

THE SMITH-WAITE®

CENTENNIAL TAROT DECK



Based upon the original and only
authorized edition of the famous
78-card Rider-Waite® Tarot Deck

Original drawings by
Pamela Colman Smith®
under the direction of
Arthur Edward Waite

Instructions excerpted from
THE KEY TO THE TAROT
by Arthur Edward Waite

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INTRODUCTION

by Stuart R. Kaplan

The Smith-Waite Centennial Tarot Deck faithfully reproduces the original 1909 tarot deck created by Pamela Colman Smith and celebrates its 100th anniversary.

In 2009, the complete Pamela Colman Smith Commemorative Set was released by U.S. Games Systems, Inc. In addition to the Smith-Waite Tarot deck, it contained prints and postcards of Pamela's work, plus a 101-page book, *The Artwork & Times of Pamela Colman Smith*, which relates the story of her life and illustrates much of her non-tarot art.

Tarot collectors have shared with us that the Commemorative Set is so special to them they prefer to keep the complete set in pristine condition. In response, U.S. Games Systems issued a stand-alone version of the Smith-Waite Centennial

Tarot deck for those collectors who want to do readings with this special deck.

As a way of introducing those who may be less familiar with Pixie's background, we have included in this deck two samples of her non-tarot art from our collection. The first is an illustration, for *Little Charles*, a children's book by Mrs. Barbould. Pamela printed this scene in *The Green Sheaf* No. 4, 1903. The other is an illustration for Scene from *Deirdre*, Act III, with the original caption "Do you not see them? The bright birds which sing at our flight! Look how they wheel about us as they sing" in *The Green Sheaf*, No. 7, Supplement, 1903.



Dr. Arthur Edward Waite (1857-1942) was a genuine scholar of occultism whose published works include *The Holy Kabbalah* and *The Key to the Tarot* first issued in England in 1910. Waite utilized symbolism as the key to the Tarot pack. In *The Key to the Tarot* he writes: “The true tarot is symbolism; it speaks no other language and offers no other signs.” What are the Tarot cards about which Waite so skillfully writes? What is the message of each card and when and where did these fascinating cardboard symbols first originate?

The precise origin of Tarot cards in antiquity remains obscure. Court de Gebelin writing in *Le Monde Primitif* in 1781 advances the theory that Tarot cards derived from an ancient Egyptian book, *The Book of Thoth*. Thoth was the Egyptian Mercury, said to be one of the early Kings and the inventor of the hieroglyphic system. Gebelin asserts that it is from the Egyptians and Gypsies

that Tarot cards were dispersed throughout Europe.

The emergence of Tarot cards in Europe predates by over five centuries the work of Waite. A German monk, Johannes, describes a game called Ludas Cartarum played in the year 1377. Covelluzzo, a fifteenth-century chronicler, relates the introduction into Viterbo of the game of cards in the year 1379. It is generally accepted that playing cards emerged in Europe in the latter half of the fourteenth century, probably first in Italy as a complete 78-card deck. Or perhaps some inventive genius subsequently combined the common 56 cards known as the Minor Arcana with the 22 esoteric and emblematic Tarot cards known as the Major Arcana to form the 78-card pack.

During the fifteenth century, Tarot cards were generally drawn or hand painted for the princely houses of Northern Italy and France.

Subsequently, the card packs became more numerous because they were reproduced by techniques using woodcuts, stencils, and copper engraving. By the sixteenth century, a modified Tarot pack called the Tarot of Marseilles gained popularity.

There exists today, in the archives of the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, 17 Major Arcana cards generally believed, probably erroneously, to have been hand painted about the year 1392 by Jacquemin Gringonneur for Charles VI of France. These cards are likely of later Venetian origin, possibly mid-fifteenth-century Tarocchi of Venice cards.

The Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City possesses 35 cards from a 78-card Tarot deck dating from circa 1484 and believed to be the work of either Bonifacio Bembo or Antonio Cicognara. This deck apparently belonged to Cardinal Ascanio Maria

Sforza(1445-1505) or to his mother Bianca Visconti Sforza and was probably not intended for actual play but, instead, may have been merely a pictorial representation of the times.

Tarot fortune-telling readings generally take into account not only the individual divinatory meaning of a card but also the proximity between two or more cards and whether the card is upright or reversed (which weakens, delays and even reverses the meaning). The brief descriptive title on each of the 22 Major Arcana cards serves as a catalyst toward a broader and deeper meaning, which the diviner seeks to express.

Tarot decks contain 78 cards divided into two major groups:

- 22 Major Arcana Cards
- 56 Lesser Arcana Cards

The 22 Major Arcana or emblematic cards comprise of 21 cards numbered

from XXI to I (21 to 1) plus an unnumbered card known as The Fool (*Le Mat* and *Le Fou* in French). The 22 Major Arcana are also referred to as trumps (*atouts* in French, *atutti* or *trionfi* in Italian) signifying “above all.”

The 56 Lesser Arcana cards contain four suits including the usual court cards; King, Queen, Jack (Valet, Page) plus a fourth card, the Cavalier (Knight, Knave), which is placed between the Queen and the Jack. The suits are generally swords (spades), batons or wands (clubs), cups (hearts), and coins or pentacles (diamonds). Suit origins are believed to represent the four estates of life during medieval times: nobility or persons who held their rank by military service were symbolized by swords; peasants or working class people by clubs; clergymen and statesmen by cups; and tradesmen and the industrial class by coins.

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