

# Where Did Tarot Come From?

## A timeline

When it comes to tarot, our own free will ensures nothing is set in stone. So it's no surprise that the history of these fascinating cards is a little fuzzy. Thankfully, we know enough to connect a few lines across the centuries. Let's take a look.

### LATE 1300s

Playing cards emerge in Europe, based on early Egyptian and Asian decks.



Looks like he's having fun.



### 1425

Vague descriptions of game play survive, with a very cursory explanation of rules.



Haste thee to gaol.  
Pass not by Go.  
Collect thee not  
two hundred ducats.



### 1400s

A new game appears in northern Italy.

"Let's play tarocchi!"



## 1440-1460

The first documented tarocchi decks appear.



## 1650

The earliest known Tarot de Marseille appears in France. Versions of this deck are still used today.



## 1781

French Freemason Antoine Court de Gébelin links the tarot to ancient Egypt, and suggests the cards hold philosophical and divinatory secrets.



# 1788

Jean-Baptiste Alliette, known as Etteilla, creates the first tarot deck designed for divination.



## 1800s - 1900s

Influential occultists continue to imbue the tarot with meaning by connecting the cards to Kabbalah, Hebrew mysticism, and Egyptian influences. Their framing becomes the foundation of the modern tarot as a divinatory system.



Éliphas Lévi



Gérard Encausse  
(Papus)



## LATE 1800s

A secret society of magicians called The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn developed new perspectives on the tarot, adding more to the mix like Christian tradition, pagan gods, ancient rituals, astrological signs, and numerology principles.



## EARLY 1900s

Mystic scholar and Golden Dawn member Arthur Edward Waite assigns definitive meanings to each card and fellow member Pamela Colman Smith illustrates them.



## 1909

Rider and Son Company publishes this revolutionary Rider-Waite-Smith (RWS) deck, which, for the first time, depicts scenes of ordinary people in everyday life.



## TODAY

The RWS deck remains the foundation of modern tarot and has inspired hundreds of variations on an astounding range of themes.

### Pop culture



### Music



### Nature



The packaging may change, but the heart of tarot as a path to personal growth never does.



## And here we are, 600+ years later

From the *tarocchi* of olde to modern-day tarot is quite the journey. Ultimately, what's most important is the four-fold essence of every tarot card:

1. Its **meaning**: traditional and contextual, surface and deep, obvious and nuanced
2. A **reminder** of what you can do in service of your greatest and highest good
3. A **challenge** to do it, and
4. The **encouragement** that you can

A tarot reading can be a beautifully profound experience. If you come to it with a curious mind and an open heart, it offers the guidance and empowerment to make courageous choices that help you create a satisfying, fulfilling life.

Sources: Perspectives on the History of Tarot by Simon Wintle, The New Tarot Handbook by Rachel Pollack, Wikipedia



# DESERTAROT

DesertTarot.com