

Early Waite-Smith editions

© K.Frank Jensen 1999

For the last couple of years I have worked on identifying different early editions of the so-called Rider-Waite tarot, which I prefer to call Waite-Smith to let Pamela Colman Smith, the artist, get her due respect. After all, the English publishing house Rider has only been responsible for a minor part of the total number of packs of this best selling tarot, published continuously throughout the past 90 years.

The first Waite-Smith edition was published by Rider in December 1909. The deck of cards could be obtained separately or boxed with a card sized edition of A.E. Waite's book: *The Key to the Tarot, being Fragments of a Secret Tradition under the Veil*. This first edition of „The Key“ was dated 1910, and included a bibliography (pgs.170-194). A second edition of the Waite-Smith tarot deck (which is said to be of superior quality, at least concerning the quality of cardboard used), was published soon after, in April 1910.

Printing technique

The technique used for printing the first editions of the Waite-Smith tarot was color-lithography. In the last decades of the 19th century, color printing developed in several ways, combining earlier color printing methods and experiments took place to substitute the manual work by mechanical aids, thus making printing easier. The fundamental process used one lithographic stone to print the black hand drawn line art and lettering, which could either be drawn directly on the stone by the artist (or by a transcriber), or a special prepared paper could be used for the



Linear screen (Pamela-A)



Dotted screen (Pamela-B,C,D,E)

drawing, which afterwards was transferred to the lithographic stone. The black line print was then filled in with colors by overprinting it with the appropriate number of color stones, each with its own color. Shades in a certain color were made by allowing the white of the paper (or colors from a former layer of print) to shine through the overprinting. The preparation of the stones for such tinting could be done by hand, but after c.1880,

a mechanical added tint was often used by adapting a special prepared grained or lined paper, which could create the necessary dots or lines, giving the impression of a shade.

We do not know to what extent Pamela Colman Smith was involved in the printing process of the tarot deck. In November 1909 in a letter to Alfred Steglitz she, however, mentioned that she had made the illustrations for the tarot deck „a big job for little money“, adding „I'll send you a pack .. printed in colour by lithography... probably very badly!....“. At the same time she offered Steglitz some of the originals for sale. This indicates that she (and not Waite) was in possession of the originals and also that she had not much belief that the printing process would reproduce her works in an acceptable way. She *could* have made the material for the printing, by either drawing directly on the stones, or by using the transfer method. If she didn't, another person had to redraw her illustrations, and add the coloring tints (by hand or by the mechanical process). The use of a transcriber would explain the many differences in the artwork between the editions.



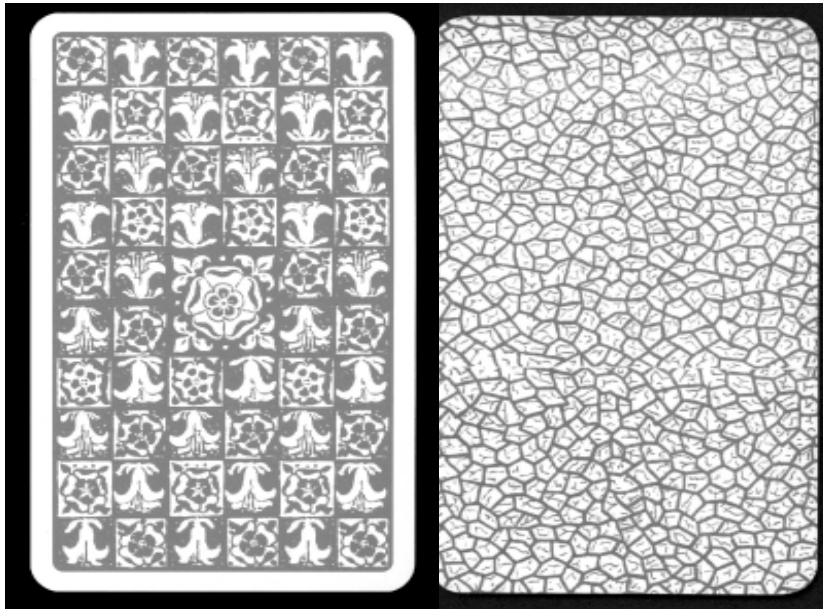
Sun without undulating line (Pamela-B only)



Sun with undulating line Pamela A,C,D,E



Sun with heavy undulating line and extra line Pamela-C only



Roses & Lilies back

Crackled back

There is no reason to believe that Pamela didn't know what the printed result would be. She certainly knew what could be done within the limitations of the printing technique of the time and her artwork did undoubtedly provide for that. She was used to work with the printers from her illustration jobs and her own publications, including her broadsheets. She would also know that if the transfer to the printing medium was done by a transcriber, it wouldn't be exactly like she intended.

Facts

Up to date, I have been able to identify 5 different early editions of the Waite/Smith pack („early“ in this connection means packs published in the period from 1909 up to the Second World War). In this paper I'll describe the characteristics and suggest a possible relation between the packs.

In the following, the five editions are called Pamela-A to Pamela-E. The letters were assigned in the sequence in which I discovered the packs, and are thus not indicating any order of publication. I have chosen *The Sun* as a common denominator,

since this card most clearly shows the differences between the editions. Also to *The Lovers* was paid particular attention during my comparison of the packs, because the mechanical method used for tinting the colors is particularly clearly visible in the two persons depicted at *The Lovers*, and because the criss-cross hatching (which is a hand-made tinting) in the mountain of the same card, makes this card particularly fit for comparison of tiny details.

These five early editions can be distinguished from each other by different combinations of following traits:

- The mechanical tinted pattern (to be compared with the modern printing screen) is either dotted, linear or a muddled mixture of the two.
- An extra „half part of a sun beam“ (an undulated line) is drawn immediately to the right of the Roman numeral XIX. This undulated line, which has given raise to some speculation, is already present in the illustration of *The Sun* in an article by Waite in *The Occult Review*, December 1909, written immediately before the publication of the deck.

Strange enough is *The Sun* here misnumbered XVIII (!). The undulated line is also present in the first edition of Waite's book: *The Illustrated Key to the Tarot*, published first in 1911 by Rider, London, as well as in Theo de Laurence's 1918 pirated edition of Waite's text, published in USA under de Laurence's name. The undulated line can be found in most, except one of the Rider editions (up to 1971) and from 1971 in the editions from US Games Systems Inc.

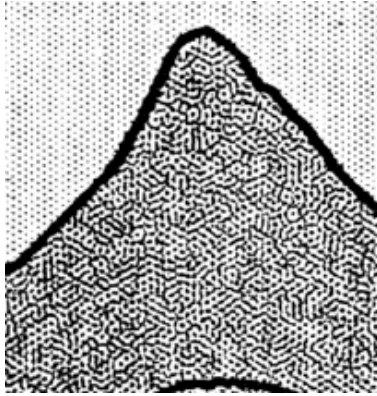
Other obvious differences between the editions can be seen by

- the placement of the title and the punctuation after it
- the lines in banner
- the Sunflower on the right side, just to mention a few differences regarding *The Sun*. For the packs in their entirety, the deviations are numerous.

Following identification traits have also been taken into account

- the size of the cards
- the thickness of the card pack (= quality of cardboard used). Both measures can deviate a little after how much the deck is worn and what trimming process was used. I have considered a deviation of up to 2 millimetre as being acceptable.
- the back pattern
 - almost all packs examined have the same crackled back pattern (some call it pebbles), only varying in color intensity. There exist furthermore packs with a Roses and Lilies back (*Pamela-A/Cary Collection* and - probably - *Pamela-C*).

Of lesser importance for the identification is the color density and balance since these often vary within the same printrun. Besides, it has not been possible for me to view all the listed early editions in the original, and color copies tend to distort the colors in a variable degree.



Mountain, The Lovers, Pamela-E

Pamela-A

This edition has a linear mechanical tint and includes the undulated line. Size 121x70 millimetre, thickness of 78 cards: 38 millimetre. All known packs except one has the yellow/brown cracked back pattern.

The pack with this combination of tinting type and size is known to exist packed in a box together with Waite's *Key to the Tarot* in an edition dated 1910.

Pamela-A is present in following collections:

- K Frank Jensen, Spilkammeret includes half part of a black slipcase
- United States Playing Card Company, USA this pack is an unusual variation since it has a lilies and rose back design in red/brown colors.
- Collection Holly Voley, USA packed in a dark red, two piece box with a 1910 edition of Waite's „Key“ included. The name of the publisher „William Rider & Son Limited - 1910“ is pasted over with a label „W.M.Postel“.
- Collection Simon Wintle, England in a dark green slipcase

Pamela-B

This edition has a dotted tint but lacks the undulated line. Size 119x70 millimetre, thickness of 79 cards: 26,5 millimetre. Apart from the differences on The Sun, there are obvious differences on all cards. While The Sun is artistically well executed, most other cards in this edition appear to be of inferior quality to Pamela-A.

Pamela-B is present in following collections:

- K Frank Jensen, Spilkammeret
- Collection Sheila Wilding, USA this pack is in a two part red cardboard box packed with a hardbound copy of „Key to the Tarot“ (212 pages), New Edition, Rider & Co. Paternostre House, E.C.4. Printed in Great Britain by Fischer, Knight & Co. Ltd., Gainsborough Press, St. Albans.

- Cary Collection, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, USA (inv. # ENG38)

on the remains of a box is printed „Printed in Great Britain“ and a handwritten note (dated 14 of January 1937): „Church of Light, L.A “ and a handwritten price „\$2.-“)

- Collection Simon Wintle, England the owner gives the thickness of this pack as being 29-30 millimetres, which is a deviation. Other identification points are confirmed
- Collection Rhonda Hawes, USA
- Guildhall Library Collection, England No less than two copies of the Pamela-B version are in the collection: #GB179 + #GB270. Both set comes with Waite's „The Key“, New Edition with same info as given above (Wilding Collection).

Pamela C:

This edition has a dotted tinting and an undulated line. Size 119x70 millimetres. Thickness: 27 milimetres. The illustrations on this pack correspond with the 1993 Rider-reprint called „*The Original Rider/Waite Tarot Pack*“ except that this pack has the crackled back pattern (while the reprint has a Rose/Lilies pattern in blue and carries a 1971 USGames copyright statement).

The undulated lines in the listed three packs and in the 1993-reprint all have an extra tiny side line, which no other registered packs have. It seems evident that the reprint is made from a Pamela-C type pack.

Compared to Pamela-A, does this pack also appear to be inferior in artistic execution.

Pamela-C is present in following collections:

- Collection Laurie Amato, USA The thickness given is 30 millimetres. The pack was bought from Gene Hockman, who in his *Encyclopedia of American Playing Cards*, vol. III, states that „it is believed that an edition of the Waite pack was published in New York simultaneously with the English edition“. I have not found any evidence of this.
- Collection Holly Voley, USA this pack has an extra blank card
- Victoria and Albert Museum, England The Sun card is illustrated in Cavendish's *The Tarot* where the extra line extruding from the crumbled line is clearly visible.

Pamela D:

This edition looks like a photographic, bad quality reprint of Pamela-A. The reproduction process has added another print screen to the original tinting, thus making the images look very blurred (details are there, but unsharp) and blocked up. About

one millimetre is cut off on the right side of the image. At least in my pack is the trimming of the cards not precise and some corners are not rounded. Size aprox. 119x70 millimetres. Thickness: 27 milimetres.

Pamela-D is present in following collections:

- Collection K.Frank Jensen, Spilkammeret
- Collection Holly Voley This particular pack has a label „Made in Great Britain“ glued directly onto the lower part on the front of the Six of Swords. The pack was acquired from the former James Wardle-collection.

Pamela E:

This edition is unique since the corners are square and the back is blank. The Sun has the undulated line. The mechanical tints used are dotted, but where The Lover's mountain in the other packs was tinted by a hand process, we can here see a special pattern created, which is the typical result of superimposing mechanical tints from two printing plates upon each other, laid so that the dots do not fall upon but between each other. Size 120x75 millimetres. Thickness: 25 milimetres.

Pamela-E is present in following collection:

- Cary Collection, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, USA (inv. # ENG37). The cataloger dated the pack c.1920.

Speculations

These are the facts known so far. It seems sure to assume that the Pamela-A type is the first (1909) Rider edition of the Waite-Smith pack. Whether the 1910 edition is among the packs listed here is, however, a little doubtful. If we consider, that the 1993 reprint is based on „an original edition“, i.e. the 1909 or 1910 pack, Pamela-C is the only choice. The 1910 pack is stated to be „on better cardboard“ (which I assume is not the heavy type used for the 1909-edition). Besides, the 1993 reprint does have the same tiny line protruding upwards from the lower part of the undulated Sun-line of Pamela-C. I have, unfortunately, not been able to view any of the original packs of Pamela-C, so I couldn't

judge the cardboard quality. Another question is, why does the reprint have a Roses and Lilies back pattern and not the cracked pattern, as the other copies of Pamela-C? Was, perhaps, the 1910-set boxed with „The Key...“ printed with a Roses and Lilies pattern, while sold on its own it had the crackled back? The tiny line indicates, that the illustrations on both versions come from the same printing stones. Was it vice-versa with the 1909 edition? The riddle of the Roses and Lilies back pattern could, perhaps, be solved by packs in the collections of Stuart R. Kaplan and Robert A. Gilbert, which I, however, could not get access to. I was, second-hand, informed that Stuart R. Kaplan owns the pack from which the 1993-reprint was made, and that this proper pack has the lilies and roses back pattern, so this combination of front and back is not a later construction.

Pamela-B is the only edition which has not the undulated line. The artwork in general appears to be inferior - looks more like a copy after Pamela-A or Pamela C. The reason for this could be, that new printing stones or plates were created, and the transcriber who did the job, was not so careful. It could also be because a copy of Pamela-A or C was used as the model instead of the original artwork, which, perhaps, had been split up for sale (it has never been unearthed again). Or the person who did the copying job considered the undulated line a mistake and just removed it. Admittedly,

the line appears to be a design flaw and so far I have not found any acceptable answer for its presence. Since all modern editions of the Waite/Smith Tarot, according to Kaplan's „The Encyclopedia of Tarot“, are based upon an early copy which belonged to Waite's family, the line was carried over in edition after edition, nobody was caring or daring to remove it.

In 1920 a „New Edition“ of „*The Key*“ was published. In my own library, I have a copy of „The New Edition“ which has printed on it the date of 1920. This copy lists the printers name as: *Made and published in GB by Chance and Bland Ltd. Gloucester.* R.A. Gilbert, however, does in his Waite bibliography note that *The New Edition* with the date of 1920 was printed by *Buttler & Tanner, Frome and London.*

In Holly Voley's collection is an incomplete deck (the majors are missing, so I have not been able to identify the type). This pack has „*The Key*“, *New edition*, with a stated date of 1931. The printers are *Fisher, Knight and Co. Ltd. Gainborough Press. St. Albans*, the same who printed all the copies of *The Key*, that accompany the listed Pamela -B decks. It may therefore be assumed, that these are all of a later date.

Pamela-D is probably an unauthorised photographic (and definitely cheaply made) reproduction of one of the original packs, and as such there are no

traces of a publisher to be found. It is difficult to estimate a date for, since photographic reproduction techniques were available also early in the period. The quality is inferior to any of the other packs listed. Both listed packs appear to come from England.

Pamela-E is quite an unusual but also unknown edition and most likely another unauthorised one (even though much superior to Pamela-D). The cataloger's date of 1920 seems to be appropriate considering the tinting method considered.

Literature:

- Bamber Gascoigne: How To Identify Prints. Thames & Hudson, England 1988
- R.A. Gilbert: A.E. Waite. A Bibliography The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough. 1983
- Gene Hochman: Encyclopedia of American Playing Cards, Vol. III.
- K. Frank Jensen, article in Manteia no. 11, (preliminary theories, with are partly corrected in the present article)
- Stuart R. Kaplan: Encyclopedia of Tarot, Vol. III, USA 1990
- Theo de Laurence: The Illustrated Key to the Tarot (pirated edition of Waite's text), USA 1919
- A.E. Waite: The Key to the Tarot..., first edition 1910 + New Edition 1920
- A.E. Waite: The Illustrated Key to the Tarot, first edition 1911 + later editions
- A.E. Waite: Article in The Occult Review, Vol. 10, no. 12, December 1909, pg. 307-17, written immediately before the publication of the deck. A few cards are reproduced, including The Sun (Pamela-A-type) which, however, in the article is misnumbered XVIII (!)
- Richard Cavendish: The Tarot. London 1975.

Acknowledgements:

Information for this paper was received with thanks from Laurie Amato, USA, John Berry, England, Cary Collection, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, USA. Ronald Decker, USA, Sir Michael Dummett, England, Rhonda Hawes, USA, Melinda Boyd Parsons, USA, Holly Voley, USA, Sheila Wilding, USA, Simon Wintle, England.