



K. FRANK JENSEN

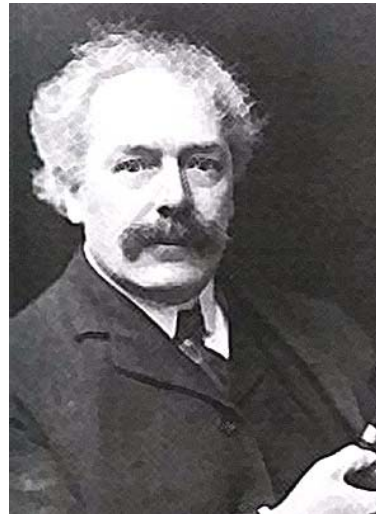
The Early Waite-Smith Tarot Editions

Shortly before Christmas 1909 an esoteric tarot deck was published, which would completely change the concept of tarot decks. The new pack was the first edition of the tarot pack conceived by the esoteric author Arthur Edward Waite, illustrated by the artist Pamela Colman Smith and published by William Rider & Son, London, who specialized in esoteric literature. The deck appeared shortly after an article by Waite “*The Tarot - A Wheel of Fortune*” was published in vol 10, #12 of the magazine “*The Occult Review*”, also published by William Rider (illustration).

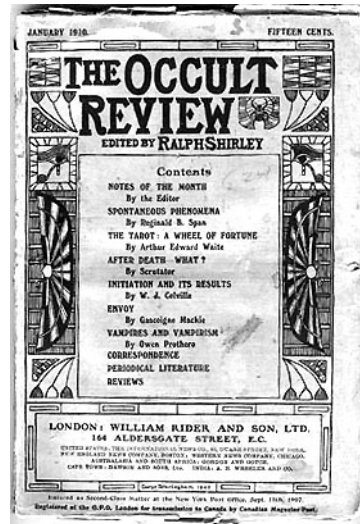
England had no tradition for playing the game of tarot and so tarot decks were not generally for sale. English occultists, who wanted to explore the esoteric secrets said to be inherent in a tarot deck had to make their own or - what was more common - to get hold of one from abroad, mainly from France, where the occult interest, which reached England in the later decades of the 19th Century, originated and where there also was a tradition for playing the tarot card game. In his pompous writing style, Waite points out in his article: *... “the Tarot is, as people say, in the air; but there is one difficulty with which we have all to contend in England. It is easy to read about the subject” “but the cards themselves are not too easily obtainable”*. This need for tarot decks Waite had now solved: *“.... I have embraced an opportunity which has been somewhat of the unexpected kind and have interested a very skilful and original artist in the proposal to design a set, Miss Pamela Coleman(sic) Smith in addition to her obvious gifts, has some knowledge of Tarot values; she has lent a sympathetic ear to my proposal to rectify the symbolism by reference to channels of knowledge, which are not in the open day.....”*.

That December day in 1909 no one could imagine what a milestone the publication of the Waite-Smith Tarot deck was to be. Waite was probably pleased that, after several years, his ideas for a “rectified” tarot deck finally reached publication. Yet, at the same time he also realized that, with a tarot deck readily available, esoteric tarot would no longer be the secret that he otherwise had tried to maintain. Pamela Colman Smith was hopefully, despite her expressed doubts, not too dissatisfied about how her artwork survived the printing process. That the Waite-Smith tarot deck would completely change the concept of tarot for a whole century and reach the entire world in endless numbers and editions, neither of them could have foreseen nor never got to know.

Rider’s publishing company announced the deck rather plainly as “*A pack of 78 tarot cards*”. Through 6 decades the boxes for the deck were either neutral or had just “Tarot Cards” printed on them. Ironically, the first time we find the name “*Rider Tarot Deck*” printed



on the box is, when the decks were no longer published by Rider, but taken over in 1971 by U.S. Games Systems Inc. In his "Encyclopedia of Tarot", vol. III, Stuart R. Kaplan of U. S. Games states that "The Rider Deck as it was originally called was issued in December 1909 by William Rider & Son, London..." (my underscore). There is, however, no evidence that it was ever called that before 1971. In order to pay proper credit to both its creators, since 1990, I have called the deck the "Waite-Smith Tarot"; a name that by and by has become generally accepted. That the Waite-Smith Tarot gained so great an importance and set a standard for most later tarot decks is, with all due respect to Arthur E. Waite's scholarship, in this author's opinion, more the merit of Pamela Colman Smith and her designs, than it is the merit of A.E. Waite.



Arthur Edward Waite

Arthur Edward Waite was born on October 2nd 1857 in Brooklyn, New York. One year old when his father, who was a captain in the merchant navy, died at an accident at sea, his mother took him and his newborn sister to England, where they lived for the rest of their lives. Arthur grew up as a devout Catholic, serving and taking part in the rituals of the church as an altar boy. When, however, his sister Frederica Harriet died shortly before her 16th birthday, he fell into a depression, which caused him to lose his Catholic faith. Instead he turned to explore other paths of mystical experience, including spiritualism and occultism. Despite his interest and attraction to these paths he was, however, very sceptical towards them for his entire life.

Waite was destined to become a writer, a poet, a reviewer and a translator. While still young, he wrote adventure stories for a children's magazine called "Boys of England" and eventually he became an expert in "Penny Dreadfuls" - pulp magazines - and wrote essays about this otherwise neglected genre. The fascination for this kind of literature stayed with Waite into old age, and he built up a large collection.

During his lifetime Arthur E. Waite not only wrote roughly 50 books and an endless number of articles but additionally translated just as many books into English, mainly from French. With his own works, and in the selection of the books he translated, his major aim was to stimulate his readers' interest in themes such as Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Ceremonial Magic, The Holy Grail, Mysticism, Alchemy and Tarot that were important to himself and essential to his own quest. Waite had no academic education, but aspired to be recognized as a scholar by his readers; his research of *The Secret Tradition*, as he called it, was thus very careful, very critical and very sceptical against the "endless lot of pseudo-esoteric nonsense" which was published at that time as well as now.

When William Rider & Son with Philip Wellby - a friend of Waite's - as managing director in 1905 started the monthly magazine *The Occult Review*, Waite was asked to help in its preparation and to contribute to it; an enterprise he would become involved with for many

years to come, writing articles on all sorts of esoteric themes. In periods he also functioned as an editor, besides that he anonymously over almost 20 years wrote a monthly critical column with reviews of new, relevant literature.

In 1899 Waite was offered a job by the London branch of an American food product manufacturer and for 10 years, until 1909, he earned a major part of his living as a business manager and public relations officer for “*Horlick’s Malted Milk*”. Part of Waite’s job was to advertise the product in provincial papers as a sort of universal remedy, good for all kinds of weakness and illness. He became also the editor - and wrote great parts himself - of the popular “*Horlick’s Magazine*”.

Pamela Colman Smith

Pamela Colman Smith, baptized Corinne Pamela Colman Smith and called Pam or Pixie by her friends, was born February 16, 1878 in London by American parents. She spent her early years in England, where her father worked for a company of decorators, Nicholas, Colshaw and & Co. Later he accepted a job as an auditor for *The West India Improvement Company* which meant that the family came to travel around, spending time in London, in Kingston, Jamaica and in New York. Pamela Colman Smith stated that she lived in England until she was 10 years old and after that in New York from 1893 to 1899.



When she was 15 she started attending the *Pratt Institute*, an art school in New York, founded in 1887 and still in business. The Pratt Institute was the first art school which taught what nowadays would be called “commercial art”. The institute gave classes in composition, drawing and painting and whatever else at the time was relevant for a career in art. One important aspect was that the Pratt Institute taught the students to be aware of the limitations of the technical reproduction methods and how to accommodate them for a final print to come out properly.

Among Smith’s teachers at the Pratt was Arthur Wesley Dow, an important painter of the period. His teaching was strongly inspired by Japanese art. He emphasized the Japanese virtues: the use of harmonic colours, the lack of shadowing, giving equal attention to what happens in the foreground and in the background. He encouraged his students to study Japanese wood block prints with their bright colours which were already familiar to Pamela since her father had a large collection of them. Their significant influence can be seen in Pamela Colman Smith’s illustrations in general and also in the Waite-Smith Tarot.

When her mother died, she lived in New York with her father, earning an income by selling handcoloured books, illustrations and prints through a gallery on Fifth Avenue. This was also the period in which her interest for the theatre began; she built a miniature theatre, wrote plays and designed stage settings for it. Pamela’s father encouraged intensively her

artistic abilities and theatre endeavours by introducing her to people, who could advance her interests. When he unexpectedly died in 1899, she returned to England, joining the Lyceum Theatre Company, whose celebrated stars were Ellen Terry and Sir Henry Irving, touring with the group and working on set- and costume design and playing small parts.

Smith's success as a painter began with an exhibition in New York in 1907 which was followed by exhibitions in 1908 and 1909 in the well-known photographer Alfred Stieglitz's *Photo Secession Gallery* in New York. Her paintings were for the most what she herself described as "*music pictures*", intuitive, symbolistic paintings based on well-known musical pieces. The exhibitions were successful and had so good reviews that the 1907 exhibition, attended by 2200 visitors, had to be prolonged for eight days. Not less than 33 of the exhibited drawings and paintings were sold.

In 1901 she established a studio in London from where she hosted a weekly salon. It was an open house arrangement frequented by numerous well-known artists, authors and actors, who read from their works, played music and let themselves be entertained by the fairy tale readings and paper theatre performances by Pamela based upon the Jamaican stories that she had loved since her childhood. Among the frequent visitors were William Butler Yeats and his brother Jack. With the latter, Pamela came to edit and publish a magazine "*A Broad Sheet*", leading her in 1903 to start her own monthly handcoloured publication "*The Green Sheaf*" containing illustrations, songs, poetry and fairytales. It was William Butler Yeats who introduced Pamela to *The Order of the Golden Dawn*, where she met Waite. Yeats, who had a general interest in esoteric matters and in Irish folklore, had himself been a Golden Dawn member since 1890.

In 1909, at the time she worked on the Waite-Smith tarot, Pamela joined the "*London Suffrage Atelier*". The studio worked with cheap handprinting techniques, designing and producing propaganda material such as banners, posters, brochures and postcards to further the cause of the womens suffrage movement, which had gained growing support all over Great Britain. Pamela's knowledge of the media of visual communication and her experience with cheap printing techniques, such as wood engraving, stencils etc., made her an obvious teacher of the other volunteers and she devoted many working hours to this task. Undoubtedly, 1909 was a stressful year for Pamela Colman Smith engaged as she was in several tasks.

Pamela's last public exhibition was in 1914. After 1920, none of her artistic works seems to have reached the public. Maybe she felt disappointed by the lack of commercial success, maybe she just wanted to live a more quiet life after the hectic years in the big cities, New York and London. After the first World War, about 40 years old, she inherited some money from an uncle, which made it possible for her to buy a house in an artists' colony in Cornwall. In 1911 she had converted to the Catholic faith and the church now became part of her life and of her art. She collected religious cards and pictures for inspiration and in 1917, she illustrated a set of thirty cards, "*The Way of the Cross*" with verses by the French author, Paul Claudel. She engaged herself in local church work and became a sacristan for "*Our Lady of The Lizard Church*". As a means of income she established a vacation home for Catholic priests in a neighbouring house. She died penniless in 1951.



The Tarot Scene at the Turn of the Century

The Waite-Smith Tarot grew out of the late Victorian age with its interest in esoteric and occult matters; an interest heavily influenced by the occult traditions in France. Secret societies and publicly accessible organisations, such as the *Theosophic Society*, flourished. In 1888 *The Order of The Golden Dawn* was established, partly based upon the French occultist Eliphas Lévi's teachings. Waite joined the order as early as 1891 and it came to play an important part in his life and work, even if not always a satisfying part. By entering and signing the *Order Roll*, Waite had accepted that by betraying the Order Secrets, he would submit himself to a penalty, "*a deadly and hostile current of will set in motion by the Chiefs of the Order, by which I should fall slain or paralysed without visible weapon, as if blasted by the Lightning-Flash*". This was an oath that Waite later would feel bound to maintain, with regard to his writings about the tarot and other works.

One early book dedicated to tarot and tarot divination, published in England was S. L. Mathers' "*The Tarot: Its Occult Signification, Use in Fortune-Telling and Method of Play*" (1888). Important to Mathers' correspondences between the Hebrew Kabbalah and the tarot major cards was his study of the Jewish mystic Rabbi Akiba Ben Joseph's "*The Book of Formation*" (Sepher Yetzirah), said to have been written in the 2nd century. The basic Hebrew/astrological correspondences given in "*The Book of Formation*" were the pattern upon which the symbolic systems were based, which came to form the body of the Golden Dawn teachings: ritual work, Enochian magic, geomancy, tattvas, astrology, metals, colours, precious stones, tarot. Mathers was the first to give special names in English to several of the tarot majors: "*The Magician*", "*The High Priestess*", "*The Hierophant*", "*The Lightning-struck Tower*", "*The Last Judgement*" and "*The Universe*" and did also introduce the name of "*Pentacles*" (instead of Coins) into the English tarot nomenclature.

Tarot was an important part of the doctrine of the Golden Dawn up through all of the grades of the Order. A thorough and documented knowledge of tarot and its Kabbalistic correspondences was needed to ascend the order grades. A profound instruction was given in a relatively short treatise, "*Book T*", which was accessible only to those order members, who had advanced to the Second (Inner) Order.

It had been Waite's goal for several years to create a "*rectified tarot*" and through his relationship with William Rider, this dream could finally be realized. When Waite recognized the fact that the existence of Tarot could no longer be kept a secret within esoteric orders, the time had come for him to create and publish his tarot deck. The paradox being, that he still wanted to consider himself a person in possession of that higher esoteric knowledge, which only but a small group of fellow-minded people could obtain. In his self-biography "*Shadows of Life and Thought*", Waite says: "*.....Now in those days there was a most imaginative artist and abnormally psychic artist, who had drifted into the Golden Dawn and loved its Ceremonies - as transformed by myself - without pretending and indeed attempting to understand their subsurface consequence. It seemed to some of us in the circle that there were a draughtswoman among us who, under proper guidance, could produce a tarot with an appeal in the world of Art and a suggestion of significance behind the Symbols, which would put on them another construction, than had ever been dreamed by those who, through many generations, had produced them and used them for mere*



divinatory purposes. My province was to see that the design - especially those of the important Trumps Major - kept that in the hiddenness which belong to certain Greater mysteries, in the Paths of which I was travelling....." (my underlining).

The "proper guidance" Waite writes about is, of course, his own. He appears not to have had great confidence in Pamela Colman Smith's work in *The Golden Dawn* - perhaps because she was 21 years younger than him - compared to how seriously dedicated he considered himself to be. None-the-less, he needed a competent artist to execute the "updated and rectified tarot" and for that task he found in Pamela the correct artistic qualifications. Waite's underestimation of Smith's seriousness could, however, have been a misjudgement since from her drawings and paintings it is quite obvious that her knowledge of mythological legends and religious symbols was well-founded.

Waite's main interest was the symbolism of the major arcana and it appears that he gave Pamela a more or less free hand in the design of the minors. Whether the idea of illustrating the minors, instead of using the classical tarot decks' arrangements of the appropriate number of suitmarks came from Waite, we can't be sure about, but Pamela Colman Smith certainly developed the idea.

Shortly before Pamela Colman Smith was commissioned to illustrate the deck, the British Museum had received a set of photographs of the so-called *Sola-Busca tarot deck* as a gift from the Sola family, which for years had been kept close within the family. Waite, who frequented the British Museum regularly may have mentioned this set of photos to Pamela, in any case it is evident, that part of her inspiration for the minor arcana came from them. Several details in Pamela's images were reworkings of her own earlier paintings and drawings; art historian Dr. Melinda Boyd Parsons supports the idea that many of the tarot characters are portraits of Pamela's friends. For example, the actress Ellen Terry be seen as the *Queen of Wands* and in the *Nine of Pentacles* and Florence Farr (a prominent Golden Dawn member) portrayed in *The World*.

In an "editor's note" in the very same 1909 issue of the "Occult Review", where Waite's article about his tarot deck appeared, the publisher announced the forthcoming event, a pack of tarot cards, which will be "... fully coloured. The lithographic process has been undertaken by Messrs. Sprague and Co., whose name is sufficient guarantee for the excellence of the work". In a letter, dated November 1909, now in the collection of Beineke Library at Yale University, to Alfred Stieglitz in New York, Pamela Colman Smith mentions her illustrations for the tarot deck, writing: "a big task of 80 illustrations for a very small payment; they will be printed in colour lithography, probably very bad", adding "I'll send you a pack". At the same time, Pamela offered Stieglitz the original artwork - or part of it - for sale in his gallery, which could indicate that she - and not Waite - had the originals in her possession and, maybe they actually belonged to her and not to Waite. Waite's interest was to see his rectified tarot deck in print, the original art was not of much interest to him. Whether any piece of the original artwork was sold or not is unknown, but in any case they have all disappeared; not even one single original illustration has apparently survived through the years. Nothing is known about them, not even what size they were. They could have been in a 1:1 ratio or they could have been larger and afterwards reduced to card size. If some of the 78 illustrations had been bought by Stieglitz' customers, a few would likely have been preserved.

However much we dislike the idea, we probably have to acknowledge, that to Pamela the 78 tarot cards of the Waite-Smith Tarot were a commissioned work, which she worked on during a relatively short period only in 1909 when she was also occupied with several other projects, including an exhibition in New York and involvement with the suffrage movement. Apparently Waite accepted her illustrations immediately since no drafts and redrawn cards have been found, as we know them from Frieda Harris' work on Crowley's "*Book of Thoth*" tarot, which was in progress over four years (1938-42).

What was Waite's part in the tarot deck that made it become a lasting success? First and foremost, he was the initiator. Without him there would not have been a similar influential tarot deck. He planned its "rectification" and publication, he persuaded and engaged the artist, Pamela Colman Smith to give visible expression to his ideas, he led it to print through his connexion to the publisher. He created the first 78 card tarot pack ever with a dedicated esoteric purpose apart from Etteilla's fortune-telling type decks. It was not the very first esoteric tarot deck, since Oswald Wirth's series of majors with Hebrew letters printed on the cards was published already in 1889, but Waite's was first full 78 card esoteric tarot deck.

Waite's concern was, as he himself stated it, to secure that the majors, which he called "*Trumps Majors*", reflected their - in his opinion - true esoteric meaning. He used about the same names for the majors as Mathers did in his 1888 book, but he simplified some of them: "The Lightning-struck Tower" became plain "*The Tower*", "The Last Judgement" became "*Judgement*". Waite did not use Mathers' "The Universe" but changed it to "*The World*". Also Mather's name "*Pentacles*" for the suit of coins was used by Waite.

What then made the Waite-Smith Tarot different from the French and Italian game tarot packs? Apart from the illustrated number cards of the Waite-Smith Tarot that were substituted for the usual rendition of the appropriate number of Italian suit signs: swords, wands, coins and cups. Waite's objective with his "rectified tarot" was to create a deck, which followed the Golden Dawn doctrines as they were given in the Order's papers and in the "*Book-T*". He rejected the French sequence of the majors and thus the assignments of the Hebrew letters and the Kabbalistic Tree's spheres and paths as they were defined by Lévi, Papus and Oswald Wirth. The French attributions were wrong in Waite's opinion and did not satisfy his demand for a well functioning esoteric system combining tarot with essential esoteric teachings. Waite changed the order of the majors, and their new sequence would become a standard in the Anglo-Saxon world..

The big problem was that Waite wanted to make this correction without revealing to the public that which he still considered to be a "secret teaching" which he, by oath, had sworn not to reveal; a knowledge he had gained through his membership of the Golden Dawn. He states about his new creation: "...*There is a secret tradition concerning the Tarot, as well as a secret doctrine contained therein; I have followed some part of it without exceeding the limits which are drawn about matters of this kind and belong to the laws of honour. This tradition has two parts, and as one of them has passed into writing it seems to follow that it may be betrayed at any moment, which will not signify, because the second... has not so passed at present and is held by very few indeed. I ask, therefore, to be distinguished from a few writers in recent times who have thought fit to hint that they could say a good deal more if they liked, for we do not speak the same language; but also from any one who... may say that she or he will tell all, because they have only the accidents and not the*

essentials necessary for such disclosure... I have said as much as I can; it is the truth after its own manner; and as much as can be expected or required in those outer circles where the qualifications of special research cannot be expected.....”

It is with like statements Waite’s “*The Key to the Tarot*” and “*The Pictorial Key to the Tarot...*” (see later) definitely fail. By continuously hinting that such secrets exists and that he (the author) is one of the few who knows and protects such secrets he distances himself from his audience. Particularly since they were no longer secrets at the time when “*The Key...*” was published.

The Placement of The Fool

One important aspect in creating his “rectified tarot” was Waite’s concern for the placement of *The Fool*. To Waite the proper placement of *The Fool* was the very key to the sequence of the majors that made the entire puzzle form a synthesis. He states, that there is an inner circle of initiates, who are in possession of that key, and the circle is, of course *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*. The key is the positioning of the unnumbered *Fool* at the beginning of the series of majors, so that the first Hebrew letter, Aleph, is assigned to *The Fool*, while the last Hebrew letter, Tau, is assigned to *XXI-The World*. In Lévi’s French order, the first card was *The Magician* and thus the entire correspondence between the 22 Hebrew letters and the 22 tarot majors was quite different.



Exchanging Justice with Strength

By paying attention to the 12 tarot majors which related to the 12 signs of the Zodiac, Waite found that if two majors were exchanged from their positions in the French tarot order, there would be complete agreement between the tarot picture image, the serial order of the Hebrew alphabet and the astrological attributes from Sepher Yetzirah. These two Tarot cards were VIII, *Justice*, and XI, *Strength*. Waite placed *Strength* as VIII and *Justice* as XI, a sequence that had never before appeared in a printed Tarot deck. Waite justified this switch in his commentary: “*For reasons which satisfy myself, this card has been interchanged with that of Justice, which is usually numbered eight. As the variation carries nothing with it which will signify to the reader, there is no cause for explanation*”(!) By substituting VIII with XI, the only tarot image depicting a set of scales, the traditional symbol for Libra, came to correspond to the zodiacal sign Libra, while the image with a lion came to correspond with Leo. Was this switching of the two cards now a result of Waite’s creative thoughts? No, it was not: the same card order can be found in the Golden Dawn Cipher manuscript, the basis on which the Order of The Golden Dawn was established.

The Lovers and The Sun

While most of Waite's major designs stay fairly close to the traditional images as they are found in, for example, the Marseilles pattern, two of them are distinctly different: "The Lovers" and "The Sun". In Waite's sequence, the kabbalistic attribution for VI-*The Lovers*, is the Hebrew letter Zain, corresponding with the zodiacal sign Gemini. The traditional tarot image of *The Lovers* depicts three persons at a crossroad, a young man standing between two women, a younger and an older one - vice and virtue if you will - making this a card that symbolises choice and breaking up to create one's own family and life; an interpretation supported by the Cupid over their heads. Waite substituted the scene and reduced the number of persons to two, Adam and Eve, set in scene of the Garden of Eden. Reducing the traditional three persons to two allowed for the correspondance of the card to Gemini. In Waite's deck it was now the only major arcana card depicting two persons, since also *The Sun* had been changed. The



traditional Sun-image depicts a naked boy and girl standing arm in arm before a blazing Sun. Waite's image depicts a naked child sitting across a horse, holding a banner in its left hand. By removing the two children and replacing them with one child only, the tendency to see *The Sun* as related to the Gemini was diminished. And, of course, the correct astrological attribution for this card is the radiant Sun itself.

Waite's Minor Arcana

The majors, the aces and the court cards were Waite's primary concern. The court cards follow the "Book of T" description though he does not adopt "Book of T's" names and sequence: *Knight, Queen, King, Page (or Princess)*. How much Waite was concerned with the images of the number cards is not obvious; in some cases he might have wanted a certain theme to be illustrated, such as including elementary hints, but that could have been done simply by giving Pamela Colman Smith a few notes to work from. The "Book of T" does not describe a scene for each number card as it does for the majors and courts, but gives a few lines of keywords for their interpretation. It appears likely that these keywords constituted a great part of Pamela Colman Smith's instructions from Waite.

Pamela Colman Smith signed all cards with her characteristic monogram. Except possibly for one: *The Fool*. It may be that her signature is hidden in the jumble of lines in the middle bottom of the card. It is, however, not where Pamela used to place her signature. Why then is *The Fool* not signed? As has been pointed out *The Fool* played a key role for Waite. Could that be the reason?

Waite's Writings on Tarot

Waite's own writings about tarot are limited to the brief pages in his anonymous (Grand Orient) "*Manual of Cartomancy*" (the 1909 edition and later), "*The Key to the Tarot*" and "*The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*" (originally 1910, respectively 1911), the article "*The Tarot: a Wheel of Fortune*" in *The Occult Review*, vol. 10, December 1909, an article in *The Occult Review*, vol. 43: "*The Great Symbols of the Tarot*" (January 1926) and an article "*The Tarot of The Rosy Cross*", which he gave as a private lecture to the members of his future order "*Independent and Rectified Rite*" (ca. 1910). Compared with his huge contribution to the literature of occult and mystic themes in general, tarot takes up only a small, yet important part of Waite's search for "*The Secret Tradition*".

Waite saw his entire life's literary work as one total examination of the "*Secret Tradition*" in all its aspects, in search for that Mystical Enlightenment he strove for. Waite's books are not easily read and many were not sold out. He revised several of them through the years, adding new details to the same themes. They never came to be published as a collected edition. In 1936 he was requested by the publishers Selwyn & Blount to write his memoirs. He did it but hesitatingly, partly because he did not find it worth writing about himself, partly because his health was rapidly declining. "*Shadows of Life and Thought*" was finished in 1938 and would become Waite's final book. He died in May 1942 at the age of 84.

The Early Waite-Smith Editions

For a long time I had in my collection a Waite-Smith Tarot, which I considered being the original edition since it, no doubt, was pretty old and quite different from the packs published by Rider after World War II and later by U.S. Games. Not only concerning its general appearance, but also regarding the cardboard it was printed on. When I later found another obviously early Waite-Smith deck and noticed that it in many details was quite different from the one I already had, I saw a theme that needed to be researched. Comparing these two decks, I found differences in all cards. In two cards "*The Sun*" and "*The Lovers*", the differences were so obvious, that my further research became concentrated around these. Requests for enlarged colour copies of the two cards were mailed to collector friends and tarotists, whom I knew owned older Waite-Smith Tarot decks and likewise to museums and collections, whose catalogues listed decks of that kind. Coincidentally (?) my key cards were the same two cards in which the Waite-Smith major's imagery deviate the most from the standard tarot images as they are present, for example, in the Marseilles-pattern.

Details compared

The details particularly paid attention to in the key-cards *The Lovers* and *The Sun*, were whether the mechanical tinted pattern (to be compared with the modern printing screen) was either dotted, linear or a muddled mixture of the two. *The Lovers* was paid particular attention to in that regard, because the mechanical method used for tinting the skin colour is clearly visible in the two persons depicted, and because the crisscross hatching (which is a handmade tinting) in the mountain on the same card made this card particularly fit for comparison of details. The *Sun* was chosen, since this card most clearly shows an obvious and important difference between the editions: an undulating line, which looks like an extra "half of a sun

beam” is drawn immediately to the right of the Roman numeral XIX. This undulated line, whose symbolic meaning has given rise to some speculation, is already present in the illustration of “*The Sun*” in Waite’s article: “*The Tarot: A Wheel of Fortune*” in the December 1909 issue of “*The Occult Review*”, the first time any of the card designs were published. A strange detail is that the *The Sun* illustration in this article is misnumbered as XVIII instead of XIX (in a reprint of the article in Darzy Künz’s series of *Golden Dawn Studies* (#8 -1996) this misnumbering was regretfully corrected).

The undulated line is also present in the first edition of Waite’s book “*The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*” published by William Rider & Sons in 1911 (probably already sold in late 1910), as well as in L. W. de Laurence’s 1918 pirated edition of Waite’s text, published in USA under de Laurence’s name and with the title “*The Illustrated Key to the Tarot*”. The undulated line can, with small differences, be found in all early variations of the Waite-Smith Tarot deck except one. Other obvious differences between the various early editions, just to mention a few regarding *The Sun* (for the decks in their entirety, the deviations are numerous), are the placement of the title and the punctuation after it, the lines in the banner and the Sunflower on the right.

In comparing the packs, the following identification traits were likewise taken into account: the size of the cards and the thickness of the card pack (variations would indicate that different cardboard was used). Since both measures could deviate a little after how much the deck was worn and what trimming process was used, a small margin was accepted. Of lesser importance for the identification was the colour density and balance, since these often vary within the same print run, depending on the printer’s awareness and skill. Besides, it was not possible for me to view all the early editions in the original and colour copies tend to distort the colours in a variable degree.

During my research, no less than 4 different early variations of the Waite-Smith Tarot decks showed up* (“early” in this connection being packs published in the period from 1909 up to about 1940). In the following, the four editions are called Pamela-A, -B, -C and -D (in short Pam-A through D) respectively. I assigned the letters in the sequence in which I discovered the packs, and originally they were not intended to indicate any order of publication. Accidentally, they came to follow the likely publication order. When first announced, these names have found general use.

(* In earlier writings on the subject I listed 5 different editions, including also a Pam-E. This was later identified as a special print (probably a proof-print) of de Laurence’s Waite-Smith deck).

The Lovers

In *The Lovers* the printing screen is very clearly rendered in the bodies of the figures. Pam-A has a linear mechanical screen in contrast to both Pam-B and C, where the screen is dotted. There are great differences in the artistic quality of the line art. While Eve’s face in Pam-A is clear and delicately drawn, Pam-B and Pam-C appear to be inferior re-drawings. Pam-A’s snake in the tree has a snake’s head, while this can hardly be seen in Pam-B and C. The body lines - look at the hands, the knees, the toes - reveal a much inferior artistic ability. The crosshatching technique used in the mountain also shows great differences. The Angel’s face expression is also worth a closer examination. While Pam-A is in accordance with Waite’s statement in “*The Key.*”: “*The Angel is...pouring down influences*” this can hardly be said about Pam-B and C’s angels, who both look rather oblivious of the situation they are involved in.

The Sun

The most obvious difference, however, which at a quick glance can identify the three early editions of the Waite-Smith tarot (Pam-A, B, C) is the mysterious extra crumbled line to the right of the Roman numeral XIX. In Pam-A the line is light, looking like it was the half part of one of the ordinary rays. It look as if it could have been a design mistake; that there should have been 22 rays, 11 straight ones and 11 undulated ones, corresponding with the 22 majors, and that the artist forgot to finish the line or couldn't find space in the design. In Pam-B the line is entirely missing as if the copying artist corrected an apparent mistake. In Pam-C it shows up again, but in a clumsy manner and from the bottom a tiny little extra line additionally also protudes as if coming from the radius of the sun itself.

Comparing the facial expressions and the eyes of the variations of *The Sun*, differences between the editions are also obvious. The lines in the banner held by the child are also different; most clearly in Pam-B, where the lines are parallel with the banner's width, while in the other editions the lines run parallel with the short edges. The feet of the child do also show differences. The printed titles in the calligraphy are different, as well as the placement of the full stop after the title. Differences can be noticed in the sunflowers as well.

A curious detail is the word "LOVE" which was first pointed out by the US-tarot author Mary K. Greer. The word is hardly visible but situated immediately under Pamela Colman Smith's signature. None of the copyists of Pam-B and Pam-C have been aware of this detail, which also is found at the line art illustrated in "*The Pictorial Key...*".

Comparing with Pamela Colman Smith's line art as depicted in "*The Pictorial Key*" and in "*The Occult Review*", it is obvious that the drawings are the same as in Pam-A. Pam-A and Pam-D are clearly the only decks of the four that correspond with the illustrations in "*The Pictorial Key...*".



Why the different editions?

There exist both Pam-A, B and C decks boxed with Waite's book "*The Key...*", which indicate that these editions most likely were all published by William Rider. What could the reason be, that they differ so much and that the later editions are so inferior? A likely explanation could be that the original printing plates were destroyed or worn out, and new ones were made. Why the deck, however, was redrawn by copyists instead of using the illustrations from "*The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*" as a basis for a new edition, which would have been possible, is hard to explain. Unfortunately Rider's entire archive was destroyed during the two World Wars, so information can not be found that way. On the dust cover of an edition of "*The Pictorial Key...*" published after 2. World War, it is stated, that the printing plates were destroyed in Plymouth during the war. That a location name is given could indicate a known fact. In any case, it is unlikely that they were the original 1909 plates since so many and different versions had been made over the years.

The Back Patterns

All the early versions of the Waite-Smith Tarot found up to a few years ago, had a pebbled brown back pattern. This could vary somewhat in intensity depending on the actual printrun and the amount of printing ink used. A deck and book set called „*The Original Rider-Waite Tarot Pack*“, published jointly by Riders, England and USGames in 1993 (see later) presented, however, a back pattern consisting of squares of roses and lilies printed in a light blue color. The same pattern, but printed with a red/brown ink was at that time known only from one Pam-A deck, belonging to the now closed museum of the *United States Playing Card Company (USPCC)*, where it was registered with a 1916 date. Where this deck is now is not clear; contemporary



commercial interests do regrettably not allow for non-profitable bodies like this museum.

For years the blue roses/lilies back was a puzzle, since no one knew about its actual existence. R. A. Gilbert, who is a Waite expert and through whose antiquarian- and used book outlet a stream of Waite's publications have passed, had never seen a pack with this pattern until the 1993 edition was published. Since 2002 however, two original packs with the blue roses/lilies back pattern have turned up.

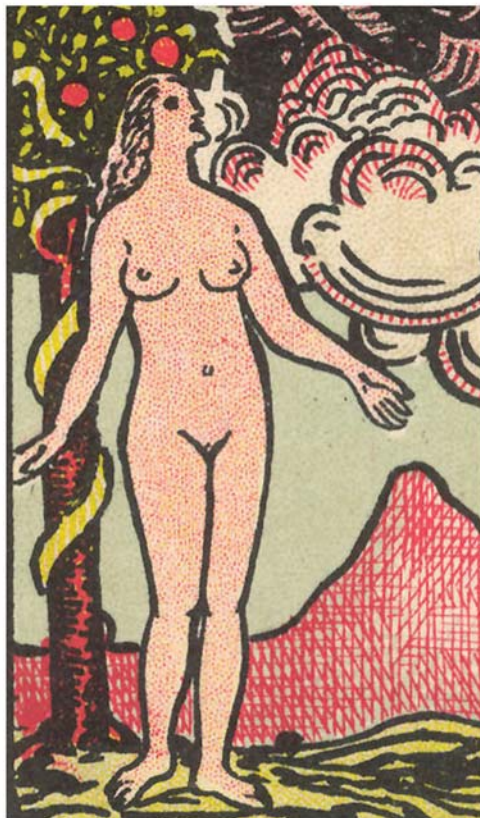
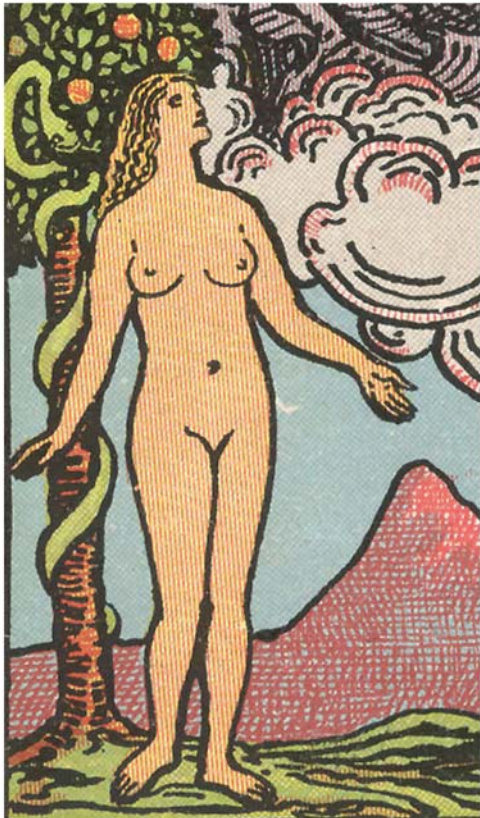
The packs fit exactly in all details: size, thickness, print screen, crumbled sun ray, accompanying "Key.." etc. with the Pam-A pack, the only difference being that it has the particular roses and lilies back pattern. Except though in one single point, which caused that another identification criterium had to be taken into consideration: the weight.

There is in my opinion no doubt that these two decks, the Pam-A with pebbled and with the roses & lilies back are the 1909 and the 1910 editions. But which one is the oldest? I'll explain my presumption later. I have not added a new name to them, but will refer to them as "*Pam-A-pebbled*" and "*Pam-A-roses & lilies*"

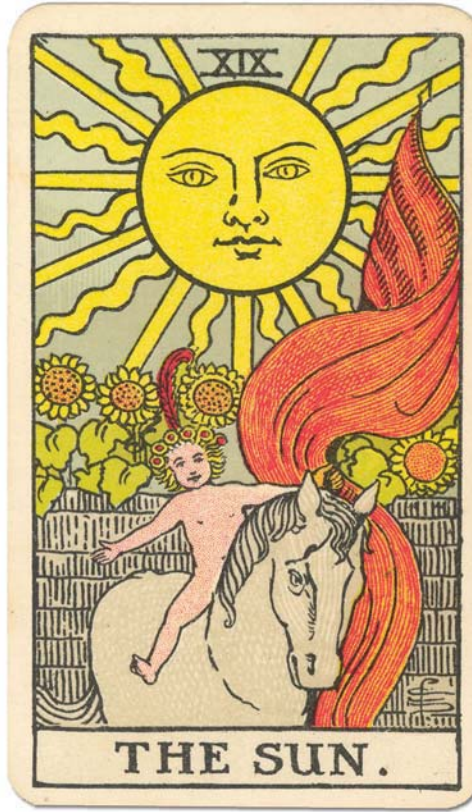
respectively.

The Key to the Tarot & The Pictorial Key...

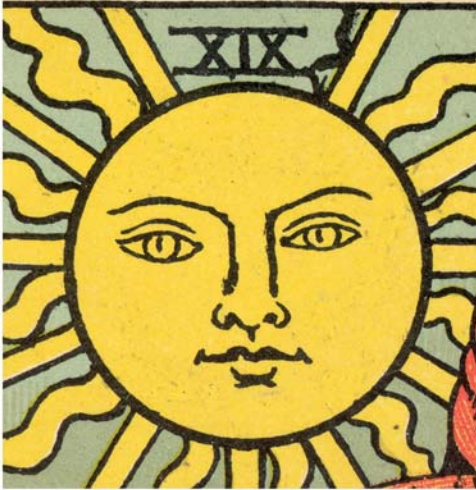
The Waite/Smith Tarot was published for the first time in December 1909 and another edition followed in April 1910, both by Riders in London. Both packs were sold as a set, accompanied with Waite's "*The Key to the Tarot being Fragments of a Secret Tradition under the Veil*" included in the box, or as decks only. The small book, fitting in size to the cards, but of 194 pages, was meant to explain details of the deck. The book has three parts dealing with, respectively, the history of the tarot, an interpretation of the symbolism and divinatory keywords for all 78 cards. Both the 1909 and 1910 edition were sold with a "Key.." dated 1910. There was no indication of the printers name on this edition of the book. In an advertisement from Rider it is mentioned that a cheaper soft cover edition also was available but its factual existence has not been confirmed.



The Lovers (detail): Pam-A, Pam-B

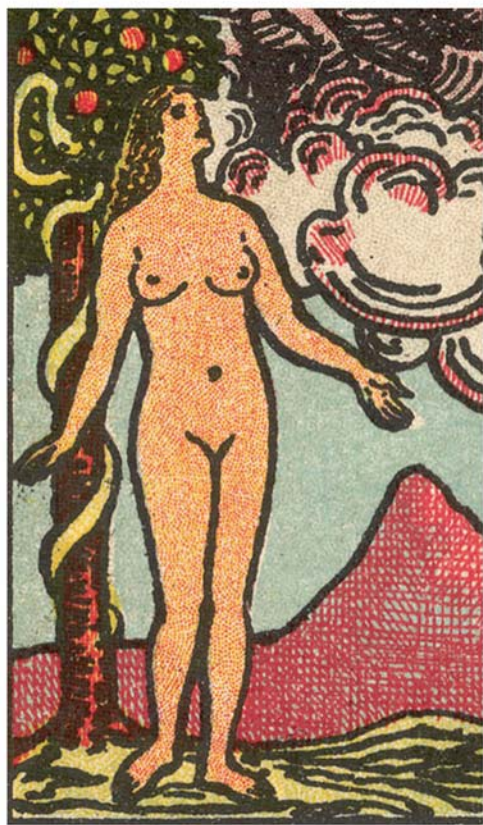


The Sun: Pam-A, Pam-B



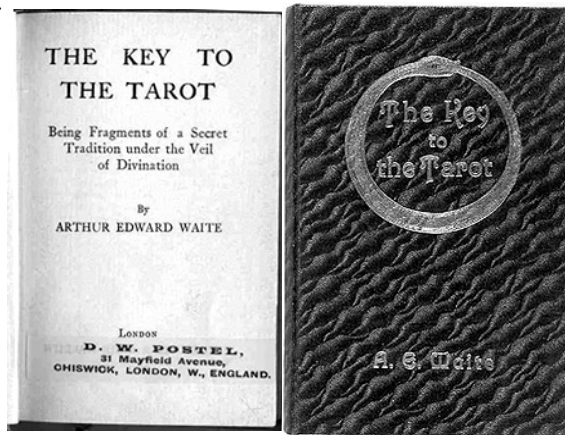
The Sun: Pam-C, Pam-D





The Lovers (detail): Pam-C, Pam-D

Later (in 1920) a new edition of "The Key..." was published. This second edition - called "New Edition" on the title page, was printed by *Buttler & Tanner, Frome and London* and expanded with the extra material from Waite's "The Pictorial Key to the Tarot", which had appeared in the meantime (1911). One Pam-A set accompanied by the 1920 edition of "The Key..." is known, which indicates that the Pam-A version was sold at least as late as 1920.



The 1920 "New Edition" of "The Key..." was reprinted in 1931 (the printers are now *Fisher, Knight and Co. Ltd. Gainborough Press. St. Albans*, who also printed all known copies of "The Key..." that accompanied Pam-B decks). It may therefore be assumed, that Pam-B packs are from this date or later. One known copy of Pam-C is accompanied by "The Key... new edition" printed in 1931.

"The Pictorial Key to the Tarot" with full size line art illustrations of all 78 cards, first published in 1911, was based upon Waite's text in "The Key..." but with several additions, for example was a section added to each of the 78 card descriptions. "The Pictorial Key to the Tarot" was published over the years in many later editions and still is. Not all of these are, however, true to the original 1911-edition, sometimes omitting parts of the original text or "correcting" Waite's language as they do; new publishers apparently want to leave their mark or, falsely, believe that they are improving the original.

The "Original Rider Waite Tarot Pack" (1993)

For a long time my research was confused by the so-called "The Original Rider-Waite Tarot Pack", published in 1993 as a joint venture by *Riders, London* and *USGames Systems*. The illustrations in this pack correspond in all details with the inferior Pam-C deck, only this deck has the roses and lilies pattern in blue and not the pebbled back. According to *Stuart R. Kaplan* of *U.S. Games* (private correspondence), the deck was based upon a pack owned by a collector, who wanted to stay anonymous. Any further examination of the original was therefore not possible and it can only be hoped that another Pam-C deck with the roses and lilies back pattern exists and shows up one day, so it can be examined and a proper explanation of this strange composition perhaps can be given.

The edition included also an edited reprint of "The Key...". One would expect, that a product sold under the name of "The Original Rider-Waite Tarot Deck" was based upon historical facts, but it is not. Not even the accompanying "Key..." is a facsimile of the original 1910 edition or any other early edition for that matter. From Waite's full title "The Key of the Tarot. Being Fragments of a Secret Tradition under the Veil of Divination", the second sentence is simply omitted and substituted by "Revised and Updated Edition". Comparing



the text in this version of “*The Key...*” with the 1910 edition, it does not take much to realize, that the so-called “update” simply means that Waite’s original text is cut down to a minimum, sentences and entire sections being deleted. Comparing the annotated list of literature, which in the 1910 edition so perfectly revealed Waite’s animosity towards his fellow tarot writers of the day, it will be noticed, that Waite’s annotations are simply cut away, leaving only the titles of the books. Not only that, Waite’s admittedly pompous language is “revised”, many words throughout the text are deleted. Sorry to say that we are dealing with a pack which, despite its pretentious title, was published without any respect for the history of the Waite-Smith Tarot. The problem being particularly, that quite a number of tarotists believed it to be what it was presented as, a facsimile true to the original Waite-Smith deck. Throughout the more than ten years that passed since its publication, I have had numerous mails and letters, who took as their starting point that this was indeed a replica of the “real” Waite-Smith Tarot.

Early Editions: Conclusions

There are four early editions of the Waite-Smith Tarot deck in variable quality. These editions are clearly different in regard to which printing plates were used to produce them. Three of them, Pam-A, B and C are found in boxed sets accompanied by Waite’s card size book “*The Key to the Tarot being.....*” so these can all with a reasonable degree of certainty be considered as published by Rider, London.

Pamela-A

Pam-A comes with two different back patterns, the pebbled back, which all other early decks also have, and the rarer roses and lilies (also called “Tudor Rose”) pattern, so far known to me in two existing copies only. The Pam-A packs are of superior artistic quality compared to Pam-B and C. They also correspond exactly with Pamela Colman Smith’s line art as it is rendered in Waite’s “*The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*” (1911). I feel safe to say, that these two packs are what can be justly called the “*Original Waite-Smith Tarot Deck*”. Apart from the back pattern, there are no more visible differences than what can be expected when coming from a different printrun. Unless new convincing information comes up, I’ll consider these two packs are the 1909 and the 1910 editions. Which deck is the 1909 printrun and which is the 1910 can not be said certainly. Information given by R.A. Gilbert in his Waite-bibliography that the 1910 printrun was of a better card quality is, however, a clue. Both packs are of almost same thickness, but the pebbled pack appears to have a surface that is slightly smoother, the most important difference is, however, the weight of the two decks (a detail, I unfortunately had not included in my earliest research). The weight of the pebbled back deck is considerably heavier than that of the roses/lilies pack. A weight difference, that indicates a cardboard weight of 365-370 grammes cardboard used for the pebbled deck and 325-330 grammes only for the roses/lilies. And, indeed, a heavier paper weight is normally considered a sign of a better quality. Logically seen, it is also unlikely that the first edition was printed with the pebbled back, then the second with the roses/lilies and the next print again with the pebbled. I would therefore consider the roses and lilies pack being the 1909 version and that the 1910 pack was changed to the brown pebbled standard back used for all other early decks. Additionally, the roses and lilies pattern is a lot more in accordance with Pamela Colman Smith’s art style and could easily be her work.



Pamela-A

This edition has a linear mechanical screening and includes the undulated line in The Sun. Size 121x70 millimetre, thickness of 78 cards: 38 millimetre. Most known packs have a yellow/brown cracked (pebbled) pattern on the reverse. Only two known packs have a roses&lilies pattern. The roses/lilies pack is likely the first - 1909 - edition. The decks were sold in a red or red-brown two piece box together with Waite's "Key to the Tarot" in the edition dated 1910. The Key is placed upon the top of the deck. Single decks sold in a dark-green slipcase are also known. One pack is known with a "Key..", second edition (1920).

Pamela-B

This edition has a dotted screen but lacks the undulated line. It has a pebbled back. Size 119x70 millimetre, thickness of 78 + one blank card: 26 millimetre. Beside the difference on *The Sun*, there are numerous differences on all cards. While *The Sun*-card is artistically rather well executed, most other cards in this edition are obviously of inferior artistic quality to Pamela-A. The pack is known existing in a two part red or maroon cardboard box packed with a hardbound copy of "Key to the Tarot" (212 pages), New Edition 1920 (Rider & Co., Paternostre House, E.C.4. London. Printed in Great Britain by Fischer, Knight & Co. Ltd., Gainsborough Press, St. Albans). Another pack has a "Key..." dated 1931 along with it. One pack is known in a black slipcase. Two packs known are marked with a label "printed in Great Britain"

Pamela C

This edition has a dotted screen and the coarsely drawn undulated line. Pebbled back. Size 119x70 millimetres. Thickness: 27 millimetres. The undulated line is heavy and clumsily drawn, without the elegance of the lines in Pamela-A. There is an extra tiny side line to the crumbled line, which no other packs have. The printing screen is dotted. The pack follows the Pamela-A design rather closely but is much inferior in artistic execution. A pack is known together with "The Key..." dated 1931.

Pamela-D

This edition is a low quality photographic reproduction of Pamela-A. Size aprox. 119x70 millimetres. Thickness: 27 millimetre. The reproduction process has added another print screen to the original, thus making the images look blurred (the details are there, but unsharp) and blocked up. About one millimetre is cut off on the right side of the image. More than one examined Pam-D pack was badly and irregularly trimmed, the cards also being of different sizes and several corners were not properly rounded. Two packs were marked with a glued on label: "made in Great Britain". A blue top-slide lid box is known.

While several Pam-A packs with the pebbled back are known, there are so far only two identified copies with the blue roses and lilies pattern. This points to the likelihood that the 1909 print run was made in a rather limited number. For some unknown reason, maybe economical or technical, the printers or the publisher may have wanted to use brown ink for the back patterns afterwards. This *may* explain the aforementioned unique pack in USPCC's former museum as coming from a testrun, where it was determined, that the brown ink didn't work well with the roses and lilies. This is, however, only a guess. Another reason for the pebbled back could be, that it covers the entire back of the printed sheet to the edges and thus it needs less care during the printing process. The roses/lilies back pattern with a white border around each card needed closer attention to align with the front illustrations.

Pamela-B

Pam-B is a complete redrawing of Pamela Colman Smith's drawings. The copyist appears to have had better artistic abilities than the one who made the drawings for Pam-C but had less



intention to follow the original, for example in the removal of The Sun's "extra" ray. Since the deck is known coming with Waite's "*The Key... new edition*", printed in 1920 and also in 1931, and never with the 1910 edition of the same, it is with not much doubt published after 1920 and at least up in the 1930s.

Pamela-C

Another redrawing, and this time done by a rather sloppy and/or incompetent copyist, who did not care very much for his/her work. The only known copy with a "Key..." has the 1931 edition included, indicating that the deck was likely not published before that date. Despite this relatively late date, not many Pam-C packs are known, which may also indicate that the deck was available for a short period only or that a rather limited number were printed.

Pamela-D

I have not discussed this deck in detail. Pam-D is a photographic reproduction of Pam-A. The photographic print screen is superimposed upon the original linear printing screen, leaving a rather muddy impression. The pack seems to have been produced cheaply and in haste, which can also be seen by the bad trimming many cards suffer from and that many corners are not properly rounded. In contrast to Pam-C, this pack is rather frequently found. Whether it comes from Rider or is a pirated version has not yet been clarified, since no packs are known with identifying boxes nor with an accompanying "Key..."

Questions still open

The factual existence of a Pam-C with a roses/lilies pack is not confirmed. We do not know the exact reason for why the Waite-Smith tarot deck was redrawn several times. Destruction

Suggested Print History

- 1909, December:** Selected line art illustrations (in Waite's article for "Occult Review")
- 1909, December:** Pamela-A, first printrun. Blue Roses and Lilies back pattern. Deck approx. 38 mm. thick. Sold separately or in box with "Key...", first edition (1910).
- 1910, April - ca. 1920:** Pamela A - second printrun: Pebbled back pattern. Deck approx. 38 mm. thick, better (weightier) cardboard than first printrun. Sold separately or in box with "Key...", first edition (1910) and with "The Key..", New edition 1920.
- 1911:** "The Pictorial Key to the Tarot" (first edition) with line art as Pamela-A
- c. 1920 - early 1930s:** Pamela B. Sold in box with "The Key, New edition", dated either 1920 or 1931.
- late 1920s - 1940s (?):** Pamela-C. Sold separately or in box with "The Key, New edition", dated 1931
- c. 1930s - 1940s (?):** Pamela-D (photographic reprint). Publisher not determined.
- late 1940's - ca. 1977:** Rider editions in blue boxes based on line art from "The Pictorial Key". A "Key...New edition", dated respectively 1972, 73, 74 or 77, in soft blue cover, could be bought separately. Special *Traveller's edition* deck dated 1975.
In the 1960's printed "in collaboration with Waddington" (the English playing card maker). From 1972 printed by AGMüller, Switzerland and later by Carta Mundi, Belgium.
- 1971 until now:** U.S.Games editions in yellow boxes + various language- and special editions
- 1993 - "Original Rider/Waite Tarot"** Reprint printed by AGMüller, Switzerland for The Estate of AW.Waite/Rider/USGames. Similar to Pamela-C, but with blue roses and lilies back pattern



of the print plates during the two wars is probably a reasonable explanation, but we can't be sure about it. That a Pam-A with "The Key.." New edition, 1920 exists seems to indicate that the original printplates at least survived the First World War (unless, of course, that an existing stock of the deck was sold with a "Key.." printed later). Also, in the 1930's, it would have been more sensible to base a new edition upon the illustrations from the "The Pictorial Key...." instead of making a bad photographic rendition of the original deck (Pam-D), but that did not occur until after World War II. The biggest question of them all is however: what happened to the original artwork? Did it perhaps disappear with Rider's or Waite's archives? It took years before the two now known Pam-A packs with the roses and lilies reverse pattern showed up. Maybe one day just one of the original drawings - not to talk about the entire set - will do the same.

Epilogue: Waite-Smith Tarot decks after the Second World War

Plagiarised versions of the deck began to show up early, an example being de Lawrence's in Chicago, who not alone sent the deck on the US-market in a monochrome edition but also copied Waite's "The Pictorial Key.." word for word, only changing the title to "The Illustrated Key..." and listing de Lawrence himself as the author. The period from the Second World War up till now would need another article, but it shall shortly be said that after the war, Rider continued publishing the Waite-Smith deck. It was now printed in offset and came in heavy blue boxes. The line art was exactly as the illustrations in "The Pictorial Key" and as in Pam-A. In the same period the remakes began to show up. In the 1960's a tarot revival began, stimulated by the flower-power and hippie communities particularly in the US, who took to tarot as a card reading tool. A well-known pack from 1968 is the recolouring by Frankie Albano, keeping to Smith's line art, but using a more intensive colour scheme. Albano's packs came in several sizes and were packed in yellow boxes. Great economical interests came in. In 1971, Mr. Stuart R. Kaplan of US Games Systems Inc. saw the light and obtained a licence from Riders to publish the Waite-Smith Tarot. USGS' decks came in yellow boxes quite similar to Albano's, all USGS cards were marked with "© USGames 1971" and - here Rider's name came in - the deck was now called "THE RIDER TAROT", later changed to "RIDER TAROT" only. In 1999 Stuart R. Kaplan stated that he had sold \$100 million worth of them. With U.S. Games' editions came also a number of decks with titles in various languages, even a pack with Danish titles was printed. These titles were printed with a standard typefont in a grey band substituting Pamela Colman Smith's original calligraphed titles. This practice has, unfortunately, led to that U.S. Games' English language editions likewise no longer are featuring Pamela's handwritten titles.

Pamela Colman Smith's tarot illustrations became so popular, that they came to be a standard for the majority of tarot decks published later on. Were they not a direct plagiarism, they could be a so-called re-colouring, a redrawing, a simplification, an alleged improvement or - nicely said - a deck inspired by Pamela Colman Smith. In part four of the manuscript for my book, "The Story of the Waite-Smith Tarot", I describe no less than 40 tarot decks which immediately can be called Waite-Smith remakes, making direct use of Smith's line art, not just having been "inspired" by her number card illustrations. Many of the 40 packs do not even refer to Waite nor Smith. The majority of the copycat packs are available for a relatively short time only and then completely forgotten again. The Waite-Smith Tarot deck was created almost 100 years ago, and its popularity has never been as high, as it is now. It is hard to imagine that any modern tarot pack will survive for that long a time. They come, they go.



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