FLORENTINE CARDS: TWO BURGUNDIAN POVERONOS
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The King of Clubs and the Queen of Diamonds illustrated below are two Florentine cards of the 18th century. They are part of a file of documents which in 1867 entered the Florence National Library − where they can still be examined as Conv. Soppr. Filippini Nr. 233 − as a result of the suppression of the Convents. As often happens with many surviving antique cards, they were found in peculiar circumstances: they had been trimmed to shape and used as the basis for the padding of two tassels which decorated a picture frame in the library of the Filippini Convent of San Firenze.

The original dimensions of the cards were about 95x65 mm. As usual, the backing paper is folded over the edges, making a frame on the face side. The figures were printed and then coloured by hand; the coloured areas on the Queen are fewer in number and broader than on the King. These courts are rather similar in appearance to several well-known French regional patterns, particularly of the South-West regions: the Provence pattern of various periods has a Queen very similar to this one (though, in this case, a stronger correspondence for the King would be with the King of Diamonds); the Lorraine pattern is also rather similar, and the backs of the cards (see below) would obviously be in good agreement with that region. Likewise with some examples of the Burgundy pattern, which will not be surprising to experts: Miss Mann has commented on this example that it is the Burgundian pattern, and that it was the one usually employed one in Florence until c.1850.
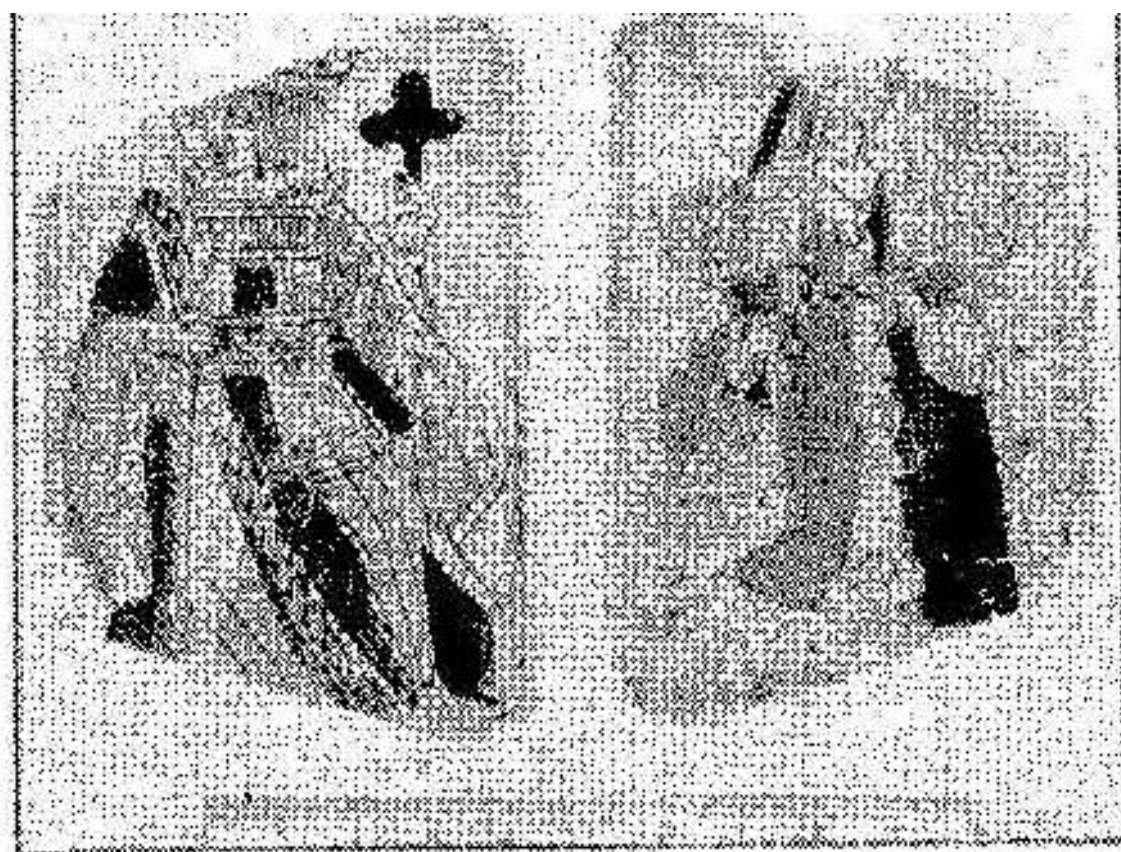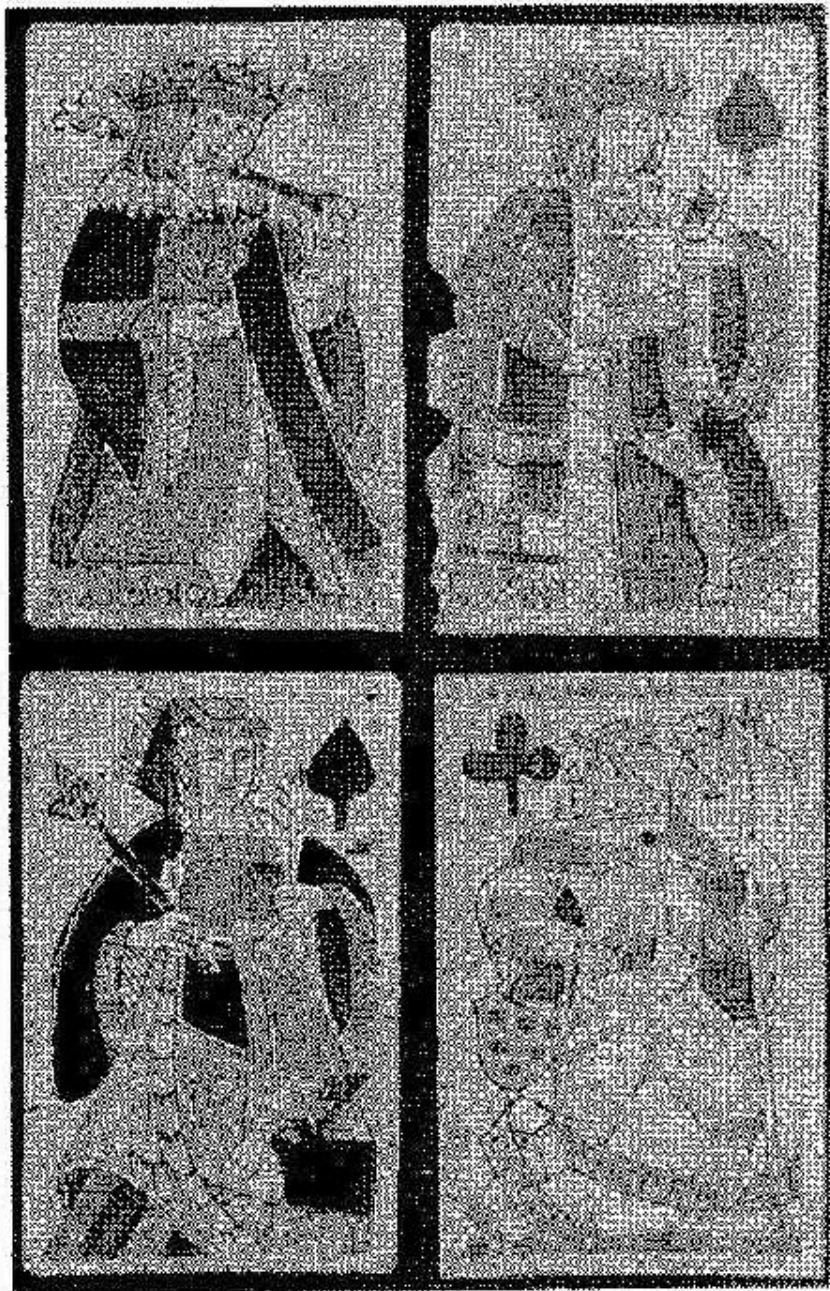

Figure 1 – Florentine cards, from BNCF Conv. Soppr. Filippini Nr. 233.

More surprising is the back-design of the two cards. The coat of arms is certainly that of the House of Lorraine, which began to rule over Tuscany in 1737, a date which is consistent with the dates of other documents in the file, all of which are of the 18th century, mainly the second half.

Burgundian pattern
"Alla Fama", Florence, 18th century

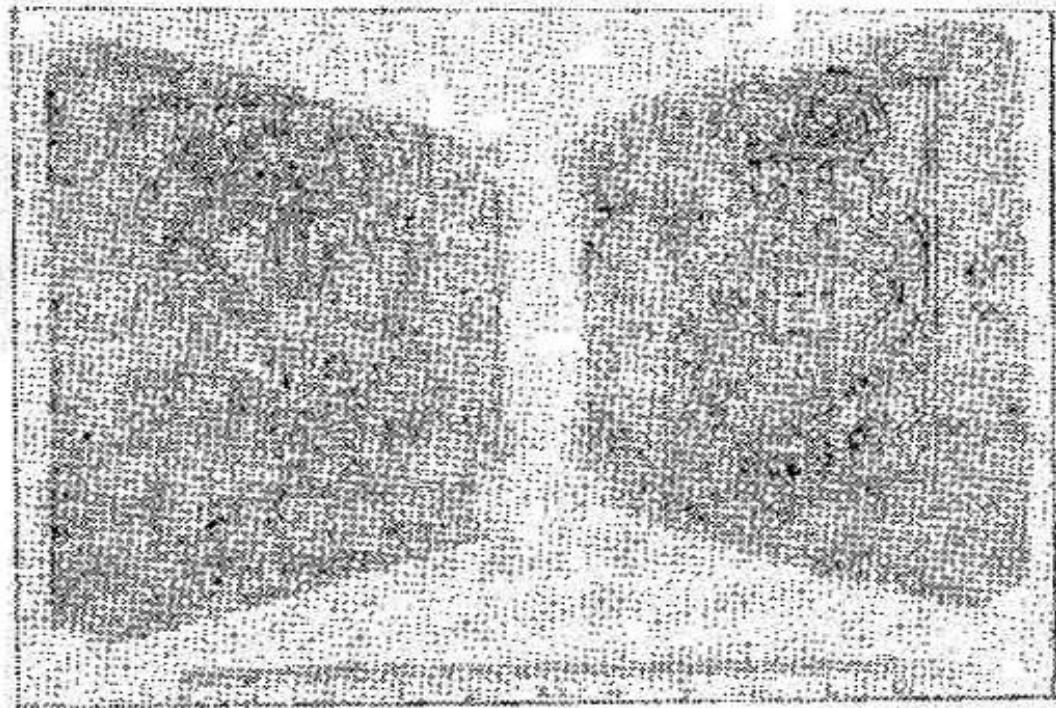**Figure 2 – Florentine cards from Sylvia Mann's collection.**

Figure 3 – Card-backs of the cards of Fig. 1.

Another noteworthy feature is the unusual name of the printer, spelling here as POVERONO, which may appear at first sight a misprint of similar names, well known from Minchiate packs. Cards from different packs were already very similar to each other; both the pattern and the dimensions were already strongly standardised. There is a revealing episode in some verses by Michelangelo Buonarroti Jr (1568-1646), describing a game of Gilé , where a woman allows one card from a different pack to be inserted in her hand in order to increase its value; the deceit is detected only later, by inspecting the backs.

Thus, it was mainly the card-backs which allowed the cards to be differentiated, through the coat of arms or other designs, and possibly the printer's name. However, even in this respect, Florentine cards had become alike; it suffices to recall the many 8-letter names of cardmakers, such as PARAGONE, PEVERONE, POVERONE, POVERINO, and POVERONO as here. The recurrence in the course of several centuries of such similar printers' names became a kind of popular advertisement for the quality of the pack, probably also allowing the issue of competitive lower-priced items, a general practice which − apart from the cards − has certainly not disappeared nowadays.

Burgundian pattern, c.1830

Figure 4 – Similar cards from Sylvia Mann's collection.

(Hopefully these reproductions from the PCW will be substituted later on with better ones. F.P.)