

# The Moon Card of the Tarot Deck May Reprise an Ancient Amuletic Design Against the Evil Eye

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**Abstract.** This paper proposes a novel source for –or at least influence on– the iconography of the Moon trump in the Rider-Waite Tarot deck, which preserves the design from the Tarot de Marseille. In fact, the Moon template appears to date back to the earliest days of the Tarot. The proposed source or prototype is a Greco-Roman talismanic design against the Evil Eye known as the “all-suffering eye”, which frequently occupies the reverse face of Byzantine copper/bronze “Holy Rider” amulets. The paper identifies compositional elements that correspond in the Evil Eye and Moon card designs, presents reasons why the moon and the Evil Eye might have been thought of as cognates, and considers other likely inputs into the Moon card’s visual program.

**Keywords:** Tarot History; Evil Eye; Apotropaic Devices; Byzantine Magical Amulets; Amulets; Talismans.

[es] La carta de la Luna del Tarot puede repetir un antiguo diseño de amuleto contra el mal de ojo

**Resumen.** Este artículo propone una fuente novedosa para –o al menos una influencia en– la iconografía de la carta de La Luna en la baraja del Tarot Rider-Waite, que conserva el diseño del Tarot de Marsella. De hecho, la plantilla de La Luna parece remontarse a los primeros días del Tarot. La fuente o prototipo propuesto es un diseño de talismán grecorromano contra el mal de ojo (aojo) conocido como el “ojo que sufre todo”, que con frecuencia ocupa el reverso de los amuletos bizantinos de cobre/bronce del tipo “Holy Rider”. El artículo identifica elementos de composición que corresponden en los diseños de mal de ojo y de la carta de La Luna, presenta las razones por las que la luna y el mal de ojo podrían haber sido considerados como cognados, y considera otras posibles entradas en el programa visual de la carta de La Luna.

**Palabras clave:** historia del Tarot; aojo; mal de ojo; dispositivos apotropaicos; amuletos mágicos bizantinos; amuletos; talismanes.

**Summary.** 1. Introduction. 2. The Moon Card. 3. The “All-suffering Eye” Template. 4. Other Influences. 5. The Evil Eye and the Moon. 6. Conclusions. 7. Written sources and bibliographical references.

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## 1. Introduction

The power of the esoteric imagery in the Tarot cards has long been recognised, with Carl Jung claiming that the trump cards may represent archetypes of the human unconscious mind.<sup>2</sup> The most influential Tarot pack of recent times is the Rider-Waite deck, which first appeared in London in 1909. For many years this was the only Tarot readily available, and it now enjoys near-canonical status among modern decks<sup>3</sup>.

The origin of the iconography on Tarot cards is a matter of interest to people from many walks of life, ranging from art historians to Jungian psychologists and from students of alchemical emblems to practising occultists. The present paper examines the iconography of the Moon card, one of the more enigmatic trumps in the Rider-Waite deck, and proposes for it a source –or at least an influence– that has not hitherto been suggested.

The argument of the paper is as follows. Visual similarities of structure and form are noted between the

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<sup>2</sup> Claire Douglas (ed.), *Visions: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1930-1934 by C.G. Jung*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 923; Carl G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, transl. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Tom T. Little, “The TarotL Tarot History Information Sheet”, The Hermitage, published 2001, accessed November 27, 2002, [www.tarothermit.com/infosheet.htm](http://www.tarothermit.com/infosheet.htm)

imagery of the Moon card (Section 2) and that of an ancient amulet against the Evil Eye (Section 3). Other potential inputs into the iconography of the Moon card are also acknowledged in passing (Section 4). The image-based similarities noted in Sections 2 and 3 suggest that the Evil Eye design inspired – or at least contributed to – the iconography of the Moon card (Section 5). Having recognised the image-based similarities, the meanings of the Evil Eye amulet and Moon card are compared to see if there are any overlaps that would support the proposed historical influence of the former on the latter. The finding is that there are in fact deep-seated and widespread cultural connections between the moon and the Evil Eye (Section 5). The paper concludes by noting that the proposed correspondence between the moon in the card’s iconography and the Evil Eye in the amuletic design is consistent with the negative interpretation of the Moon card in Tarot cartomancy (Section 6).

## 2. The Moon Card

The imagery on the Moon card of the Rider-Waite deck – trump no. 18 in the Major Arcana – is shown in Fig. 1a. In this scene, “a full moon hangs in the sky over a surreal dream-like landscape. Two dogs tip back their heads and howl, while a crab crawls out of a pool. Two mysterious and slightly sinister towers rise in the distance”<sup>4</sup>.

In terms of cartomancy, A.E. Waite’s *Pictorial Key to the Tarot* asserts that the Moon card represents the “life of the imagination apart from life of the spirit”<sup>5</sup>. Waite took a negative view of the canines that are engaged in “baying at the moon”, observing that “The path between the towers is the issue into the unknown. The dog and wolf are the fears of the natural mind in the presence of that place of exit”<sup>6</sup>. In this scenario, the canine duo are not barking in excitement but rather howling in fear. Consistent with this, the Moon card “has often been interpreted as a card of evil omen, whether upright or reversed”<sup>7</sup>. The instructions that accompany the modern Rider-Waite deck say that the card signifies “Hidden enemies, danger, calumny, darkness, terror, deception, error”<sup>8</sup>.

The visual template under consideration long predates the Rider-Waite Tarot<sup>9</sup>; it is, for example, present in the Marseille deck (Fig. 1b)<sup>10</sup>, which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>11</sup>. A very similar design appears

in the Cary sheet from early 16<sup>th</sup>-century Milan, which suggests that the template “dates back to the very earliest days of the tarot”<sup>12</sup>. However, little is known of the origins of the design. The water-body presumably alludes to the influence of the moon on the ocean in the form of the tides, but the almost heraldic flanking of the moon by two quadrupeds who face each other and the central position of the vertical – and somewhat scorpion-like – crustacean require explanation.

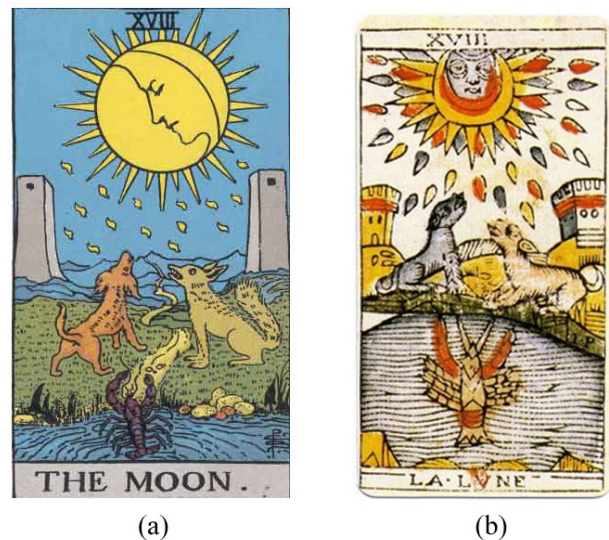


Figure 1. Tarot Moon cards. (a) Rider-Waite deck, 1909; design by Pamela Coleman Smith; (b) Marseille deck, Jean Dodal, Lyon, 1701-1715. Sources: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, accessed June 5, 2021, at (a) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:RWS\\_Tarot\\_18\\_Moon.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:RWS_Tarot_18_Moon.jpg) and (b) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean\\_Dodal\\_Tarot\\_trump\\_18.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_Dodal_Tarot_trump_18.jpg).

## 3. The “All-suffering Eye” Template

One possible source of Moon card imagery lies in an ancient talismanic design against the Evil Eye<sup>13</sup>, which frequently occupies the reverse face of Byzantine copper/bronze Holy Rider amulets. The design is often referred to as the “all-suffering eye” because it shows the

<sup>4</sup> Jane Lyle, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Tarot* (London: Chancellor/Bounty/Octopus, 2001), 58.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur E. Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*, illustr. Pamela Coleman Smith (New York: University Books, 1910/1959), 140.

<sup>6</sup> Waite, *Pictorial Key*, 140. It seems reasonable to suppose that the dog represents the domestic aspect of the human mind while the wolf represents its wild aspect; either way, both creatures are agitated.

<sup>7</sup> Lyle, *Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 59.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Games Systems, *The Rider Tarot Deck: Instructions* (Stamford, CT: U.S. Games Systems Inc., 1971), 16; the attributes are excerpted from Waite, *Pictorial Key*, 286.

<sup>9</sup> Tom T. Little, “The History of the Moon Card”, The Hermitage, published 1999, accessed November 27, 2002, [www.tarothermit.com/moon.htm](http://www.tarothermit.com/moon.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Lyle, *Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 59 (figure).

<sup>11</sup> Tom T. Little, “The Classification of Tarot Designs”, The Hermitage, published 1999, accessed December 3, 2002, [www.tarothermit.com/](http://www.tarothermit.com/)

[lineage.htm](#). Little, “History of the Moon Card”, notes that “The old Italian decks, outside the influence of the Tarot de Marseille, show completely different scenes on the card”. Typically these show either astronomers or allegorical moon-maidens, and do not concern us here.

<sup>12</sup> Little, “History of the Moon Card”; Tarot History, “The Mysterious Cary Sheet”, accessed June 5, 2021, <http://www.tarohistory.com/cary.html>; Yale University Library, “Cary Collection of Playing Cards”, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/11032228>

<sup>13</sup> For background information on the Evil Eye and defences against it, see for example: Jadwiga Kubińska “Défense Contre le Mauvais Oeil en Syrie et en Asie Mineure”, *Archeologia* [Warsaw] 43 (1992): 125-128; James Russell, “The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period”, in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 35-50; Antón Alvar Nuño, *Envidia y Fascinación: El Mal de Ojo en el Occidente Romano* (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2012).

Evil Eye being attacked by a variety of animals<sup>14</sup>; the complete medallion/pendant is sometimes called “Solomon’s seal” as it may bear this name in its Greek captions<sup>15</sup>. Such amulets were particularly popular in the 5-7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (Fig. 2)<sup>16</sup>. In the words of Christopher Faraone: “The most familiar ancient amulet against the evil eye was an image of the ‘all-suffering eye’ (*ho polupathês ophthalmos*), which appears, for example, on the early Byzantine medallion in Fig. 6 [here Fig. 3a]. A stylized eye sits at the centre of the composition surrounded by attackers: heraldic lions from the sides, an ibis, a snake and a scorpion from below, and three daggers from above. [...] Some of these amulets show a trident [...] above the eye instead of knives”<sup>17</sup>, and sometimes both appear<sup>18</sup>. At the bottom of the design may lie a supine figure (Fig. 3a); this is usually taken to be the demoness Abyzou, an emanation from or personification of the primeval ocean – now located in the netherworld and associated with death – whose name is cognate with the English word “Abyss”<sup>19</sup>. Her identification with the ocean is reinforced by her fish-like lower body<sup>20</sup>.

The apotropaic template dates back at least to early Roman imperial times and was widely diffused. Even by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, the motif was known as far afield as Britain, where it features as a relief on a building façade<sup>21</sup>; it also appears in a wall-painting in the Monastery of St. Apollo in Bawit, Egypt<sup>22</sup>, which has many Coptic frescoes from the 6-7<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Byzantine amulets probably originate in Syria, but examples have been found not only there and in modern-day Israel but also in western Anatolia and Carthage<sup>23</sup>. Variants of the

design abound<sup>24</sup>. On some amulets of this type, the lion is taken by commentators to be “a trained quadruped that looks like a dog or a wolf”<sup>25</sup>. In the version on a Roman domestic mosaic found in modern-day Turkey, the rearing quadruped on the right is unambiguously a dog (Fig. 4a)<sup>26</sup>, while the motif on an engraved carnelian gem has three dogs, two of which rear up (from left and right) toward the central eye<sup>27</sup>. As Faraone observes, the “scorpion and other non-mammals are usually placed below [the eye], the dog on the right side and the lion on the left”<sup>28</sup>. If both of the quadrupeds are taken to be canines<sup>29</sup>, and Abyzou at bottom centre is allowed to transform back into the ocean, and the scorpion is replaced by a similar-looking crustacean which emerges from that ocean, then we have the exact constellation found on the Tarot Moon card, with the moon taking the place of the eye. Waite’s description of the card’s iconography even recapitulates the dreaded Abyzou by referring to the water-body as “the deeps, the nameless and hideous tendency[,...] the abyss of water”<sup>30</sup>.



Figure 2. “All-suffering eye” designs on bronze Byzantine Holy Rider amulets from Israel, 5-6<sup>th</sup> century CE. (a) Baltimore, Walters Art Museum 54.2653. (b) Amulet from Arbel, Galilee. The Greek caption in both cases reads *Eis Theos*, “The one God [overcomes the evil].” Sources: (a) Walters Art Museum, CC0, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/22369/amuletic-pendant/>; (b) Dafna Gazit, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 25-62 and Pls. 1-6, at 60 and 62; Karen B. Stern, “Mapping Devotion in Roman Dura Europos: A Reconsideration of the Synagogue Ceiling”, *American Journal of Archaeology* 114, no. 3 (2010): 473-504, at 487 and Figure 8, left; Christopher A. Faraone, “The Amuletic Design of the Mithraic Bull-Wounding Scene”, *Journal of Roman Studies* 103 (2013): 96-116, at 104; Véronique Dasen “Probaskania: Amulets and Magic in Antiquity”, in *The Materiality of Magic*, eds. Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 177-204, at 181-184.

<sup>15</sup> Gustave Schlumberger “Amulettes Byzantins Anciens, Destinés à Combattre les Maléfices et Maladies”, *Revue des Études Grecques* 5, no. 17 (1892): 73-93, at 74, <https://doi.org/10.3406/reg.1892.5535>; Vicky A. Foskolou, “The Magic of the Written Word: The Evidence of Inscriptions on Byzantine Magical Amulets”, *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* [Bulletin of the Christian Archaeological Society, Athens] 35 (2014): 329-348, at 339, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/dchae.1761>

<sup>16</sup> Foskolou, “Magic”, 339. For the recent history of Fig. 2b, see Rossella Tercatín, “Jewish Amulet Against ‘Evil Eye’ Offers Insight into Talmudic Israel Life”, *Jerusalem Post*, May 26, 2021, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/archaeology/amulet-against-evil-eye-offers-look-at-jewish-life-in-talmudic-israel-669202>

<sup>17</sup> Faraone, “Amuletic Design”, 104. Faraone’s interpretation follows that of Schlumberger, “Amulettes Byzantins Anciens”, 74.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Schlumberger, “Amulettes Byzantins Anciens”, 82.

<sup>19</sup> A.A. Barb, “Antaura: The Mermaid and the Devil’s Grandmother – A Lecture”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): 1-23, at 2-7; Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets”, 33, 37-38, 41 and 61-62.

<sup>20</sup> Barb, “Antaura”, 6-7 and 9.

<sup>21</sup> Faraone, “Amuletic Design”, 105-106 (incl. Figure 8).

<sup>22</sup> Barb, “Antaura”, 6-7 and Pl. 5a.

<sup>23</sup> Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets”, 62.

<sup>24</sup> It may even have contributed to the otherwise Egyptian-style iconography on the 5<sup>th</sup>-century CE  $\alpha\epsilon\omega$ -palindrome amulet from Nea Paphos in Cyprus; Lloyd D. Graham, “The Iconography on the Paphos *IAEW*-Amulet May Draw Upon the Apotropaic ‘All-Suffering Eye’ Motif”, *Academia Letters* (2021), article 1256, <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL1256>

<sup>25</sup> Schlumberger, “Amulettes Byzantins Anciens”, 76.

<sup>26</sup> Faraone, “Amuletic Design”, 105 and 107 (Figure 9).

<sup>27</sup> Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database, “Magical Gem in a Post-Antique Ring: Evil Eye, Animals”, CBd-2221, accessed June 5, 2021, <http://cbd.mfab.hu/cbd/2221/?sid=1>

<sup>28</sup> Faraone, “Amuletic Design”, 107.

<sup>29</sup> As solar creatures, lions would not be appropriate in a design associated with the Moon, such as the Tarot Moon card. In any case, the replacement of lions by wolves and then dogs might be expected to occur over the centuries as the world became increasingly domesticated and urbanised (as witnessed by the presence of the two towers in the Moon card design).

<sup>30</sup> Waite, *Pictorial Key*, 140-143.

<sup>31</sup> Permission via Atalya Fadida, Visual Archives, June 2021.

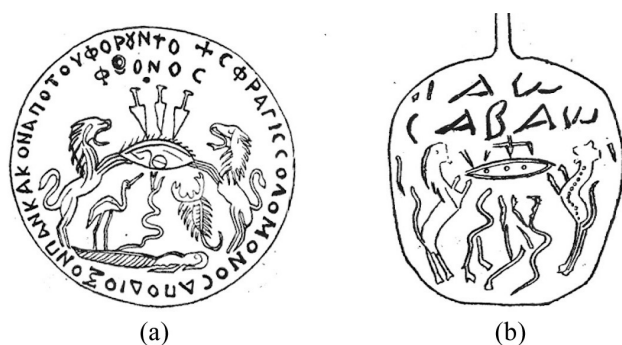


Figure 3. “All-suffering eye” designs on Byzantine medallions, 6-7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. (a) Silvered copper, acquired in Smyrna (modern Turkey); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles, Schlumberger.68; the encircling Greek legend reads “Seal of Solomon, drive away all evil from the wearer” and above the eye is the caption *phthonos*, “envy.” (b) Bronze, acquired in Beirut. The Greek caption reads *Iao Sabao[th]*, traditionally translated as “Lord of Hosts.” Sources: Public domain, via (a) Schlumberger, “Amulettes Byzantins Anciens,” 74 (no. 1) = Foskolou, “Magic,” 339 (Figure 9) = Faraone “Amuletic Design,” 104 (Figure 6); (b) Schlumberger, “Amulettes Byzantins Anciens,” 82 (no. 10).

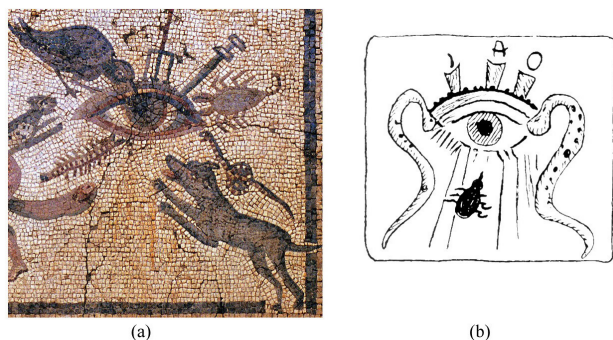


Figure 4. Variants of the “all-suffering eye” template. (a) Detail of an apotropaic mosaic from a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century CE Roman house in Antioch (near modern Antakya, Turkey). (b) Sketch of a roof-tile from the synagogue of Dura-Europos, Syria (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE), after that of the Comte du Mesnil du Buisson. Sources: Public domain, via (a) Wikimedia Commons, accessed June 5, 2021, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antiochia\\_-\\_House\\_of\\_the\\_Evil\\_Eye.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antiochia_-_House_of_the_Evil_Eye.jpg); (b) Du Mesnil du Buisson, *Les Peintures de la Synagogue de Doura-Europos, 245-256 après J.-C.* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1939), 136 (Figure 96.1) = Stern, “Mapping Devotion,” 488 (Figure 8 left) = Faraone, “Amuletic Design,” 105 (Figure 7).

In a roof-tile from the synagogue at Dura Europa<sup>32</sup>, the heraldic creatures flanking the central eye have transformed into two snakes whose outlines could easily morph into the two towers flanking the moon on the Tarot card (Fig. 4b). Equally, in Fig. 2b one can see the bird and snake that usually flank the scorpion losing clarity relative to their depictions in Fig. 2a; it would take little to reimagine their outlines as the edges of a water-body from which the segmented creature – now a crustacean – crawls upwards. The

loss of definition in the bird/snake pair is even further advanced in Fig. 3b.

In both the Marseille and Rider-Waite cards (Fig. 1), the orb of the Moon is shown stellate, i.e. surrounded by sharp spiked emanations that indicate the radiation of light. This attribute is unusual, normally being the prerogative of the sun and the stars, but the sharp spikes would accord well with the knives and trident prongs that surround the central feature in “the all-suffering eye” talisman.

On medallions, the “all-suffering eye” design is often surmounted by explicit lunar and solar emblems, with lunar ones predominating<sup>33</sup>. If the design’s central symbol were to be identified with the moon, then the replacement of the scorpion with a visually similar crustacean would be especially understandable because the moon rules the Zodiacal sign of Cancer, whose animal is a crab, lobster or crayfish<sup>34</sup>. Some magical gems depict this pairing (Fig. 5). Cancer is also the cardinal sign of the Water trigon, of which Scorpio – the scorpion – is the fixed sign<sup>35</sup>, so a scorpion/crustacean equivalence seems to be intrinsic to astrological iconography.

#### 4. Other Influences

The Moon card design (Fig. 1) is an entity of manifold meaning that undoubtedly draws upon multiple sources<sup>36</sup>, not just on a single template. Vignettes of Cancer in late 15<sup>th</sup>-century French “Books of Hours”, which feature elongated crustaceans in landscapes and riverine settings, constitute one likely influence, even though the shellfish are usually set horizontally and the moon is absent<sup>37</sup>. Sometimes these images show buildings on distant hills, a possible inspiration for the Moon card’s towers. Beyond their obvious role as an architectural echo of the two canines, the card’s two towers may also owe something to the two hills in forerunners of the alchemical frontispiece to *The Hermetical Triumph* (Fig. 6)<sup>38</sup>. The emblem presents the “mutual Correspondence betwixt the Heavens and the Earth, by means of the Sun and Moon”<sup>39</sup>, so it contains at least some lunar symbolism. As a Triumph, the image is already a trump (in the sense of “trump card”) since these two words are etymological cognates. The visual influence could equally run in the opposite direction, i.e. from the Tarot card to the alchemical emblem.

<sup>33</sup> Schlumberger, “Amulettes Byzantins Anciens”, 76-78.

<sup>34</sup> Jessica Savage, “June’s Zodiac Sign and ‘Lobster-Like’ Crabs”, Index of Medieval Art (blog), published June 21, 2016, accessed Jun 5, 2021, <https://ima.princeton.edu/2016/06/21/junes-zodiac-sign-lobster-like-crabs/>

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Alan Richardson, *The Magician’s Tables: A Complete Book of Correspondences* (London: Godsfeld/ Octopus, 2007), 111.

<sup>36</sup> Jung, *Archetypes*, 38.

<sup>37</sup> Iolon, “La Luna – The Moon”, *The Tarot Wheel*, published 2021, accessed Jun 5, 2021, <https://tarotwheel.net/history/the%20individual%20trump%20cards/la%20luna.html>

<sup>38</sup> Adam McLean, “Hermetic Triumph – General Explication of the Emblem”, *The Alchemy Web Site*, accessed Jun 5, 2021, <https://www.alchemywebsite.com/triumph3.html>

<sup>39</sup> Alexandre-Toussaint de Limojon de Saint-Didier, *Le Triomphe Hermetique, ou La Pierre Philosophale Victorieuse* (Amsterdam: Henry Wetstein, 1689), text (“The General Explication of the Embleme”) between p. xxvi and p.1.

<sup>32</sup> Stern, “Mapping Devotion”, 487-488 (incl. Figure 8, left).



Figure 5. Crab crawling up toward crescent moon. (a) 1<sup>st</sup>- to 3<sup>rd</sup>-century CE carnelian gem from Tartus, Syria; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles, de Clercq.3498; (b) 2<sup>nd</sup>-century CE Roman coin from Alexandria, Egypt; BnF – Département Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques 1966.453. Sources: Images courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, via (a) Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database, “Magical Gem: Crab, Crescent, Star”, CBd-3783; accessed June 5, 2021, <http://cbd.mfab.hu/cbd/3783/?sid=1>; (b) Gallica, “Monnaie: Bronze, Antonin le Pieux, Égypte, Alexandrie”, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b103135121/f2.item>.

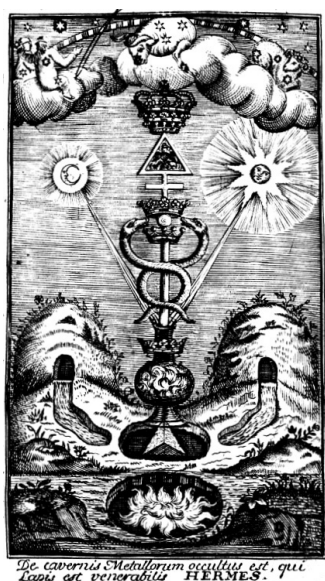


Figure 6. The Hermetical Triumph. The emblem is the frontispiece to de Limojon de Saint-Didier, *Le Triomphe Hermetique* (1689). Source: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, accessed June 5, 2021, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Hermetic\\_Triumph.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Hermetic_Triumph.jpg).

## 5. The Evil Eye and the Moon

Byzantine magical amulets, including those that feature the “all-suffering eye” template against the Evil Eye, have “periodically attracted the attention of scholars from Renaissance times to the present”<sup>40</sup>. Specimens are likely to have been present in the curiosity cabinets of the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century Italian and

French nobility, the milieu in which the current Moon card design first arose. Moreover, talismanic devices to deflect the Evil Eye have long-standing links with the moon<sup>41</sup>, making the “all-suffering eye” a natural inspiration for Moon card iconography. Referring to Judges 8:21, which reads “Gideon [...] took the crescents that were on the necks of their camels”, Frederick Ellworthy – author of *The Evil Eye* – wrote: “Who can doubt that those ornaments were the exact prototypes of the identical half-moons we now put upon our harness? We shall see later that these have ever been among the most potent amulets against the evil eye”<sup>42</sup>. Similarly, W.L. Hildburgh observed that “Lunar crescents, as amulets, have in Spain two major intentions: they may be worn as preservative from the effects of “evil eye” (*mal de ojo*, *aojo*), ‘fascination,’ and the like, as caused by persons; or as similarly preservative from a kind of lunar influence which, in the popular mind, seems to be closely associated with *mal de ojo*”<sup>43</sup>.

One root of the apotropaic moon/eye nexus may lie in the ancient Egyptian *Wedjat* (Eye of Horus) amulet<sup>44</sup>, which “represented the waxing and waning of the moon, and served as a metaphor for protection, strength and perfection”<sup>45</sup>. In the modern-day Middle East, Balkans, Turkey and North Africa, the Evil Eye is thought to be effectively repelled by the *nazar*, an eye-like amulet typically made from concentric circles of blue and white glass. This is an instance of “like curing like” or – more accurately – “fighting fire with fire”, for the glass ornament itself represents the Evil Eye<sup>46</sup>. If the same logic applies to the lunar emblems discussed in the previous paragraph, as seems almost certain<sup>47</sup>, then moon emblems are protective against the Evil Eye because the moon is identified with the Evil Eye<sup>48</sup>.

## 6. Conclusions

Given a deep-seated and widespread connection between the moon and the Evil Eye, it should not be too surprising if the origin of the Tarot Moon card were found, in part, to lie in a motif focused on this destructive force. Of course, if the moon in the Tarot card design is in fact identified with the Evil Eye, as it would be if it stands in

<sup>41</sup> Dasen, “Probaskania”, 189-190.

<sup>42</sup> Frederick T. Elworthy, *The Evil Eye: An Account of this Ancient and Widespread Superstition* (London: John Murray, 1895).

<sup>43</sup> W.L. Hildburgh, “Lunar Crescents as Amulets in Spain”, *Man* 42 (1942): 73-84 and Pl. D, at 73.

<sup>44</sup> Quinn Hargitai, “The Strange Power of the ‘Evil Eye’”, BBC Culture, February 19, 2018, accessed Jun 5, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180216-the-strange-power-of-the-evil-eye>

<sup>45</sup> Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 2008), 151.

<sup>46</sup> N.A. Rodríguez Marco and S. Solanas Álava, “Nazar Boncuk (The Evil Eye Amulet)”, *Archivos de la Sociedad Española de Oftalmología*, 82, no. 11 (2007): 727-728; accessed Jun 5, 2021, [http://scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0365-66912007001100014&lng=en&ndnrm=iso](http://scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0365-66912007001100014&lng=en&ndnrm=iso). Also, Hargitai, “Strange Power”.

<sup>47</sup> “Arab amulets at the present day bear the figure of the thing against which they exert their virtue, and all oriental practices in this line come down from immemorial antiquity”. Elworthy, *Evil Eye*, 133.

<sup>48</sup> Hildburgh, “Lunar Crescents”, 80-82.

<sup>40</sup> Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets”, 25.

for the “all-suffering eye” of the ancient template, then it is easy to see how the card as a whole might from the outset have carried strongly negative connotations. The surviving animals of the talismanic design – now just two quadrupeds and a crustacean – no longer attack the central orb; on the contrary, the canines howl in fear of it, and the crustacean – even were it not ruled by the

moon– is too benign and too distant to pose any real threat. As the surrogate Eye is now free to cast its baleful influence on the sublunar scene without inhibition, its “envenomed exhalations” fall to earth like a rain of poison (Fig. 1)<sup>49</sup>. It is little wonder that the Moon card of the Tarot deck has long been regarded as a card of evil omen.

## 7. Written sources and bibliographical references

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<sup>49</sup> Heliodorus of Emesa (3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century CE) referred to the projections of the Evil Eye as “envenomed exhalations”; Hargitai, “Strange Power”. Other dystopian influences behind the falling objects may include imagery from the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation 6:12-13, in which “the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale”.

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