

Paris and Rouen pattern figures

The Kings were historical rulers. Alexander the Great was the Macedonian general who triumphed from Greece to India. David was the second king of Israel. Julius Caesar was the famous dictator of Rome. Charles the Great, i.e. Charlemagne, was the founder of the Holy Roman Empire.

The other male figures are La Hire, the comrade-in-arms of Joan of Arc; Hector, a prince of Troy; Ogier, a knight loyal to Charlemagne; Judah Maccabee, who led the Jewish rebellion against the Syrians. The Queens present problems. Rachel would be the matriarch remembered in the book of Genesis. Pallas is the classical warrior goddess (Athena to the Greeks; Minerva to the Romans). "ARGINE" is more mysterious. Some have declared this to be an anagram of "regina," the Latin for "queen". But why should Latin intrude on our story, and why would "regina" need to be disguised? It has been suggested that JUDITH (also IUDITH, IUDIC) was meant to be the wife of Louis I or an obscure form of Isabelle, wife of Charles VI. But again, Why the disguise? The more plausible character is the obvious one, that Judith who slew the invading General Holofernes, according to the Apocrypha.

The combativeness of Pallas and Judith suggests a better signification for ARGINE. The name ARGEIA is known on other French cards. She appears on a sixteenth-century woodblock (a carved slab for printing cards), formerly in the collection of Vital Berthin. The cardmaker shows ARGEIA as an armed woman. She was a legendary princess from Argos, in Greece. She is undoubtedly the woman intended as our Queen of Diamonds, but she has suffered at the hands of cardmakers who were ignorant of her story and careless in copying her name.

If we are entitled to revise two Queens, let us offer another suggestion: RACHEL would do better as RAGNEL, wife to Sir Gawain, one of the knights of the Round Table.

One more card could also require improvement. La Hire is an unlikely character in standard cards. He lived only a few decades before the invention of the French patterns. He would have been too modern to fit among the heroes of antiquity. Possibly this is another inscription that cardmakers produced by the corruption of an ancient name. This solution is more speculative than the others: Could this Jack of Hearts be Aulus Hirtius, a comrade of Caesar? The inscription A. HIRT' (an acceptable abbreviation of Aulus Hirtius) easily could have been converted to the more familiar LA HIRE.

If we follow all these suggestions, we arrive at a group of legendary heroes and heroines. Furthermore, we have a balance of ancient sources:

- Jewish: David, Judith and Judah Maccabee
- Greek: Alexander, Argeia and Hector
- Roman: Caesar, Pallas and Aulus Hirtius
- Christian: Charlemagne, Ragnel and Ogier

Certain heroic characters, even if unlabelled, can be recognized by their emblems. Alexander wears a costume embroidered with a lion. David, the psalmist, stands beside a harp. The skirt of Caesar's robe is decorated with the Roman eagle. Charlemagne carries a globe identifying him as emperor of the Christian world. All these emblems were used in Medieval art and in old French cards. However, in the 1800s when cards became double ended, the courts were deprived of the evidence in their bottom halves. Only one of the original symbols has survived in the Anglo-American pattern: we can still see that our King of Clubs depicts Charlemagne, for he happened to hold his globe in the upper half of the card. This orb of Christendom is an interesting vestige of a long and complicated tradition in card history and the history of Western art.

[<- Paris and Rouen patterns](#)

[Return to History ->](#)