic

Chapters	Support available	What is expected of you
3 to 7	Keywords and model sentence in each entry	Lean on them, but point in the image to the detail that supports them
8 and 9	Table of positions with sentence and alternative	Build your own sentences and check them against the table
10 and 11	Criteria of synthesis, with no set phrases	Defend a synthesis by saying which clue supports it and which limits it
12 and 13	No keywords	Read the whole layout, note down the minimum and compare two interpretations

Observe the direction of the table. It does not mean to make you memorize meanings; it means that, from top to bottom, you move from receiving words to producing sentences, and from producing sentences to justifying them. On reaching Chapter 12 you are asked to solve a case without keywords. If at that moment you miss them, the book suggests that you go back to the previous chapter and repeat an exercise; there is nothing wrong with that.

— What the Tarot Can Do and What It Cannot —

The tarot serves as a tool for reflection and as entertainment. A card offers a concrete image and an implicit instruction: look at this. Faced with that image, you can put in order what you think about a matter, notice what you had overlooked, formulate a better question than the one you started with, or simply spend a pleasant time with other people around a table. All of that is real and sufficient.

What the tarot cannot do is predict. A reading does not establish what is going to happen or what another person thinks or feels. Nor does it replace the advice of a doctor, a lawyer, a psychologist or a financial adviser. If you have an important decision to make in any of those areas, the tarot can help you put your questions in order, but the decision and the consultation with professionals lie outside it.

That is why the book speaks in a particular way. The cards "suggest," "invite you to ask yourself," "allow you to say." A sentence such as "this card indicates that you are going to be left" has no place in these pages; "this card shows a figure walking away, and it may invite you to ask yourself what you want to leave behind" does. The

difference is one of method: the second sentence can be checked in the image and the first cannot.

> **Common Mistake**
>
> Reading first and looking afterward. If you have read somewhere that a certain card "means" such-and-such and you look in the image for confirmation, you will normally find it, because the brain fills in what it expects. Look first, note what you see and only then compare it with what you have read. The coincidences will still be there, but you will also see the discrepancies.

— How to Work with This Book —

You need nothing special. A Marseille deck, even a reissue, a notebook and a pencil. If you prefer not to buy anything yet, the images in the book are enough for almost all the exercises. No special clothing, special place or ritual is needed. If you like to shuffle calmly and light a candle, do so: the book does not forbid it either, only it does not depend on it.

A small, steady habit is worthwhile. A twenty-minute session with a single card yields more than a whole afternoon with fifteen cards. Choose one, describe it with the template, write one sentence and record what you could not state. After a week you will have seven well-observed cards and a notebook that will serve as a witness to your progress.

To fix the idea, a fictional case. Lucy has just bought a deck and, on the afternoon of her first session, writes this about the Fool: "A man running away from something." The book would ask her which part of that sentence can be seen. What can be seen is a figure walking in profile, not running away; a bundle can be seen, but not what he is running from. With the template, the note reads: I see a figure with a pole over the shoulder and a staff; I interpret that he is on the road; another possibility is that he is simply stopped in a walking pose. The final sentence is less showy but it holds up, and from it Lucy can build richer ones without losing her footing.

That is what this book offers: a method so that sentences, however modest they are at first, rest on the card. When you doubt one of your sentences, go back to the question put to Lucy: what part of what you have just written can be seen on the card and what part have you put there? That question is the whole method. Turn the page and begin by finding out which deck you are holding.

Part I

◆ Preparing the Eye ◆

Chapter 1

Knowing Which Deck You Are Holding

Before interpreting a card it helps to know which card it is and which copy the image in front of you comes from. This chapter presents the two antique copies the book works with, teaches you to tell them apart from a modern restoration, counts the 78 pieces of a complete deck and sets out what you can expect from these pages.

By the end of this chapter you will be able to

- name the two antique copies in the book, Jean Dodal's and Nicolas Conver's, and say how they are alike and how they differ;
- identify the Fool, Judgment and the World by their labels and numerals, without mixing them up;
- point out on a card concrete clues for suspecting that your deck is a modern restoration;
- separate a complete deck into its three families (22 majors, 40 number cards and 16 court cards) and check that they add up to 78;
- classify any statement about a card as a card fact, a catalog fact or a hypothesis.

— Two Copies of One Model —

The expression "Marseille tarot" designates a model of deck, not a particular object. The model is a way of drawing and ordering 78 cards that several printers repeated over generations, each with his own woodblocks. A *woodblock* is the carved block of wood bearing the drawing; from it the black line was printed onto the card, and the color was added separately. Two printers following the same model carved different blocks, and that is why their cards look very much alike without being identical.

This book works with two *copies*, that is, two particular decks preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The first was printed by Jean Dodal in Lyon between 1701 and 1715, according to the library's catalog. The second is by Nicolas Conver, a printer whose activity the catalog places between 1809 and 1833. Almost a century separates them and, as will be seen shortly, the composition of each card is the same in essentials. Both are in the public domain. Both will serve as *witnesses*: I call a witness the copy against which a statement is checked. When the book says

that a card carries such-and-such, the image of the witness will be next to it so that you can verify it with your own eyes.

On the lower part of the cards of both copies you will see a small red stamp. It is the stamp of the library that preserves the deck. It belongs to the object as it has come down to us, like a damp stain or a worn corner, and is not part of the drawing. It is worth saying so now because the stamp sometimes falls on a letter of the label, and whoever takes it for a symbol ends up looking for a meaning in it.

A convention before looking. Left and right are always understood as you look at the card, never according to the side of the drawn figure. If the book says that someone walks toward the right, they walk toward the right edge of the image as you have it in front of you.

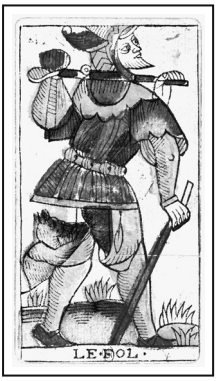
It is also worth fixing what having two copies and not one is good for. With a single witness, everything you see seems like a rule: if the World carries such-and-such, you conclude that "the World carries such-and-such." With two, what can vary and what stays the same appears, and that difference is the first real information an antique deck gives. The descriptions in this book hold for Dodal unless otherwise stated, and when a Conver card differs, the text will point it out by name.

Try It

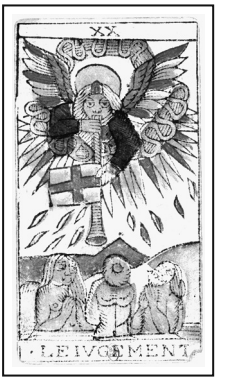
Look at the layout that follows before reading the section that comments on it. With pencil and paper, write three similarities and three differences between the two copies, each with the side of the card on which it is seen. Leave it on the table and check it afterward against the descriptions. The ones you saw and the text does not mention count for more than the ones you got right: they are the ones that teach you to look.

When comparing, do not dwell on color. In these copies it was applied separately from the line and sometimes spills over the outlines, so a difference of tone says little; a difference of form, of label or of object says more. Put the differences in two columns, that of color and that of drawing, and rely above all on the second.

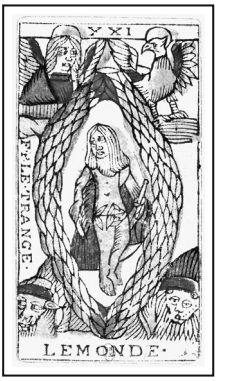
Dodal and Conver: the same model in two copies



Dodal · The Fool



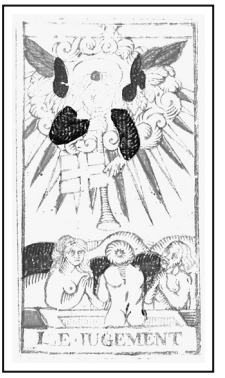
Dodal · Judgment



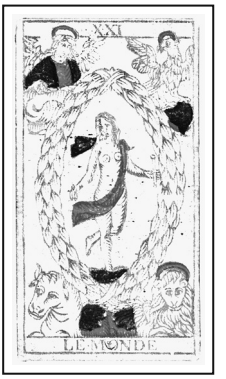
Dodal · The World



Conver · The Fool



Conver · Judgment



Conver · The World

Above, three cards from Jean Dodal's copy; below, the same three from Nicolas Conver's copy. They are identified by their label and numeral, not by their position.

Six Cards to Begin With

The layout above brings together three Dodal cards; the one below, the same three from Conver, in the same order: the Fool, Judgment and the World. I chose them because they resemble each other in something deceptive (in all three there is a central figure or a figure that dominates the composition) and because they force you to identify each card by its label and not by its general look.

Dodal's Fool carries the label "LE FOL," with a dot between the two words and another at the end; the red stamp partly covers the F, though the word can be read. There is no printed numeral that can be read: in the upper margin no figure

appears, only a stray dot in the left corner that does not form a number. The figure walks toward the viewer's right and turns his face, in profile, to that same side. He carries over his shoulder a pole with a bundle hanging from it and holds a staff in the other hand. Behind his legs, on the left side of the card, there is a blue-gray shape with a blurred outline. I am not going to say what it is, because the image does not make it clear, and get used to that answer: "it cannot be made out" is a legitimate sentence.

Conver's Fool is labeled "LE MAT." He also walks toward the viewer's right, with the pole and the bundle over his shoulder and the staff in his hand. Below the line that closes the upper margin, a row of strokes peeks out that the edge of the card cuts off. They could be a numeral, but I do not read them with certainty and I am not going to read them to you. Behind the legs there is, again, a pale shape that likewise cannot be identified. The two labels, "FOL" and "MAT," are usually translated as "fool," and this book calls the card The Fool in both cases. But the fact that the series gives it a single name in English does not erase that Dodal's card says one thing and Conver's another.

Dodal's Judgment carries the numeral "XX" in the upper strip and the label "LE IVGEMENT," with the V where we would expect a U. An angel with a trumpet occupies the upper half: from the trumpet hangs a banner with a red cross on a yellow ground, and around the angel are seen wings of several colors, rays and some interlaced gray shapes that serve as clouds. In the lower half there are three figures, and the one in the center is seen from behind. Conver's repeats that structure: numeral "XX" above, angel with a trumpet, banner with a cross and three figures below, with the central one from behind. The details change. The cross on the banner appears light against the yellow, not red, and a yellow and red band closes the scene beneath the three figures. I suggest you read Conver's label later, in the exercises, without my giving it away.

Dodal's World carries the numeral "XXI" and the label "LE MONDE," with the two words almost joined. In the margin on the viewer's left there is a vertical inscription that reads "F·P·LE·TRANGE." A figure occupies the center of an oval wreath; in the upper corners there is an angel on the left and an eagle on the right, and in the lower ones two bearded heads with red caps. There is no bull and no lion: it is a mistake repeated in many texts and one that the image refutes. Conver's World carries "XXI" and "LE MONDE," and in its left margin no vertical inscription is seen. Above, it keeps the angel on the left and the eagle on the right, and both wear a red nimbus. Below there is, on the left, a horned head that looks like a bull's or an

ox's and, on the right, a lion with a mane. The wreath is wider and is closed with yellow crosses above and below.

Notice what has just happened. The lower corners of the World show that two copies of the same model can differ in something that any book of interpretation takes as fixed. When someone assures you that the World carries "a bull and a lion," it is worth asking which copy they are talking about.

Three Labels, Three Cards

The Fool, Judgment and the World get confused for a reason of order: depending on how the deck is ordered, the Fool goes at the beginning, or at the end, or between XX and XXI. Whoever learns the majors by position ends up crossing the three. Here they are identified by the label and the numeral, which are on the card:

- "LE FOL" (Dodal) or "LE MAT" (Conver), with no numeral that can be read with certainty: the Fool;
- "XX" with "LE IVGEMENT" (Dodal), or "XX" with the label of Judgment (Conver): Judgment;
- "XXI" with "LE MONDE," in both copies: the World.

The Fool, then, is the card that carries no certain number. That absence is a fact, and one of the most useful that an antique deck gives.

What We Know and How We Know It

Not everything that is claimed about these cards carries the same weight. A sentence such as "Dodal's Fool is labeled LE FOL" is checked by looking. A sentence such as "Dodal printed in Lyon between 1701 and 1715" is not seen on any card: the library's catalog supports it, and you can consult it but not verify it with the card. And a sentence such as "Conver's model derives from Dodal's" is a reasonable conjecture that no image proves. This book distinguishes three degrees and will use them in every chapter.

Statement	Source	Degree of the statement
Dodal's Fool carries the label "LE FOL"	The image of the card	Card fact
Dodal's Fool shows no legible numeral	The image of the card	Card fact (it is an absence)

Statement	Source	Degree of the statement
Conver's Fool has cut-off strokes in the upper margin	The image of the card	Card fact, with no reading of the numeral
Dodal printed in Lyon between 1701 and 1715	BnF catalog	Catalog fact
Conver's activity is placed between 1809 and 1833	BnF catalog	Catalog fact
The red stamp on the cards is the library's	Catalog and image credits	Catalog fact
Dodal's World carries a vertical inscription in the left margin	The image of the card	Card fact
Conver's World carries a bull and a lion below	The image of the card	Card fact
Both copies derive from a common model	Comparison of the images	Plausible hypothesis
"FOL" and "MAT" name the same idea	Comparison of labels	Hypothesis

The *card fact* is what is seen, and anyone can check it with the image in front of them. The *catalog fact* is given by whoever has custody of the object: it is reliable, but you receive it from someone else and it is worth saying so. The *hypothesis* is an explanation that fits what is seen without anything proving it. Hypotheses are not bad, and almost the whole tarot rests on them, but they have to be called by their name. The habit this book wants to give you begins here: before repeating a sentence about a card, know which of the three degrees it belongs to.

There is a nuance that should not be forgotten. A date written on a card is not the printing date of the copy. The Two of Coins of the Conver we use carries an inscription with the year "1760," and the library does not date the copy to 1760, but to the printer's period of activity. Whoever reads the figure and takes it for a printing date confuses a card fact with a conclusion about the card.

Old Does Not Mean Identical

Two antique copies of the same model are not exact copies, and two impressions from the same woodblock are not either. The color was applied separately from the line, by hand or with a stencil, and on these cards it spills over the lines in several places, so a red hat in one copy may be yellow in another without the drawing changing. Differences of form, on the other hand, do count: Dodal's World and Conver's do not share the lower corners.

The common mistake consists of taking a detail from one copy and attributing it to the other, or to "the" Marseille tarot in general. Always note which copy you are talking about. If you cannot say, the sentence is, at best, a hypothesis.

— Recognizing a Modern Restoration —

Whoever buys a Marseille deck today does not usually receive an antique copy but a *restoration*: a modern edition that starts from one or several antique copies, redraws the lines, remakes the colors and sometimes corrects labels. There are careful restorations and others that change a great deal. None is bad for reading. The problem appears when the buyer believes they are looking at an eighteenth-century card and is looking at a twenty-first-century interpretation of that card. Its details may be very faithful or not, and that can only be known by comparing.

A single clue decides nothing. The reasonable thing is to accumulate clues and always compare them with the antique witness, as you have seen it in the previous section. These are five that can be checked with the deck in your hand, and the first two are the easiest:

1. The outline. On the antique cards of this book the black line is irregular: it thickens, breaks off, is corrected. The shading is done with parallel hatching that does not always keep the same distance. A uniform, clean line, without a single tremor, usually indicates a redrawing.
2. The color. In the witnesses, the colors are few, uneven in appearance, and overrun the lines (in Dodal's Judgment, the blue and the red spill out of their outlines). Flat, saturated fills that respect every edge are typical of a modern edition.
3. The labels. The antique ones have their own spelling: "IVGEMENT" with a V, in Dodal, or words almost joined, as in the "LE MONDE" of the same copy. A modern edition tends to regularize and to complete the letters. If all the labels on your deck appear perfectly spaced and with current French spelling, ask yourself why.

4. The support and the marks. The cardboard of an antique copy is stained, hand-trimmed and worn at the corners, and in these cases carries the library's stamp. A modern deck arrives in a box, with a booklet, with all the cards of identical size and with an edition copyright line. Beware of "aged" decks: an antique look is a style, not a date.
5. The differences of composition. Check the Fool, Judgment and the World against the witnesses. If the World in your deck has a bull and a lion in the lower corners, it does not match Dodal; it matches Conver, or a restoration based on a similar model. If the Fool carries a number that the witness does not have, or a name that the witness does not carry, someone added it, and it is worth knowing who and for what reason.

These five clues answer different questions. The outline and the color tell of the *treatment* of the card; the labels and the composition tell of its *sources*; the support tells of its material *origin*. A deck may have a very modern treatment and a very faithful composition, or the other way around. That is why the conclusion should never be "it is antique" or "it is fake," but something more precise: "its composition matches the Conver witness in the three cards compared, its labels are normalized and its color is flat."

Nor is the point to look down on the restoration. If you read with one, keep doing so. What the book asks of you is that you say which one you have and that, when you describe a card, you look at your card and not at the card of another deck. The descriptions in this book hold for Dodal and, where indicated, for Conver. If your copy differs, that difference is the first exercise in observation that falls to you: note it, and keep reading with the deck you have, not with the one the book shows.

One trap of method remains. It is tempting to decide that a detail of your deck is "the correct one" because it matches what a book of interpretation says. A book may be describing another copy, or a restoration, or a card from memory. The criterion here is simpler: the card you have in front of you rules and, to compare it, the witness that appears in these pages. What neither of the two shows is not asserted.

— The 78 Pieces: 22 Majors, 40 Number Cards, 16 Court Cards —

A complete Marseille deck has 78 cards and is divided into three families that it is worth learning to separate with your hands before learning any meaning. The sum is

simple: 22 majors, 40 number cards and 16 court cards make 78. The 56 cards that are not majors (40 and 16) are sometimes called, together, the minors, and the first 22, the majors. The two adjectives are a modern classification of convenient use. No antique card has the word "major" or "minor" printed on it.

The 22 Majors

The majors are the cards with a label of their own and, with one exception, a Roman numeral. Twenty-one are numbered from I to XXI, and the Fool stands apart. In Dodal's witness the Fool shows no legible numeral, as we have seen, and in Conver's we do not read the strokes in the margin with certainty. From there comes a count that puzzles more than one person: twenty-one majors with a number plus the Fool, which does not visibly carry one, make twenty-two.

The keys this book uses (M00 for the Fool, M01 for the Magician, and so on up to M21 for the World) are catalog labels, not inscriptions on the card. The "0" is not printed on Dodal's Fool. We use it because it allows the series to be ordered without a fight over where the Fool goes, and you will see it in the image captions and in the tables. When you need to speak of what the card says, speak of the label and the numeral; when you speak of the key, know that it belongs to the book.

Among the majors there is another particularity that will be dealt with in Chapter 4: one of them, the one carrying the numeral XIII, bears no name in either of the two copies. This book calls it Arcanum XIII, which is the only way of naming it without adding what the card keeps silent. And there is another that we will see in Chapters 3 and 4: Justice and Strength occupy in Dodal the places VIII and XI.

The 40 Number Cards

The number cards are the cards of four suits (Batons, Cups, Swords and Coins) from the ace to the ten. Four suits times ten cards make 40. The ace counts as a number card, so the suit of Cups has ten number cards: the ace, the two, the three and so on up to the ten. A number card is not recognized by a scene, but by a count: the Four of Coins has four coins, the Six of Cups has six cups. This is an important peculiarity of the model: the Marseille number cards carry no scenes with figures, but orderly arrangements of one same emblem, and that is why you have to count, and count well. Chapter 5 explains how Batons and Cups are drawn, and Chapter 6 does the same for Swords and Coins.

Counting seems silly until the day you confuse a Nine with a Ten. Whether a card is the card it is depends on the exact count. Chapter 6 devotes an entire section to telling those two Coins cards apart, because the most repeated mistakes with this model are made on the high number cards, where there are many emblems and little space.

The 16 Court Cards

The court cards are four per suit: Page, Knight, Queen and King. Four suits times four court cards make 16. In the book's keys they carry the numbers 11 (Page), 12 (Knight), 13 (Queen) and 14 (King): B11 is the Page of Batons, C14 is the King of Cups. Those numbers are, once again, catalog labels. The court cards do carry a label printed on the card, with an old spelling that will be transcribed as it is in Chapter 7. Each shows a figure, so they can be told apart from the number cards at first sight: there is a figure where the number cards have counted emblems.

The final sum is this:

- 22 majors: the Fool, I to XXI;
- 40 number cards: four suits, from the ace to the ten;
- 16 court cards: four suits, from Page to King;
- 78 cards in all.

The words of the series (Page, Knight, Queen, King; Batons, Cups, Swords, Coins) are fixed in this book and in the other three volumes of the series. If in another deck or in another book you find "Knave," "Valet" or "Jack," it is the same piece under another name. Here it will not change.

Try It

Take out your deck and separate it on the table into three piles, without looking at meanings, only by what you see.

1. First pile: the cards that carry a label at the bottom and a Roman numeral at the top. These are the majors. Set aside the one that has a label and no clear numeral: almost certainly, the Fool.
2. Second pile: the cards with a figure and a label, no numeral. These are the court cards. Separate them by suit and verify that there are four in each.
3. Third pile: the cards with a repeated emblem that you can count. These are the number cards. Order them by suit and by number.

Now count: 22, 40 and 16. If you get another figure, do not force it. A card may be missing, or one may be extra (many modern decks include a title card or an advertising card), or two majors may be mixed in with the court cards because they look alike. Note what is extra or missing, by name, and do not seek the balance of the sum until you have checked each pile.

When you finish, take the Fool, Judgment and the World and compare each one with the witness of this chapter. Does your Fool carry a numeral? What does your World carry in the lower corners?

— What to Expect from the Book and What Not To —

The promise of this book is concrete. By the end of it, you will recognize the 78 cards by their label, numeral or count; you will know how to formulate a question that can be worked on; and you will be able to explain a first reading of three cards, pointing out on each card the detail that supports each sentence. It promises no more. Nor less, though it demands a discipline that is slow at first: nothing is stated that cannot be pointed to with a finger on the card.

To that end the book gives you crutches, and warns you that it will withdraw them. The first entries bring keywords and ready-made sentences; the tables of the intermediate chapters give you sentence templates; toward the end, the exercises ask you to read without them. It is the order of any workshop: you begin with a guided hand and end with a free hand. If at any moment you think you have learned a keyword and no longer need to look at the card, look at it again: it means the support has turned into a habit, and the habit replaces observation.

From the tarot, what is expected here is what is expected of a tool for reflection and entertainment. The cards serve to order a conversation with yourself or with another person who has asked for it, to see a situation from an angle that had not been considered and to exercise the eye. They do not predict. They do not say what is going to happen, nor do they replace the advice of a doctor, a lawyer, a psychologist or a financial adviser, and this book offers none of the four. What the cards do is *suggest* and *invite you to ask yourself*, and those verbs will be used rigorously in all the sample readings.

There are things the book leaves out on purpose. It is not a history of the deck or a study of its origins, which are obscure and lend themselves to very daring hypotheses. It does not compare this model with other decks or explore systems of correspondences with other disciplines. Nor does it develop the reading of reversed

cards: in this volume all the cards are read upright, a rule that is fixed in Chapter 8 to take one complication away from the beginner. Chapter 13 points out where to go on with each of those questions, and the other three volumes of the series take up the more technical ones.

A last warning about the examples. The cases that appear in each chapter are fictional, invented to illustrate an idea. The people who star in them do not exist, and no sample reading serves as proof that the tarot works. They are exercises of method: they serve to see how what is looked at is separated from what is assumed, and for nothing else.

— Exercises —

1 · Comparing Two Cards

Place in front of you the two Judgment cards of this chapter's layout, Dodal's above and Conver's below. Note three differences that you can point to with your finger in the image. A valid difference is written like this: "in Conver's, below the three figures, there is a yellow and red band; in Dodal's that band is not seen." It will not do to say "Conver's is lighter," because color varies for reasons unrelated to the drawing, or "Dodal's is more expressive," because that is an impression of yours.

To orient yourself, look at four zones: the foot of the composition, the banner, the clouds around the angel and the label. In the label, look at the letter that follows the I in the word for Judgment. In Dodal it is a V. Check which letter you read in Conver's, and if you do not read it with certainty, note it that way and do not choose.

Once you have your three differences, review them with a rule: could another person, with the image in front of them and without your speaking, find each one? If any requires that you "explain it to them," it is still an impression.

Guidance. Among the differences that can be pointed to: the lower band that appears only in Conver; the cross on the banner, red in Dodal and light in Conver; and the letter of the label, which is a V in Dodal and which you must check in Conver. If you have found three others that meet the rule of pointing, they are just as good. If you have written one of the type "Conver's is cleaner," redo it.

2 · Fact or Hypothesis

Classify each of these ten sentences into one of the three categories: card fact (seen in the image), catalog fact (stated by the library or the credits) or hypothesis

(supported by neither image nor catalog). Note beside it, in one line, why.

1. Dodal's Fool carries the label "LE FOL."
2. The Dodal copy is dated between 1701 and 1715.
3. Dodal's Fool walks toward the viewer's right.
4. Dodal's engravers copied an earlier model now lost.
5. Dodal's World carries a vertical inscription in the left margin.
6. Conver's activity is placed between 1809 and 1833.
7. The red stamp on the cards belongs to the library that preserves the copies.
8. Conver's Fool represents the same thing as Dodal's Fool, even though it carries another label.
9. Dodal's Judgment and Conver's carry the same numeral, XX.
10. All Marseille decks derive from the Dodal copy.

Key. Card facts are 1, 3, 5 and 9, because they are checked by looking. Catalog facts are 2, 6 and 7, because they depend on what the library and the credits establish and not on what is seen. Hypotheses are 4, 8 and 10. Number 4 has no visible or documentary support in this book. Number 8 is reasonable but is not proved by the cards, which only show that both are the same place in the series with a different label. Number 10 is not merely a hypothesis, but a hypothesis that clashes with what is seen: Conver's World has a bull and a lion below and Dodal's does not, and that is enough to doubt a single linear descent.

— Case: Alice and the "Original" Deck —

Fictional case, devised to illustrate a method.

Alice buys online a deck advertised as an "original Marseille Tarot, with antique inscriptions." When it arrives, she opens the box and finds the cards with labels in French, a booklet in several languages and bright colors. She likes the look, but she has spent two days reading that "the original" exists and does not know whether hers is. She begins to worry that she has bought a copy.

The first thing she does is ask herself what "original" means. It can mean that the design is the original, that the printing is of the period, or that it is the first edition of that restoration. They are three different claims, and the word in the advertisement does not distinguish among them. She decides that the question, as she formulates it, cannot be answered, and she changes it for another that can: which of the two antique copies does my deck match, and where does it depart?

She takes three cards, the Fool, Judgment and the World, and compares them with the witnesses. On her Fool she reads the label "LE MAT" and sees no clear numeral. On her World she reads "XXI" and "LE MONDE"; below, on the left, a horned head and, on the right, a lion with a mane; in the left margin there is no vertical inscription. From these data she concludes that her deck does not match the Dodal witness in the Fool or the World, and that it does match Conver's in both.

Alice then turns to the clues of restoration. She looks at the outlines: they are uniform, without a single tremor. She looks at the colors: flat, bright, overrunning no line. She looks at the labels: they are evenly spaced, and in Judgment she reads a spelling different from the one the Dodal witness has. The cardboard is clean and all the cards measure exactly the same. There is an edition copyright line on the box. Four clues out of five point to a modern edition, and the fifth, the composition, indicates that it follows Conver's model closely.

She does not say "it is a copy" or "it is original." On the first page of her notebook she writes a three-line entry, with the degree of each statement:

- Card fact: the Fool is labeled "LE MAT" and the World carries a bull and a lion below, like the Conver witness, and unlike Dodal's.
- Card fact, pending the catalog: uniform outline and flat colors, clues of a modern edition.
- Hypothesis: it is a restoration based on a model close to Conver's; to confirm it, she would have to read the publisher's information, which is on the box and in the booklet.

With three cards she cannot state which of the copies her deck follows exactly, and she notes that. But they are enough to rule out that it is a replica of Dodal, and the entry is enough for her to begin reading without the feeling of having bought something of lesser value. What she has in her hands is a modern deck of an antique model; for learning to look, it serves just as well.

When she finishes, she adds a fourth line with the task that remains: to compare the rest of her cards with the witnesses as the book presents them, and to note each discrepancy with its card number. It is work of weeks, not of an afternoon, and she does not need to finish it to begin reading.

A simple lesson follows from the case: a badly posed question, like "is it original?", is exchanged for another that can be answered with the cards in front of you, and the answer is always written with its degree of certainty.