

# RESTORATION OF THE TAROT OF MARSEILLES



The Restoration of the Tarot of Marseilles is a scientific study which was undertaken several years ago by Alexandre JODOROWSKY and Philippe CAMOIN. "The quasi-totality of Tarots throughout the world were copied from the structure of the Tarot of Marseilles", notes the latter. The essential goal of their search : to retrieve the symbols, the vocation and the original meaning of this monument of western culture." The Tarot is the key to all of western esoterism", wrote Helena-Petrovna BLAVATSKY.

Nicolas CONVER was a carver at the king's court. In 1760, he carved on pear-tree wood the plates of the Tarot of Marseilles bearing his name, and founded the factory which later became the House of CAMOIN. His Tarot of Marseilles was once considered by experts to be the reflection of perfection. Today, the Tarot of Marseilles by Alexandre JODOROWSKY and Philippe CAMOIN is something more than that. However, the Nicolas CONVER deck remains the inevitable reference of ancient Tarots.

In 1998, movie director Alexandre JODOROWSKY and Master Card & Maker Philippe CAMOIN accomplished the task of restoring the TAROT of MARSEILLE. Their research led to discoveries: secrets "hidden" for centuries.

Legendary film director, master of Tarot, scriptwriter for comic strips and novelist Alexandre Jodorowsky has studied the Tarot for over 40 years. He says: "that since, the Tarot of Marseille is the only Tarot of reference for which I have studied for over 20 years now." Alexandre Jodorowsky decided to restore the Original Tarot with Philippe Camoin because and he goes on to say "knowing secret facts regarding its history, manufacturing, tradition, symbolism and having the original moulding plates meant we were the only ones who could properly restore the Original Tarot of Marseille."

Philippe Camoin has studied symbolism since the age of 14. "I grew up with the Tarot. In my bedroom, as a child, the only pictures on the bedroom walls were the 78 arcana of Nicolas Conver's Tarot of Marseille, who founded what later became the Camoin House."

The so-called "Tarots of Marseilles" in use in the 20th century have, unfortunately, nothing to do with the Tradition. It was high time that Philippe Camoin, heir of the Camoin House, in collaboration with Alexandre Jodorowsky brought the veritable Tradition in use throughout the centuries back to the light of day.

"The colors in the Tarots of Marseilles in use in the 20th century were copied on the patterns of a Camoin deck printed in 1880 and whose colors are a unique faux pas in the history of Tarot Tradition. Indeed, in 1880, the advent of industrial machines brings the Camoin House to use

four-color printing machines instead of the traditional technique. Before those times, colors were stencilled in. With that technique, five, six or seven colors could easily be used. Farther back in time, hand-painted decks had many more colors to them.

But in 1880, the new industrial age's production imperatives cut the number of colors down to four. A new Tarot of Marseilles deck is then released by the Camoin House: all colors now differ from those used over centuries. Since that particular deck, all Tarots of Marseilles copied that color pattern.

These 1880 colors have travelled the world. Did the Tarot of Marseilles have to lose its meaning between 1880 and 1998 ? Did it have to remain hidden to the layman for over a century ? In the 20th century, could it only summon the memory of a splendor passed for fortune-tellers and a long lost legend for the neophyte ?

The colors copied on my family's 1880 deck have no connection with the Tradition. It is pure fantasy. They have been invented for compatibility with the machines. There is no interest in them, even if a large number of authors have tried to find occult meanings in what had none. I therefore strongly advise you to work on the colors of the deck which I have restored with Alexandre JODOROWSKY if you want to find the real Source of Tarot."

"Few ancient decks still exist today, yet many must have existed in Marseilles before 1700. If one refers to ancient books, card games are mentioned in the 1337 charters of St Victor's Abbey in Marseilles. Master cardmakers were present in Marseilles long before the king endorsed them in 1631. Very ancient Tarots of Marseilles disappeared as a result of people recycling used cards into business cards.

The fact that no Tarots of Marseilles prior to 1700 can be found absolutely does not mean that the Tarot first appeared in Italy just because one deck dating back to 1471 was found there. The two schools have nothing to do with each other. The Marseilles school incorporates just about every occult science in the West and some in the East, whereas the Italian school bears a more simplified message. Nor does it prove that much more complex Tarots besides the ones that we know of today did not exist earlier in Italy. The only thing we can acknowledge is that the two schools are very different in their content. Therefore, there must have existed a tradition other than the two schools it inspired.

In my opinion, an ancient school of Tarot has always existed in the South of France, especially in the Marseilles area, France's gate to the Orient. The City of Marseilles was founded 2600 years ago and over the centuries the city has been influenced by all mediterranean cultures because of its privileged geographical situation."

***Philippe CAMOIN***

**NICOLAS CONVER**  
**Master cardmaker in 1760**  
**Founder of the Camoin House**

Nicolas CONVER engraved in 1760 the most famous and the most respected of ancient Tarot of Marseilles decks. He then founded the Conver factory which later became the House of CAMOIN, after Jean-Baptiste CAMOIN married one of the company's daughters.

Experts acknowledge that the features engraved by Nicolas CONVER on the pear-wood plates, which were then used to print the Tarot of Marseilles, reach a perfection of sorts. Yet wood-carving entails constraints and errors which can nowadays be avoided by computers.

The numerological encryptions form an almost intact whole, and even though many alchemichal symbols had disappeared by Conver's time, enough remained to reestablish a link with other Tarots and reconstitute the puzzle.

The 1880 Camoin Edition of the Tarot of Marseilles was a turning point in the history of Tarot Tradition. It was actually the Nicolas Conver deck (1760) whose colors were modified. New industrial machines in 1880 only allowed four colors at the most, and the House of Camoin ended up modifying the colors of the Conver deck. One only finds red, blue, yellow, black and very little green in the Camoin edition of 1880 and they are almost all out of alignment. This change influenced the 20th century decks, which perfunctorily copied these colors or approximations thereof, which uinfortunately have very little left to do with the Tradition.

## **Marseille's card-masters for more than 240 years**

From 1760 to 1971 the family Camoin's history appears to be the last saga of the Marseille card-masters. In the 18th century Nicolas Conver appears in the city's card-maker circle.

The then-flourishing industry started to decline in the 19th century. Only two card-masters survived, one of whom was Jean Baptiste Camoin, successor of Conver in 1861. At the arrival of the industrial era, mechanical methods began to take the place of craftsmanship. By 1878 the factory of Jean Baptiste Camoin was the only one left. Fifty-five workers were employed in the Rue d'Aubagne workshop: state-of-the-art tools allowed them to produce more than a million games per year for the French and foreign production. The factory gained 45% of the national market. Later his son Antoine took over and the workshop, which became too small, was left for a factory in Marseille's Capelette section in 1886. The factory took over the African market and had a virtual monopoly in the Spanish card market. Sales to countries all around the Mediterranean - Algeria (its most important client), Egypt, Turkey and Tunisia - caused the factory to triple its production.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the factory's market was worldwide. The Camoin signature was found among others on Lebanese, Syrian, Indochinese, Saigon and Singaporean cards. Bangkok became one of the best Oriental clients. A Silver medal at the Universal Exhibition in 1900 and a degree from the colonial show in 1906 confirm the work's quality and the economical growth of the business. Then World War II, the loss of Indochina, then Morocco and Algeria, foreign competition and the prohibition of games in the Far East brought the factory into decline. However, the Camoin House continued its activities. But following the death of Philippe Camoin's father, the factory closed in 1971. At this time the family bestowed to the city of Marseille the priceless legacy of the last card-master: the Camoin Donation.

In 1998, one year before Marseille's 26th centennial, Philippe Camoin, co-author the Tarot of Marseille's restoration, opened again the card-masters history book with the creation of a publishing house of the same name.

***Text by Annie Viale Translation by Martine Besseteaux***

## **Marseille inherits the legacy of the last card-masters.**

Original cards and cards from various periods, tools used for deck-making for more than two hundred years were about to be sold to private owners and dispersed all over France. The Camoin House (Marseille's last cardmaker) and associates did not wish this. It was quite a present for the city of Marseille to receive by inheritance in 1971 the legacy of the last card-game factory which had closed its doors.

In 1975, the precious collection went to the Old-Marseille Museum at the Diamond House (16th century) located behind City Hall. French and foreign cards make up the factory's economic history: the Tarot, the "To-Tom" game used in North Vietnam, the "Three Chrysanthemums" of Haiphong, the 19th century cards...

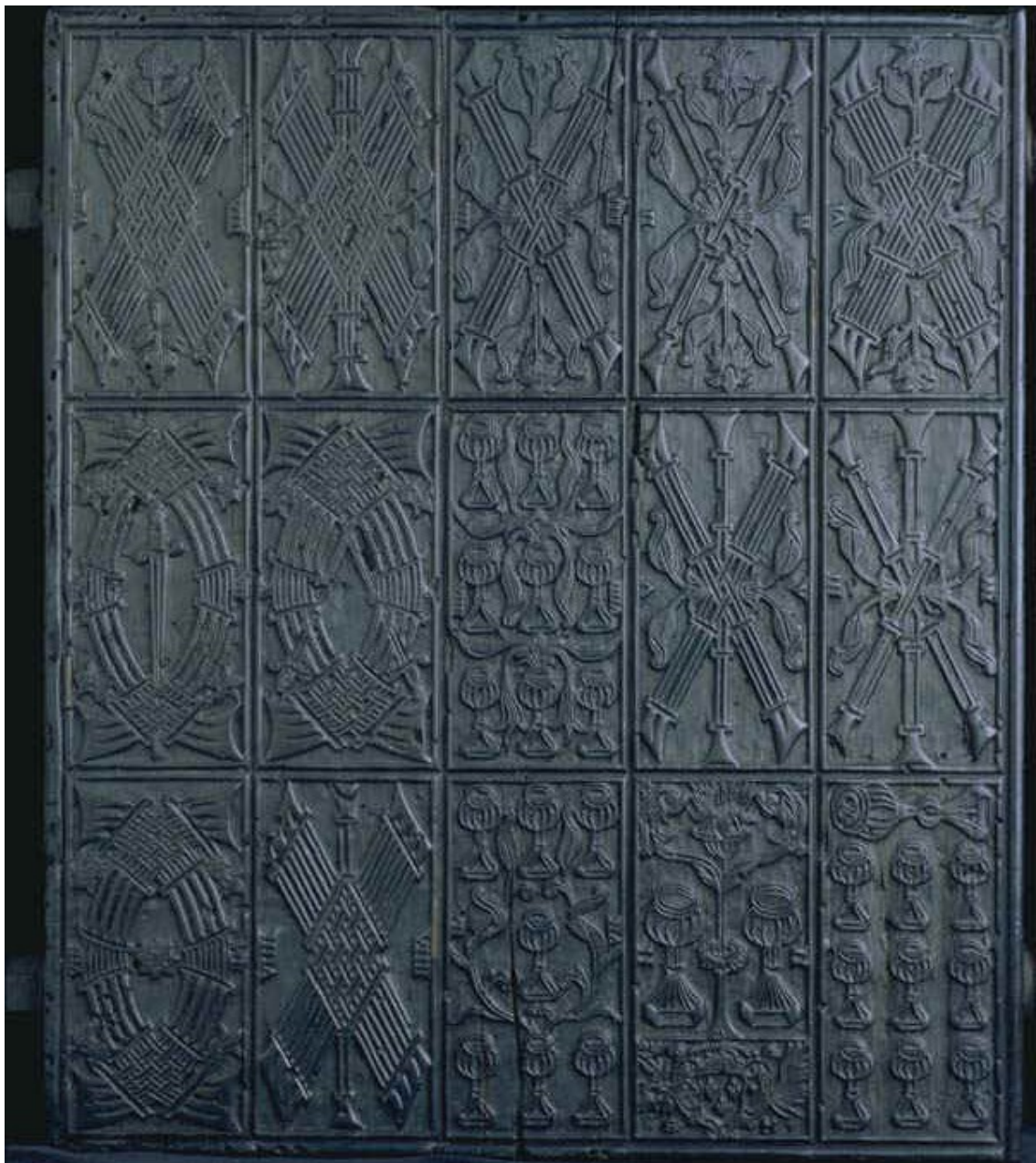
Around one hundred objects and archives complete this donation: Nicolas Conver's plates for the Tarot of Marseille, typographic wood-plates for printing french card portraits and various tools used by the woodcutter workers. Small and large scissors, gouges, planes, "agathes" used for cutting, rounding and polishing the corners of the cards make up the various tools since the factory's creation in 1760. A 1861 Camoin workshop painting depicts a typical scene in the card factory. This precious document shows the shift from the era of the card-masters to that of machines and mass production.

Closed to the public for several years, the Old-Marseille Museum will open again in 2001. Do not miss this collection for all playing cards amateur and collector.

***French text by Annie Viale. Translation by Martine Besseteaux***

**PEAR-WOOD PLATE FROM NICOLAS CONVER (1760)**























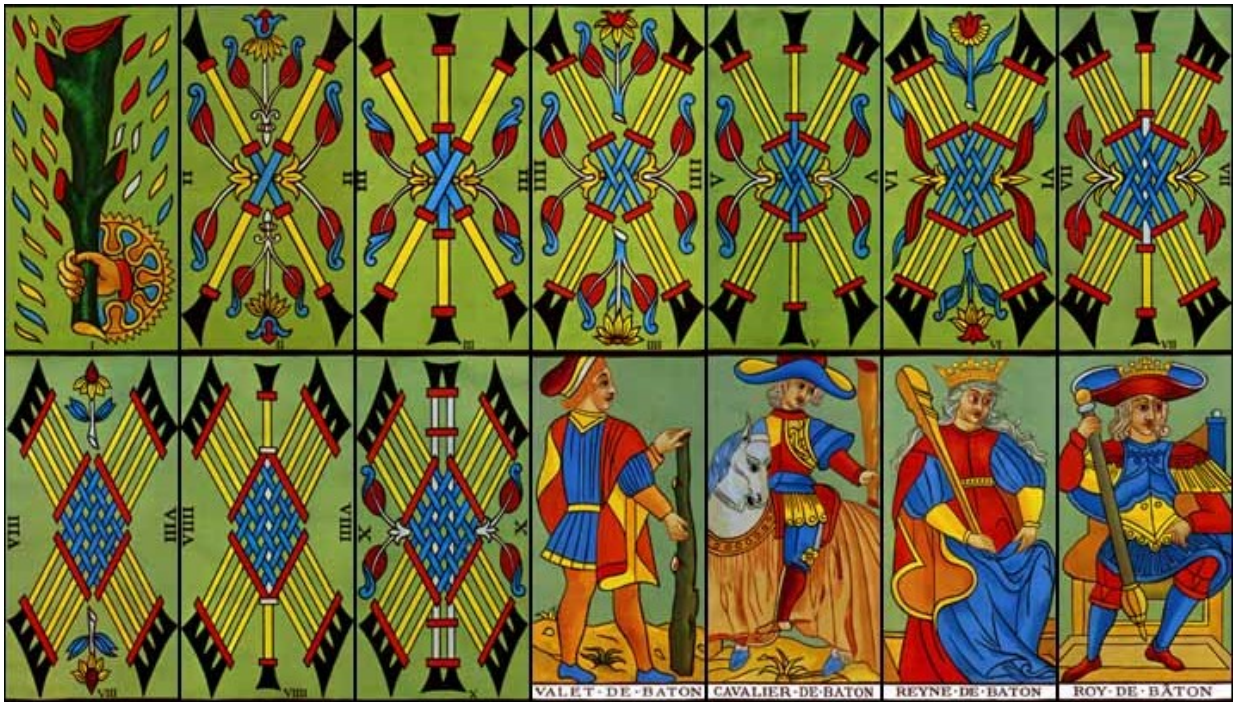






LE BATELEUR	LA PAPESSE	L'IMPERATRICE	L'EMPEREUR	LE PAPE	L'AMOUREUX	LE CHARIOT
LA JUSTICE	L'HERMITE	LA ROUE FORTUNE	LA FORGE	LE PENDU	TEMPERANCE	TEMPERANCE
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