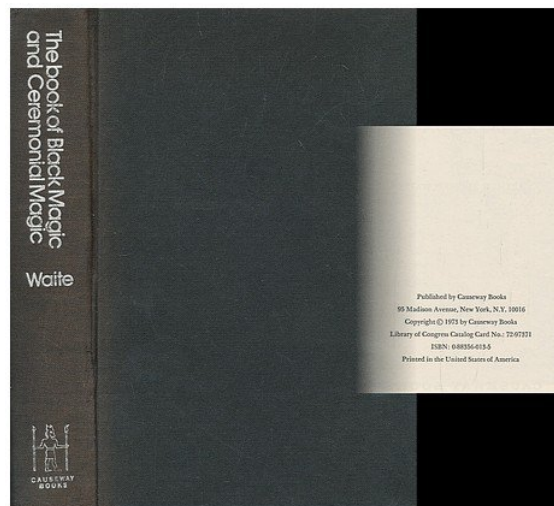
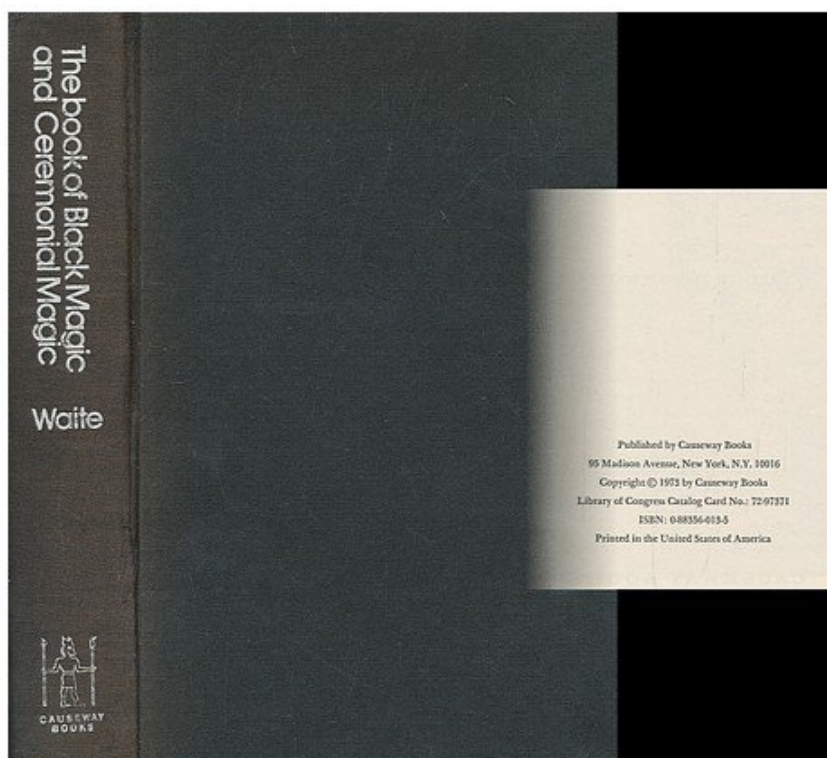


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A.E. Waite (1857-1942) is one of the best-known authors and translators of magic and the occult. He is the creator of the Rider-Waite tarot and is the author of several books including *Book of Black Magic* and *Pictorial Keys to the Tarot*.

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With this book the author has assembled together a number of magical spells and treatises from a variety of obscure sources. The result is a great overview of magic from one of the most important figures in Western occultism. When critical at times of Eliphas Levi and Waite's former associate, S. L. MacGregor Mathers, it shows an attempt at being honest with his views on magic. He also covers many of the original early grimoires, sometimes quoting them, and points out flaws in the more recent translations of his time. This is an expanded, updated version of his previous work, *The Book of Black Magic*. The book is a gold-mine of smaller magical pamphlets published in France in the nineteenth century, which were reproductions of earlier eighteenth-century works, now preserved in this book and valued for their content. All in all this is not so much a book of rituals to perform, which are plentiful and easy to find. It is instead a great reference book on ritual magic, of which only a few good ones exist today. In this regard, it is considered one of the best.

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Ian Myles Slater on: *An Old Standard*

By Ian M. Slater

Arthur Edward Waite (1860-1942) was a professed mystic, an historian of mysticism, alchemy, magic, and secret societies, an industrious translator, and a man unusually willing to turn 180 degrees from a published opinion when faced with new and better evidence. His variously titled "*Book of Black Magic and of Pacts*" (1898, privately printed; public edition, 1911), or "*Book of Ceremonial Magic*," etc. (it is currently in print

under the latter title as well), shows Waite rejecting the misinformation and misrepresentations of his old source and model, "Eliphaz Levi" (real name Alphonse Louis Constant, c.1810-1875) and his sometime-associate in the Order of the Golden Dawn, S.L. MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918), and trying to offer the interested public a responsible survey of the literature of ceremonial magic.

The book in question, under a variety of similar titles, is frequently reprinted, although it is now very badly dated. Most of those editions I have seen seemed to be identical; I can't be sure of all them. The present, Weiser, edition, seems to be a reprinting of the original, somewhat shorter, and apparently less (or un-)illustrated, edition of 1898. (I would like to be clearer, but it's been several years since I actually handled it, and, to judge from information on Amazon, some of my recollections of it seem to have been wrong.)

In any version, the book also contains a number of oversights and errors of fact, but it retains considerable value and interest, and is worth reading with care, and **critical** attention.

Waite makes interesting points on the presuppositions of the genuinely early grimoires (books of spells and rituals) which he describes and excerpts, and useful comments on the (un)reliability of the then-current translations, many of which have been reprinted in recent years. Anyone attempting to use it as guide to practicing such magic should heed Waite's warning that he has taken care to present an incomplete or corrupt form of any ritual involving harm to animals, rendering the spells, by the magical hypothesis, ineffective; entirely out of concern for the animals, not the would-be-magicians, he explains. Indeed, Waite has little patience with the operative magician in general, and with those who supply the demand for spellbooks in particular. He points out that, in terms of procedures and intentions, the magical literature allows no real distinction between "white" and "black" magic; indeed, what is presented as "white" magic, is, by making direct use of religious rites and objects, sometimes the more objectionable. He also points out that the medieval and early modern magicians generally seemed unaware that what they were doing could be considered blasphemous.

Among its other merits, Waite's book provides extended excerpts and illustrations from the leading pseudo-grimoires published in cheap editions in (mainly) France in the nineteenth century. He points out the origins of some of these tracts in more respectable "occult" writings of the eighteenth century. (A rather wavering line probably could now be drawn back all the way to the Hermetic enthusiasts of the Renaissance, and ultimately to Hellenistic Egypt, but all genuine Egyptian content, except mention of the Pyramids and Pharaohs, had vanished along the way.)

Waite attempts, albeit with inadequate data, to establish the medieval date and Christian origins of the various "Books" and "Keys" of Solomon, a task still not complete in detail, and compares these texts to explicitly Christian works, some masquerading as highly effective devotions. The book is concerned with the relatively elite practice of ritual magic, including its many vulgarizations, and not with European witchcraft, nor with Satanism as such. As Waite points out, the grimoires promise to teach how to compel, bribe, and trick devils, not worship them (although from a theological point of view, as he makes equally clear, the distinction is meaningless). Pacts are attempts to force supernatural beings to serve humans, not promises of one's own soul -- except where the intention is to break the pact.

The nearest successor to Waite's book to appear in English was Elizabeth M. Butler's "Ritual Magic," first published by Cambridge University Press in 1949, and recently reprinted. It shows a dependence on Waite (in the 1898 edition, with the original page numbering) for materials unavailable to its author in wartime and post-war Britain, but has considerable additional material on actual and supposed magicians (including Gilles de Rais), and on nineteenth century magicians, pseudo-magicians, Satanists, pseudo-Satanists, and hoaxes, and provides an invaluable context for understanding Waite's writings. Her book can be read as a

follow-up, if not an introduction.

Butler, more importantly, fills a gap in Waite's coverage. "Ritual Magic" offers a good discussion of the various German (and generally Central European) books purporting to contain the magic of Faust; these are generally duller than the French pamphlets described by Waite, but seem to be rather more likely to reflect real attempts to practice the "black arts," and represent a different geographic area. "Ritual Magic" was, in fact, the middle volume of a trilogy on the Faust tradition (including "The Myth of the Magus" and "The Fortunes of Faust'), and Butler's literary interests are clear throughout.

Those with a genuine interest in current research on the history of European traditions of magic will probably want to turn to the essays in "Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic," edited by Claire Fanger (1998), and Richard Kieckhefer's "Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century" (1997). These all, especially the latter, contain excerpts of texts to compare to those offered by Waite. (Kieckhefer gives a long Latin text as well.) A shorter survey, covering a number of other topics, and with briefer quotations, is Kieckhefer's "Magic in the Middle Ages" (Cambridge University Press, 1989; the Canto paperback of 2000 has a useful new Preface with updated bibliography). Kieckhefer also provides a good introduction to the historical literature on witch beliefs and persecutions, and how these relate to elite magic; a subject on which the second edition of Norman Cohn's "Europe's Inner Demons" is also enlightening.

28 of 30 people found the following review helpful.

Informative, but quite droll (much like the author himself)

By A Customer

The so-called "Book of Black Magic" is more or less a compendium of some of the more infamous medieval grimoires such as the Red Dragon, the Grimoire of Honorius, etc. The book is worth the price for the sheer amount of knowledge contained within. The general occult public is sometimes hardpressed to gain access to medieval manuscripts and grimoires or is not willing to pay an exorbitant fee for copies from the British Museum. Even then, one must contend with the Middle English dialect (although a company called IGOS sells translated copies of many noteworthy grimoires) and the occasional swear, crack, or scorch mark on the document. It is for this reason that the "Book of Black Magic" is a worthy addition to your shelf. Although the information is presented lucidly and translated the reader must still contend with the horrible illustrations of Waite (a true disgrace to produce a book with such poorly drawn sigils and seals), not to mention his sheer verbosity. In effect it is a trade-off.....we gain this pure compendium knowledge at the high price of reading the pompous (and often inane) outpourings of A.E. Waite. Had this book been written as a sheer compilation without the annoying commentaries by Mr. Waite it would have been a 10. If you can filter his footnotes (which are longer than the book) it is a most worthwhile experience.

--Maofas

24 of 28 people found the following review helpful.

Decent, but a bit deceiving

By A Customer

If you've already got "The Book of Ceremonial Magick," then you don't need this. This book includes the second half of the aforementioned volume, and nothing more. Also, the writing style is a bit strange, very archaic, and includes mostly essays about Magick and different types of spiritual practices. Not exactly useful for anyone getting into Magick for the first time, but it does include information on the darker side, and probably what to avoid doing if you don't want to get bad karma.

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