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The Game of Tarot: From Ferrara to Salt Lake City

By Michael Dummett

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Sir Michael Dummett, a well-known British philosopher, is the foremost scholar in the field of Tarot history, with numerous books and articles to his credit. He is a founding member of the International Playing Card Society, in whose journal "The Playing Card" he regularly publishes opinions, research, and reviews of current literature on the subject. His encyclopedic, groundbreaking, and painstakingly documented "The Game of Tarot: From Ferrara to Salt Lake City," established the invention of Tarot in 15th-century Italy and laid the foundation for all subsequent research on the game of Tarot, including exhaustive accounts of the rules of all hitherto known forms of the game. An important result of Dummett's analysis of the historical evidence was to demonstrate that fortune-telling and occult interpretations were unknown prior to the 18th century. During most of their history, Tarot cards were used to play an extremely popular trick-taking game which is still enjoyed in much of Europe. Around the turn of the 16th century, Tarot became popular in France, and from there spread to Germany, Switzerland, and beyond. Also in the 16th century, Tarot was used as a literary motif for poetic parlor games, sometimes termed tarocchi appropriati. Dummett showed that the middle of the 1700s saw a great development in the game of Tarot, including a modernized deck (with French suit-signs and without the medieval allegories that occultists have found irresistible), along with a growth in Tarot's popularity. "The hundred years between about 1730 and 1830 were the heyday of the game of Tarot; it was played not only in northern Italy, eastern France, Switzerland, Germany and Austro-Hungary, but also in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and even Russia. Not only was it, in these areas, a famous game with many devotees: it was also, during that period, more truly an international game than it had ever been before or than it has ever been since"

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