



TAROT

Some Basic Information

The Tarot

The tarot was first known as *trionfi* and later as *tarocchi*, *tarock*. It is a pack of playing cards (most commonly numbering 78), used from the mid-15th century in various parts of Europe to play a group of card games such as Italian tarocchini and French tarot.

From the late 18th century until the present time the tarot has also found us by mystics and occultists for divination as well as a map of mental and spiritual pathways.

There is so much nonsense written about the origin of The Tarot that we find repeated in some of the less well researched books on the subject. They are not the oldest playing cards we know about; they certainly were not drawn by Egyptian Priests in order to pass on mysterious and esoteric wisdom and the use of 'regular' playing cards for 'fortune telling' possibly predates the use of The Tarot.

The Tarot deck, however, has evolved into something which can be seen as imitating its own myth. Many of the currently used Tarot Decks are based upon a mythic system and do allude to stories, fables and archetypes from which intuitive connections can be made.

The core reference deck for most is the Rider-Waite deck. So called since the design was by Arthur E Waite and published by the Rider Company. It should be more correctly referred to as the Coleman-Smith—Waite deck as all of the artwork was created by Pamela Coleman Smith who was paid £72 for the creation of the 78 card deck. (published 1909).

This deck was likely based upon Sola-Busca Tarot (Northern Italy, 1491) and the Tarot de Marseille (c 1650) - they key additions made by Waite and Smith were pictures to replace the 'pips' on the minor cards and some reorganisation of the imagery of the major card to reflect the author and artists understanding of hermetic mysticism and the Kabbala.

The Crowley Thoth deck, another of the popular decks, was created by Aleister Crowley to embody in pictorial form some of his understanding of occult and hermetic teachings. The deck was designed by Lady Freda Harris who should take the credit for the fascinating art work.

Today there are over 2000 Tarot Decks in print, each reflecting a particular mythology or esoteric tradition. All (full) Tarot Decks contain

- 22 cards which make up the MAJOR ARCANA (mysteries) with cards like The Magician, The Fool, The Devil, The High Priestess, The Empress and so on...
- 56 cards making up the MINOR ARCANA comprised of four suits of 14; 10 number cards and 4 court cards in each suit
- Suits are generally CUPS (hearts); WANDS (clubs); PENTACLES (diamonds); SWORDS (spades)

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