

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.

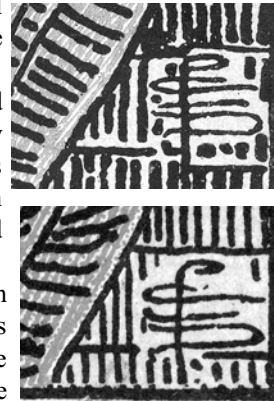
The Sun

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.