

A Collector's Guide to the Thoth Tarot

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The Book of Thoth

The Thoth Tarot was designed by Aleister Crowley and executed by Lady Freida Harris. The project took five years, from 1938 to 1943, and was published as The Book of Thoth [h]. What we now know as the Thoth Tarot are the illustrations for this book. This major undertaking was completed near the end of Crowley's life and reflects his seasoned thinking and accumulated knowledge.

The collaboration between Crowley and Freida Harris was an active one [i]. A major feature of the illustrations is the use of Projective Synthetic Geometry, or magical perspective, that Harris explored constantly in her artwork.

There was no deck of cards printed to accompany the Book of Thoth, but it's clear that Crowley intended there to be one as soon as time and funds allowed. As it turned out this was not until the late 1960s, after both he and Freida Harris had passed on. Since its first publication as a color deck, the Thoth Tarot has never gone completely out of print, a claim that can be made by almost no other tarot deck.



Sangreal One-Color Thoth

Sometime in the mid to late-1960s Carr Collins and the Sangreal Foundation commissioned the Simpson Printing Company of Dallas, Texas to print the B&W illustrations from a first edition of The Book of Thoth [a], as a tarot deck. The images were printed with blue ink, and the backs in red. The size of these cards was 5.5 x 3.75 (140 x 95 mm), which became the de facto standard for all large size Thoth decks. About 250 decks were made in a limited edition, now out of print.



An article in "Magical Blend" refers to another deck tinted in green and published by Shambhala, in 1968. This is probably the same deck with some confusion over the publishers, but that's just my speculation. I haven't been able to find a complete copy of the article. (Ebony Anpu; Lotte Lieb & Bill Heindrick: Talking Tarot [Magical Blend])

First Edition in Color

In the late 1960s Llee Heflin of Level Press [f] traveled to England to photograph Lady Frieda Harris's original watercolors, then still in the personal possession of Gerald Yorke. From these photos, the cards were published in color for the first time, with the collaboration of Heflin, Yorke, and Grady McMurtry (then Caliph of the O.T.O). Each deck included a contact card with an introductory message and contact information for those interested in learning more about the Order. They were produced in a large 5.5 x 3.75 inch format, and housed in a high quality two piece 'slider' box; a gold inner box which holds the cards and a white outer box that slides over it. With a traditional flair, the box printing was done in red and black; black text and a red O.T.O. lamen. The back was the Rose Cross in full color.

There is considerable disagreement as to which 'White Box' was published first and is the First Color Edition. There are no dates on these early boxes, no ISBN, and no booklet to provide copyright information. Indeed, there are no copyright notices at all. Publisher's records are few and vague. What we know for sure is that, between 1969 at the earliest and 1973 at the latest, Llewellyn and Weiser printed several nearly identical editions of the large format Thoth Tarot in a white and gold slider box. The information below is compiled from comparisons of the decks themselves, online and printed descriptions, [b] and the memories of those involved in publishing the decks. It's not authoritative, as that simply isn't possible with the scant records that were kept.

White Box A 1969 (?)

This edition probably does not exist.

O.T.O. records and contemporary accounts confirm the Llewellyn Hong Kong edition as the first full-color print of the Thoth deck. Llewellyn's history site dates their first edition as 1-1-1972, and shows no earlier printings of a Thoth deck. Based on that, if a 1969 edition exists it must be from Weiser, perhaps to accompany their 1969 reprint of *The Book of Thoth*. But Weiser has no record of such a deck having been produced.

That said, there are two sources that document a 1969 printing:

In his *Encyclopedia of Tarot*, Stuart Kaplan gives 1969 as the publication year for the first full color Thoth deck. He gives no details. [j]

The text on the back of the 1977 White Box, published by Weiser, says "The Thoth tarot deck remained unpublished until 1969." This may only refer to the reprinting of *The Book of Thoth*, but it gives the impression there was a 1969 card deck.

Llewellyn White Box A 1972

Printed in Hong Kong. Out of Print.

White and gold slider box, Rose Cross back. Unornamented borders on the card faces, no Hebrew letters or other symbols. Rose Cross on card back with no border. Caliph Card is included with contact information; P.O.

Box 2043. Print quality is not consistent throughout the deck, this is especially noticeable in the hue of the card borders.

Printing errors:

- The number is missing from the top of the 8 of Cups card.
- The illustration for the "Ace of Pentacles" card is printed upside-down.

Llewellyn's history site shows "Edition by Llewellyn in cooperation with O.T.O. 1971-72" and, separately, a picture of the box tagged 1/1/1972 [c].

Llewellyn-Weiser Collaboration

In 1973 Llewellyn and Wieser collaborated to release nearly identical editions of the Thoth deck, each under their own imprint.

Llewellyn White Box B 1973

Printed in U.S.A. Out of Print.

Nearly identical to the 1972 edition. White and gold slider box, Rose Cross back.

Unornamented borders on the card faces,

no Hebrew letters or other symbols. Rose Cross on card back with no border. Caliph Card is included with contact information; early printings give the PO Box as 2043, in later printings it reportedly changed to 94566.

Print quality is not consistent throughout the deck, this is especially noticeable in the hue of the card borders.

Printing errors from the 1972 edition remain in the early releases, later print runs corrected these defects.

Weiser White Box B 1973

Printed in U.S.A. Out of Print.

White and gold slider box, Rose Cross back. Unornamented borders on the card faces, no Hebrew letters or other symbols. Rose Cross on card back with no border. Caliph Card is included with contact information; early printings give the PO Box as 2043, in later printings it reportedly changed to 94566, both in Dublin, CA.

Print quality is not consistent throughout the deck, this is especially noticeable in the hue of the card borders.

Printing errors are corrected: The number appears at the top of the 8 of Cups card, and the illustration for the Ace of Pentacles card is right side up.



First Reissue

In 1977, due to the efforts of Gerald Yorke and Stephen Skinner, the original artwork was re-photographed and higher quality images became available, with better resolution and more accurate colors. [d] In 1978 the deck was reissued using these photos, with a number of other changes:

The box became a standard tuckbox with top flap opening, white with printing in black and red and a red O.T.O. lamen. The cards and box remained large format (5.5 x 3.75).

The back of the box was still the Rose Cross, but 'ghosted' and overlaid with text.

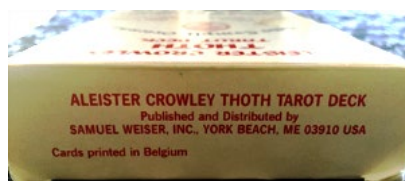
The geometric border featured on the original art was included on the card faces for the first time, together with the Hebrew letters and alchemical or astrological attributions next to the titles of the Trumps. This style of front border became standard in all future editions.

The O.T.O. contact card name was still included with Hymenaeus Alpha's name, but the contact address was removed and a copyright notice added.

A new card was added; a unicursal hexagram in red on a black background.

A booklet was added, with text by James Wasserman, plus essays written by Lady Frieda Harris with commentary and footnotes by Stuart Kaplan. This became a standard feature.

There were several slightly different versions of this edition, all now Out of Print.



Weiser/US Games White Box C 1978

Samuel Weiser Inc. in co-operation with US Games Systems Inc.

Printed in Belgium by Carta Mundi.

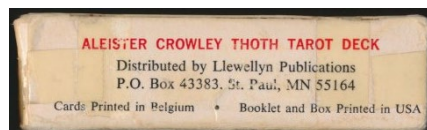
In 1983 an ISBN-number was added for the first time: ISBN 0-87728-452-0.



Printing errors: This is the deck sometimes referred to as the 'green Thoth', or just 'greenie', due to a significant green tint to the cards, especially the borders. Later print runs of this edition corrected the color error.

US Games Systems Additional Languages White Box C 1978 (?)

A four-language version was also published, with titles appearing in the borders in English, French, Spanish, and German. An additional card was included with first paragraph of the Caliph card message in French, Spanish, and German.

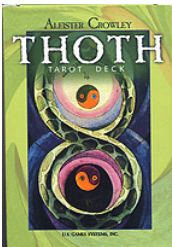


Llewellyn White Box C Date unknown

Publication information on the box reads "Distributed by Llewellyn Publications, P.O. Box 43383, St. Paul, MN 55164. Cards printed in Belgium. Booklet and box printed in USA."

AGMüller and U.S. Games Systems

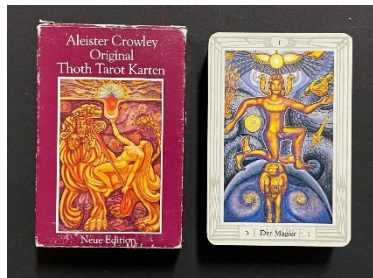
Starting in 1986, the Thoth tarot was printed by AGMüller and distributed by U.S. Games Systems. The Rose Cross back pattern was now surrounded by a white border on which a copyright notice was printed; this became the standard design. Two additional Magus cards, reproduced from Frieda Harris' drafts, were added to some editions. The deck became available in different sizes for the first time, and ISBN numbers were added. Except as noted, there is no unicursal hexagram card and no introduction/contact card.



Red Wheel/Weiser 1983

Printed in Belgium by AGMüller

Large format 3.75" x 5.5" cards, with the Wasserman booklet and only one Magus card. ISBN: 0-87728-452-0, ISBN: 0-913866-15-6, Out of Print.



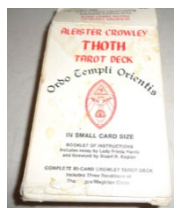
AGMüller 1986

Printed in Switzerland, published by Neue Edition, distributed by Urania and U.S. Games. German edition with German titles.

The box has that odd copyright notice that so many of the AGMüller boxes use: "© 1944, 1962 OTO International/AGM, Switzerland." The copyright notice on cards is "1986 AGMüller". All three Magus cards are included. 41 page booklet by "The Hermit", with excerpts from Aleister Crowley's original Book of Thoth.

This booklet is different from the US Games' versions. Standard size cards, 2.75" x 4.375".

ISBN: 3-905021-60-9 for the booklet, ISBN-13: 978-3-905021-60-8, Out of Print.



AGMüller and U.S. Games Systems 1986, reprinted 1996

Published and distributed by US Games Systems Inc, printed by AGMüller & Cie, Switzerland. Cards have copyright notice in the border on the back of the cards. First printed in 1986, there is at least one reprint of this edition with the copyright date of 1996.

Booklet Copyright 1978, 1983 1987 by Stuart R. Kaplan & Donald Weiser. Note: Copyright dates in the booklet often don't align with the copyright dates of the cards.

White tuckbox with "In Small Card Size" under the lamen. Includes the two additional Magus cards, reproduced from Frieda Harris' drafts. There is a card with a Crowley quote and the address of O.T.O. International Headquarters in Austin, TX, no Caliph name or other information. A Unicursal Hexagram card was included with a rainbow hexagram on a black background.

Cards measure 2.625" x 4.325". ISBN: 0-88079-308-2, Out of Print



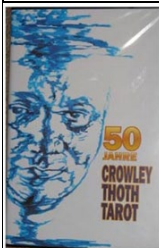
AGMüller 1986

Large Swiss Blue Box

Publication information on the box reads "© 1986 by AGMüller, CH-Neuhaussen"

Standard card-box, showing the Magus card, left-aligned, surrounded by a blue border. This edition contained the three different versions of the "Magus" card. Cards measure 3.75" x 5.5" (9.5 cm x 14 cm)

ISBN: 3-905219-06-9, Out of Print

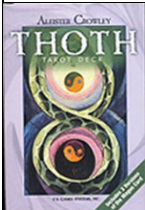


Urania Verlag 1994

Printed in Switzerland

Aleister Crowley Thoth Tarot Jubiläums Set. Limited edition of 1994 sets.

For the 50 year anniversary of the original publication of The Book of Thoth, Urania Verlag issued a limited and numbered edition which contains the deck, the German translation of The Book of Thoth, a poster depicting the "Eight of Wands" and a CD with recordings of rituals, calls and poems performed by Crowley. ISBN 13: 7611652306254, availability unknown.



U.S. Games 1996

Printed in Belgium, distributed by U.S. Games Systems, USA.

The box for this edition had a banner across the lower right corner saying "New Edition". The deck included all three variants of the "Magus" card. Copyright notice "AGMüller 1986" is printed on all cards as well as the box.

Cards measure 2.75" x 4.375" ISBN-13: 978-0-88079-308-7, Still in print from U.S. Games as of 2023.

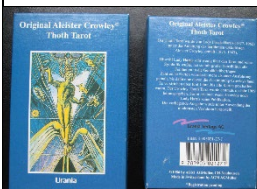


AGMüller 1996

Large Swiss Blue Box (later edition). Publication information on the box reads "© 1944, 1962 OTO International/AGM, Switzerland." Odd and clearly wrong.

There is an OTO card included with this edition, and a rainbow Unicursal Hexagram card. Only one magus card. 41 page booklet by "The Hermit", with excerpts from Aleister Crowley's original Book of Thoth. This booklet is different from the US Games' versions.

Cards measure 3.75" x 5.5" (9.5 cm x 14 cm), ISBN: 0-88079-469-0 Box, 3-905021-60-9 for the booklet. Out of Print



AGMüller / Urania Verlag AG 1996 (1986)

Distributed by Urania, Germany (then the publishing arm of AGMüller).

"Copyright by AGMüller 1986" is printed on the box, "1996 AGMüller" is printed on the cards. The newer O.T.O. contact card is included, printed in German, as is the rainbow on black unicursal hexagram card, with a white border. The booklet is by Evelin Burger & Johannes Fiebig.

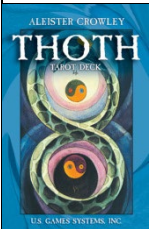
This edition included all three versions of the Magus card. Cards measure 4.75" x 3.375". ISBN-13: 978-3905-02127-1



AGMüller 1997

Pocket Swiss Blue Box. Printed in Switzerland by AGMüller and distributed by U. S. Games Systems, Inc.

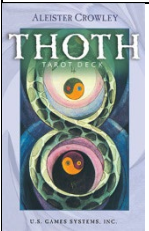
Pocket sized version of the Large Swiss, above. Has the same odd Publication information on the box: "© 1944, 1962 OTO International/AGM, Switzerland." Cards measure 2.25" x 3.5". ISBN-13: 978-1-57281-294-9, ISBN: 1-57281-294-X This version Out of Print.



U.S. Games Systems 2000

Pocket Swiss Crowley Thoth Tarot Deck

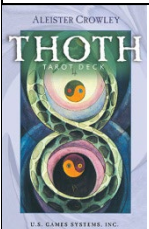
Still called the "Pocket Swiss", with the same ISBN as the older version, but with a new box to conform with the other U. S. Games Thoth Tarot boxes. Cards measure 2.25" x 3.5". Standard poker deck size. ISBN: 978-1-57281-294-9. Still in print as of 2023.



U.S. Games Systems 2005

Premier Edition, December 31, 2005

Includes a booklet and a ten-card-spread sheet. Originally issued with the two additional Magus cards, that feature has been discontinued. ISBN: 978-1-57281-510-0, Cards measure 2.75" x 4.375". Out of Print.



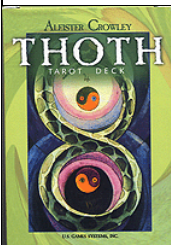
U.S. Games Systems 2012

Crowley Thoth Tarot Deck Small

Printed in Belgium, distributed by U.S. Games Systems, USA.

Reprint of the 1996 edition, without the "New Edition" banner, using the same ISBN. Card size 2.75" x 4.375". This deck no longer features the two extra Magus cards.

ISBN: 978-0-88079-308-7 Still in print as of 2023.

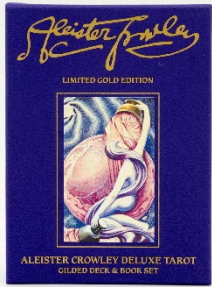


U.S. Games 2012

Crowley Thoth Tarot Deck Large

Deck printed in Belgium for U.S. Games Systems, USA.

Large format cards, with the Wasserman booklet. Originally included all three Magus cards, however, that feature was discontinued around 2017. Cards measure 3.75" x 5.5", ISBN: 978-0-91386-615-3, Out of Print.



US Games and AGMuller 2020

Thoth Tarot Gilded Box Set Limited Gold Edition

This deluxe limited edition features gold gilt edging on both the 78-card tarot deck and the 116-page hardcover book by Akron & Hajo Banzhaf. 1996 AGMuller copyright notice on the back of the cards, 2020 copyright notice on the box and book. Cards measure 4.75" x 3.375". Two-piece luxury box size 5.75" x 7.91" x 1.85.

ISBN: 9781572819801. Availability unknown.

Urania Verlag

The Golden Thoth

2008

LWB, 152 pages with a foreword by Hymenaeus Beta, two previously unpublished essays by Lady Frieda Harris, and excerpts from Crowley's writings.

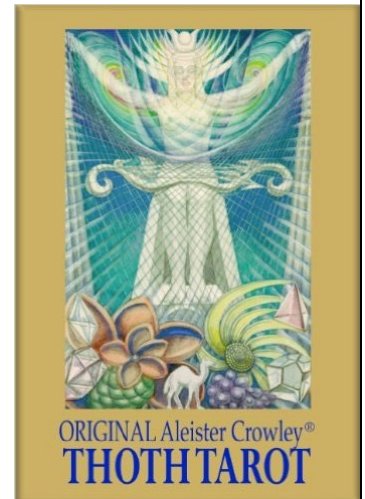
Printed using new photographs of the original art, with care was taken to match the original painting both in hue and saturation. The borders on the card backs are gold. This excerpt is from the O.T.O. international site:

"...Around 2007, O.T.O. went to considerable trouble and expense—with very supportive assistance from AGMüller and the Yorke Collection curators—to digitally re-photograph the deck in high resolution, using a (rented!) \$100,000 Phase One camera. We even did the typesetting and layout for the new deck in multiple languages, including English, for free—all in the interests of finally getting a version out that would meet Crowley's and Lady Harris' exacting standards. We've been very disappointed—thus far, it has only appeared in German.

I have compared this printing of the deck to the original paintings, and it is almost perfect. The original paintings have not faded over time, as some have claimed (the originals have always been protected from light, barring brief exhibitions, and are stable Winsor and Newton pigments). The problem is that prior printings have been simply negligent about color correction—which was admittedly harder in the pre-digital era—and in some cases, colors have been "pushed" to get an effect the publisher likes. Matching the subtlety of the paintings themselves is much harder, but clearly worthwhile." [e]

Only released in Germany, availability unknown.

A pocket size was also produced, ISBN-13: 978-3-86826-503-3, ISBN: 3-86826-503-1.



Footnotes

a) Possibly #105, based on <http://www.tarotassociation.net/magazine/> R. Leo Gillis p. 39, although uncertain as this article has several factual errors.

[b] (<https://www.jameswassermanbooks.com/producing-the-thoth-tarot/>)(Hymenaeus Beta states that Llewellyn published the first color edition. Private correspondence 2015. Please Note: This should not be taken to mean that either Hymenaeus Beta or the O.T.O. endorses the accuracy of the rest of the information herein.)

c) <http://www.llewellyn.com/about/event.php?id=230>

(<https://www.llewellyn.com/about/era.php?id=1>)

d) Lon Milo DuQuette Understanding Aleister Crowley's Thoth Tarot, p. 17

e) Hymenaeus Beta <http://oto.org/news0413.html>

f) Taken from <http://777leeheflin.org/939393/index2.html> Lee Heflin's on-line biography, URL now defunct

(h) The Book of Thoth: A Short Essay on the Tarot of the Egyptians [the title of] The Equinox, volume III, number 5, Aleister Crowley, The OTO/Chiswick Press Ltd, 1944.

(i) <http://www.tarokki.fi/tarotpuu/2011/03/18/lecture-on-the-tarot-by-frieda-lady-harris-sesame-club-1942/>

j) Kaplan, Stuart, Encyclopedia of Tarot, vol. III, (U.S Games Systems, 1990), p152