

Cartomancy, Magic, and the Path to Modernity in Eighteenth-Century France

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Historians of magic and witchcraft had traditionally ignored the age of Enlightenment following Max Weber's claim that Europe had undergone a "de-magicification" or "disenchantment" during the early modern period that had resulted in a decline in the belief in magic and a rise in the reliance on reason and rationality. Weber's argument, therefore, resulted in view of the age of Enlightenment as a lacuna in the history of magic. However, as Ulrike Krampl and others have shown, magical beliefs and practices persisted into eighteenth-century France and remained connected with ideas about magic in the time periods before and after. Evidence from books and trial records reveals a continuity of belief at multiple levels of society from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. In addition, the same period witnessed innovation in magical thinking and the development of new practices. Traces of magic did not simply continue to find a home in the Enlightenment; instead, magic also evolved and developed in different directions showing a continued engagement with magical thinking and not just the remnants of practices at the popular level.

Magic bridged the period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century with less disruption than one might imagine. The older historiographical tradition led by Keith Thomas and others argued the eighteenth century saw the decline of magic. However, neither the rational and scientific component of the Enlightenment nor the onset of the French Revolution did much to change what people hoped to learn from practices such as divination. Instead, the uses of magic remained fairly constant. Magic was not on the edge of the Enlightenment, anti-rational, or anti-modern. Instead, those who argued for its utility explicitly suggested the *hautes sciences* were just as rational as any other part of the Enlightenment. They placed themselves within, or perhaps above, those proponents of the Enlightenment who argued for rationality rather than outside the new onrush of rationality. For practitioners who did not bother theorizing their work, divination demonstrated a utility to people and the state. Why would anyone ignore a tool that proved useful, just because it was difficult to explain? If modernity (or post-modernity) requires us to move forward and leave the irrational behind, then Bruno Latour was correct and we have never been modern. If, on the other hand, modernity includes multiple claims to rationality and how it might be applied, then the shift into the modern world can proceed, albeit with a number of detours, backtracking, hesitancy, and missteps.

This paper examines one form of divination, cartomancy (and its more elaborate offshoot Tarot), to explore the ways in which people borrowed magical ideas from previous centuries and adapted them for their own purposes in the age of Enlightenment and forward. Cartomancy represents a new form of divination that emerges during the Enlightenment. Using the versions of cartomancy articulated by various practitioners in the period from 1770 to 1800, I argue that this branch of divination attempted to carve out a place in eighteenth-century culture alongside astrology, oneiromancy, chiromancy and other forms of mantic practices. As cartomancy quickly became entrenched within late eighteenth-century culture, historians must account for its presence alongside the developing notion of the modern. In addition to targeting a broad clientele and attempting to fashion a marketplace for divination within the emerging commercial culture, cartomancers also demonstrated their flexibility in adapting to the political and intellectual times. Tarot readings changed quickly to appeal to those living in an age of

Enlightenment, during the French Revolution, and in the Napoleonic era. The result is a form of divination that has retained its popularity from the Enlightenment to the present.