

## TAROT IN BOLOGNA: DOCUMENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Franco Pratesi, 27.05.1987

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Tarocchino Bolognese is one of the oldest variants of tarot. Some of the stories connected with Prince Fibbia tend to attribute to it a date of origin which is near to the very introduction of cards in Europe. Unfortunately, however, very few documents have been preserved which are earlier than the first edition of the fundamental book *Istruzioni necessarie...* printed in Bologna in 1754. On the other hand, Tarocchino Bolognese is a fortunate exception among the many tarot variants, which are now almost completely forgotten. It is still played and precisely in same places where it was introduced four or five hundred years ago. Moreover, the fact that the game is based on the use of a reduced pack - the numeral cards from 2s to 5s being absent - has the fortunate consequence that the cards of Tarocchino Bolognese have not been implied in the recent revivals of cartomantic fashions.

Prof. Dummett, in particular, has recently emphasised with usual comprehensiveness the local character of the game; the necessity in old times to memorize the whole sequence of the triumphs, which only recently and only in part show numbers; the conservative aspect of the cards and of the rules of playing, and so on. (1) In recent years we have some description of Tarocchino Bolognese in game magazines, (2) in books of card games, (3) a new reprint of the above mentioned ancient book, (4) and the edition of a pack, sponsored by Banca Popolare di Bologna e Ferrara, published together with a book by Laghi (5). Further editions are expected or are already in the press. The last mentioned book is a further evidence, if one yet was needed, of the peculiar character of Tarocchino Bolognese: it is clearly written in order to describe a game still well and alive, without any particular reference to its past, however renowned. Indicative of the present situation is a sentence in the foreword, *Il tarocco sopravvive in quelle strade dove il tempo si è fermato: le case sanno ancora di tagliatelle, senti parlare in bolognese, la notte non fa paura perché c'è luce e la gente si conosce;...*

The literary documents about the game are few; practically all of them derive from Bologna. Moreover, no witness remains for those cards being used for different aims, except for the renowned facts of 1725 related to Montieri's pack and its persecution. (1) Also modifications of the standard pack, such as the renowned Tarocchino by Mitelli, appeared relatively seldom.

Therefore, apart from the printed sources, other documentary evidence seems to be necessary in order to obtain a more detailed picture of the historical development of Tarocchino Bolognese. Due to its strictly local character, any further document or handwritten evidence has to be searched for in Bologna and not elsewhere. However, in the secular history of Tarocchino Bolognese, so rich of traditions and so poor of documents, it is not easy to find out something new. In particular, I will not be able in the following to present anything useful to clarify its origin or else its first diffusion. I intend, however, to report and briefly discuss some documents still preserved in the University Library of Bologna and already indicated in the catalogues of Italian manuscripts (6), although they generally consist in loose sheets. Thus, a Latin list of the triumphs of the end of the 16th century will be first commented on, then will be discussed, mainly schemes of *Tarocchi Appropriati*, two sonnets quoting tarot cards with political aims, a list used for fortune telling, and a complete set of rules. Moreover, two further witnesses for *Tarocchi Appropriati* will be described coming from Archiginnasio.

Let us begin with the Latin list. As known, several encyclopaedic treatises exist, where the triumphs are listed in order, without any reference to associated personages and the like; such are the well known lists from Steele's manuscript, Citolini's and Garzoni's texts, and so on. To these lists, commonly reported in the histories of cards, one can be added which is contained in a manuscript by the known scientist Ulisse Aldovrandi (1522-1605), Misc.A.21.II. The list is in Latin, but it entirely corresponds to that by Garzoni: MUNDUS, JUSTITIA, ANGELUS,

SOL, LUNA, ASTRUM, IGNIS, DIABOLUS, MORS, LAQUEO SUSPENSUS, SENEX, ROTA, FORTITUDO, AMOR, CURRUS, TEMPERANTIA, PAPA, PAPISSA, IMPERATOR, IMPERATRIX, MIMO, STULTUS. It had already been published in a booklet (7) precisely devoted to that part of the codex describing games. However, since the booklet was printed for a wedding occasion and is relatively scarce, it escaped due attention by many scholars, except for Dr. Chicco, who found in it and in the codex essential information, for instance, on the early history of Italian draughts. (8) Since in several points Aldovrandi explicitly quotes Garzoni's book, it must be assumed that the date of the text is in the 1590s and that the whole material derives from earlier printed documents. It appears, however, surprising that Aldovrandi does not report the actual sequence of Tarocchino Bolognese, as if it were not yet distinguished from usual tarot. In fact, for other games, and also for children games, the author pays considerable attention to the local popular habits. In any case, some years later, Justice can be deduced from the Bolognese edition of the *Barzulletta* (9) already to occupy a low position, as typical of the A order.

To obtain an ordered list of the triumphs for Tarocchino Bolognese we have to pass to following centuries. One list of *Tarocchi Appropriati* dated 1668 should be preserved, which I was not able to find out: *Due anni appresso si definivano alcune dame colle carte del gioco dei tarocchini. Donna Cristina di Nortumbria era battezzata come l'angelo e la Contessa Palmieri Fava come il diavolo.* (10) Three such compositions are still preserved in the University Library, which appear to derive, however, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, see below.

A different kind of exercise is tackled in the following document, a sonnet (MS 3937 Caps. 102.33:)

**Li Trionfi de' Tarochini sopra il Techeli  
Ribelle dell'Imperatore.**

*Angel d'inferno sei Michel, che al Mondo  
Tentasti d'Austria il Sol vendere nero,  
Tu la Luna Ottomana, astro che immondo,  
Suscitasti fellon contro l'Impero.*

*Stella d'onor della Saetta il pondo,  
Qual Demonio infernal scoccasti invero,  
Con influsso di Morte il brando a tondo  
Girasti Traditor, Vecchio severo.*

*La Ruota alla Fortuna arpia superba  
con la Forza inchiodar speravi affatto,  
Di te Giusta vendetta il Dio ti serba.*

*Tempra l'ardir, trattien il Carro, e ratto  
Lascia d'Amor d'Imper la voglia acerba,  
Ne il Papa tien qual Bagattin, o Matto.*

Here the 22 triumphs are again listed in order, but the list occurs among the verses of a sonnet with a particular political aim: to censure Techeli's behavior in the war between the Holy Roman and the Ottoman empires. It is known that Imre Tököly, named King of Hungary by the Turks, contributed to the siege of Vienna in 1682 but, after several defeats of the Ottoman army, he took refuge in Istanbul in 1687, wherefrom he continued his conspiracies against the Habsburgs. Although the date of the composition is not recorded, the occasion should be the rejecting, in 1683, of the Ottoman army after the siege of Vienna: together with

this sonnet other compositions are preserved on that same subject.

As for some *Pasquinate*, we have the names of the triumphs inserted in the verses. In this particular case, however, they are stated in order and they are all present. The fact that Pope is mentioned only once may correspond to the equivalence of the four Popes in the play; naturally, Popes and not Moors since the known facts of 1725 had not yet caused those figures to be changed. In particular, it is natural to suspect that this poem represents an example of a typical kind of compositions which might be double-minded. First, an exercise in which strong limits are put to the phantasy of the poet in order to increase the difficulty of the composition. Secondly, although nowhere explicitly stated, the composition could then be used as a mnemonic aid for memorising the triumph sequence, which, it must be recalled, was not marked by numerals on the cards.



Figure 1 – Alla Colomba, early 18<sup>th</sup> century (from Sylvia Mann).

Let us now examine the three examples of *Tarocchi Appropriati*. The first one is written on a sheet without any comment and seems derived from a familiar sphere (MS 3905/6 Caps. 73.19:)

### Trionfi dei Tarocchini

Angelo	Sig.ra N:N:
Mondo	Sig.ra Taruffi da S:Giorgio
Sole	Sig.ra N:N:
Luna	Sig.ra Girolema Righetti, e la Sig.ra Tonelli
Stella	Sig.ra Catterina Tesei
Saetta	Sig.ra N: Moglie del Sig.r Seg.rio Taroni
Diavolo	Sig.ra Catterina Bonifacci
Morte	Sig.ra Taruffi in San Felice
Traditore	Sig.ra Bassi marito, e moglie
Vecchio	Sig.ra Parmeggiani Madre
Ruota	Sig.ra Margarita Piccinini
Forza	Sig.ra Anna Bergonzoni
Giusta	Sig.ra M:a Bonifacci
Tempra	Sig.ra Luigia                      Sorelle che abitano

Carro	Sig.ra Anna	nell'Armorsella
Amore	Sig.ra Madalena Bonifacci	
Quattro Moretti	Tre Parmeggiani, e la Sig.ra Anna Baroni	
Bagattino	Sig.ra Angiola Baroni	
Matto	Sig.r Gio. Bavosi	

The second one was also mentioned by Frati; (10) it applies to the canons of S.Pietro, the Bolognese Cathedral, and it is completed by short Latin sayings applied too to each personage (MS 3938 Caps. 103.25:)

**Trionfi de' tarocchi e motivi latini appropriati a ciascuno de' Canonici di S.Pietro.**

Angelo	Donduzzi	Non est dolus
Mondo	Riccardi	Microcosmus
Sole	Cecchini	Vix sufficit
Luna	Belvisi	Nunquam satis
Stella	Cappi	Undique fulget
Saetta	Mignani	Montes conterit
Diavolo	Prov.Vernizzi	Gracit quaerens quem devoret
Morte	Locatelli	Hanc adspicite
Traditore	Capelli	Ave Rabbi
Vecchio	Sarchi	Utinam santum
Rota	Conti	Dives et pauper
Forza	Zambeccari	Potens in sermone et opere
Giustaz	Cursini	Lingua eius gladius acutus
Tempra	Francia	Fratres sobrii estote
Carro	Mini	Nihil significat
Amore	Moneta	Pax vobis
Bagatino	Zanotti	Laudate Pueri dominum
Matto	Arnoaldi	Stultus propter Christum
	Peggi	Affricana fides
Quattro	Longhi	On curribus et Equis
Mori	Vernizzi	Solus ignobilis
	Cursi	.....

The third one is the longest of them all and it presents some peculiarities deserving comment. It is written on four large-sheet-pages, now bound together with other documents of the 18th century; the provenance is stated to be from the miscellaneous collection of apothecary Ubaldo Zanetti. There is the usual list of *Tarocchi Appropriati* but, after that, a key is provided with the reason why that attribution has been done for each of the ladies, whose names are again written together with those of their respective fathers, husbands and fathers in law. The comments in the key are usually spiteful. The facts that the surnames are those of the most famous Bolognese families and that they are provided with the titles and names of the relatives should allow an exact date to be suggested around mid 18th century. Below, the extensive title and the bare list are reported (MS 83.9:)

**I trionfi de' Tarocchini appropriati ciascheduno ad una donna bolognese con la spiegazione in fine per capire meglio li sudetti Trionfi, o sia satira avuta da N.N.**

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 1. Angelo     | Contessa Ippolita Borgonzi Segni di Parma       |
| 2. Mondo      | Contessa Paola Fontana Salvioli                 |
| 3. Sole       | Contessa Anna Ratta de Bianchi                  |
| 4. Luna       | Contessa Vittoria Bentivogli Ranuzzi            |
| 5. Stella     | Marchesa Bradamante Bevilacqua Bovio di Ferrara |
| 6. Saetta     | Marchesa Laura Spada Buoi                       |
| 7. Diavolo    | Contessa Lavinia Conti Baldi                    |
| 8. Morte      | Contessa Alessandra Zambeccari Bolognetti       |
| 9. Traditore  | Contessa Silvia Barbazzi Ercolani               |
| 10. Vecchio   | Contessa Laura Todeschi Todeschi                |
| 11. Roda      | Contessa Maria Borgonzi Ranuzzi di Parma        |
| 12. Forza     | Anna Orsi Boschi                                |
| 13. Giusta    | Contessa Maria Pepoli Malvezzi                  |
| 14. Tempra    | Marchesa Laura Pepoli Malvezzi                  |
| 15. Carro     | Marchesa Margaritta Boschi Bolognini            |
| 16. Amore     | Maria Gentile Penelope Ratta                    |
| 17.           | Francesca Maria Grati Bugami                    |
| 18. Quattro   | Contessa Maria Camilla Grati Scarselli          |
| 19. Mori      | Contessa Donna Catterina Caetani Grati          |
| 20.           | Contessa Anna Boschetti Grati                   |
| 21. Bagattino | Marchesa Isabella Zambeccari Pepoli             |
| 22. Matto     | Contessa Anna Toccoli Castelli di Parma         |



**Figure 2 – Alessandro Grandi, c. 1865 (from Sylvia Mann).**

From a specific point of view, it is important to remark that the order is here also indicated by numbers but they cannot correspond to any number typical of the triumphs since the list is written in descending order. This fact clearly confirms how, contrary to *minchiate*, the triumphs were certainly not distinguished with numerals by the players, even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In all three cases, we are in the field of *Tarocchi Appropriati* reported in an ordered sequence. The sequences follow, as expected, Dummett's A order and they are among the few witnesses to this series. Earlier documents of A type sequence derive from *Minchiate* cards, where the numbers were directly printed on the images, and from I Germini, the known Florentine composition of about 1550, which underwent several printings up to recent times. It may be noted the mention of the four Mori, indicating everywhere a date after 1725, and their unusual position in the case of the canons where they are lower than the Fool itself. In most cases the documents preserved together with the lists appear to derive from the first half of the century, so that they were probably composed before the appearance of the printed texts about *Tarocchino*.

Another sonnet may be worth mentioning, although the information for the game is very limited (MS 3935 Caps. 100. 22, p.57:)

### SONETTO

Per far una Partida a Taruchain  
I Tudesch, i francis e i moscheuveita  
contra al Re d' Prussia is messen un di a Taulein  
con el penser d' cavari un'acqua veta

Lu, ch stem i Zugadur poch manch dun sin  
al stos per far lu el cart lo so man dritta  
e scartand a quel Ré, ch'ier a qui vsin  
al fé un'arfidadura ch'en stà scritta.

Il ha la prosunzion d'andar inanz  
e d'psaer apportar un marz a tutt al mond  
a forza d' sti prussian belli elleganz.

Mo cazan a sminchionarn da capp a fond  
Sgnaur aleà, en abbada' al sou zoaz  
quotevi in tutt egli occh, e lassai però al tond.

Several words appear as technical terms of the game; for instance, *scartand*, *arfidadura*, *marz*, *sminchinarn*, and *tond*. The main interest of the sonnet, however, lies in the fact that it belongs to a typical field of poetical allegories using cards: real wars represented by a few playing princes or kings. That procedure is very old and many examples can be found of such poems or pictures, particularly with Prime as the game representing the battle field. Here we have *Tarocchino* playing that role, a very unusual example for that pack. Moreover, the text is here written in old Bolognese dialect and the writing itself is not very clear. Thus, I suspect that about 20% of the exact meaning gets lost in each step while transferring from the handwritten text to the printed one, then from Bolognese to Italian, at which point I prefer to stop. (11) The general matter is clear, and the reference is very plausibly to Frederick the Great, King of Prussia. In particular it must likely be related to the Seven Years' War, especially to its first battles, such as that of Rosbach in 1757. However, it might be advisable for any English speaking reader wishing to understand every detail to find a Bolognese-English interpreter, possibly while checking the handwriting in the University Library!



It may be interesting for the experts of cartomancy to compare with the traditional associations between cards and their meanings the following list, preserved in a loose sheet (4029 Caps. 119.R.) A shortened notation is used for the cards, with D for denari, C for coppe, B for bastoni and S for spade; R for re, Q for regina, C for cavallo, F for fante or fantesca (as in Minchiate, the figure is intended as feminine for cups and coins, see Dummett's treatise, p. 316; here, instead of the missing FS a second FD is erroneously written).

RD=L'uomo, CD=Pensier dell'Uomo, FC=La Donna, FB=Pensiere della Donna, AC=La Casa, La Stella=Regalo, AB=Baronate, AS=Lettera, AD=Tavola, Angelo=Sposalizio e Accomodamento, Carro=Viaggio, Mondo=Viaggio lungo, CB=Martello della porta, Traditore=Tradimento, Diavolo=Rabbia, Luna=Notte, Sole=Giorno, Bagattino=Uomo maritato, Matto=Pazzia, Amore=Amore, CC=Accomodamento, 10S=Lagrima, 10D=Denari, FD=Denari, Forza=Violenza, FD=Signorina, QB=P...na, QC=Donna Maritata, Morte=Morte, QD=Verità, Tempra=Tempo, RS=Mala lingua, RC=Un Vecchio, RB= Un signore non ammogliato, Il Vecchio=Un vecchio.

The rule is: *Si metton giù in cinque mazzi, e vengono essere a sette per mazzo.* (Cards are laid down in five packs resulting of five cards each.) Thus, only a selection of the whole pack was then used in fortune telling: 15 of the triumphs excluding the four Moors, Justice, Fortune and tower; 14 court cards, i.e. without CS and QS; the four Aces and two tens. Probably the divination occurred by selecting one of the seven packs of five cards and interpreting the distribution. I am going on investigating this document in order to verify whether it can be considered earlier than the development – in any case almost contemporaneous – of French cartomancy.

Finally a handwritten summary of laws for the game of Tarocchino has to be mentioned (MS 408 Busta II, fasc.4). In general, all the chapters are similar to the corresponding ones reported both in Bisteghi's *Il Giuoco Pratico*, since its first edition of 1753, and in the final part of the *Istruzioni necessarie...* However, even if the handwritten text is older than the printed versions, as it can plausibly be supposed to be, the difference in time is certainly not so large as we would like to find.

Less fruitful has been until now my research in Archiginnasio. It has been for centuries the renowned residence of Bolognese Mater Studiorum, the oldest European University. In the manuscript division there are ancient specimens as well as several collections of the 18th and 19th centuries. As in the University library, I was not able to find anything of relevance among the oldest codices; I only found two items worth reporting in Archivio Gozzadini, *Manoscritti letterari*, 31. Both refer to *Tarocchi Appropriati*. The former is a loose sheet with a list of five Penitenze, forfeits in party games:

1) obtain something from everybody and finally give everything back in order, 2) ask something in turn to everybody's ear while he answers loud; 3) tell a tale; 4) *paragoni ciascuno de gli Astanti à un trionfo de Tarochini*, compare everybody of those present with a triumph of tarochini; 5) say to everybody which profession should be suitable to him and why. The list can be dated to the 18th or, more probably, to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It shows how our subject was still one of the most diffused ingredients of party games.

Certainly of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and apparently of 1832 or short after, is the last item I can report here: *Carattere dei Parrocchi della Città di Bologna tolti dalle figure principali de Giuoco de' Tarocchi*. The composition appears in the first part of a four leaves set, followed by a *Canzonetta* against the pontifical troops, of the August 1832. It is a list in order of 23 priests who were heads of the main Bolognese parishes. Thus we have in order for each case the names – of the card, of the church, of the priest – followed by a short description of each character, usually of satirical contents. Since I guess few readers are interested in a list of Bolognese churches and/or priests of the time, I only report the names of the cards, which are the known 22 triumphs listed in inverted order of taking power and preceded by a strange leader of the series. This personage was perhaps needed in order to distinguish the

corresponding priest, being the only one with Canonico qualification. 1 Capo Sinedrio Tarocchinesco, 2 Angelo, 3 Mondo, 4 Sole, 5 Luna, 6 Stella, 7 Saetta, 8 Diavolo, 9 Morte, 10 Vecchio, 11 Traditore, 12 Ruota, 13 Forza, 14 Giusta, 15 Tempra, 16 Carro, 17 Amore, 18-21 Quattro Mori, 22 Bagattino=Moscarella, 23 Matto. As usual, the four Moors are not differentiated. It may be noted the alternative name of Moscarella for Bagattino, now Begato. An inversion with respect to the usual order occurs between Vecchio and Traditore; evidently the habit of neglecting numbers on the cards did sometimes originate confusion.

To complete the picture of Bolognese manuscripts, three further items may be quoted: 1) one of the three known copies of the *Discorso* of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is also kept in the University library, see *Playing Card 15* (1987) 80-87; however, its provenance does not appear to be Bolognese, but probably Venetian; 2) a manuscript of game rules existing in Vitali collection (Faenza) was indicated to me by its owner and was later shown in the Ferrarese exhibition, see G.Berti and A.Vitali, *I Tarocchi*, Bologna 1987, p.128; (12) 3) another copy of Techeli sonnet above is at present in Silvestroni collection (Ravenna). The owner was so kind as to provide me with a xerocopy of it: the text appears only slightly different in the spelling. This may provide a further indication for the diffusion of a text which was mainly useful, in my opinion, to correctly remember the sequence of the triumphs. (13)

As for previous documents (however interesting they may be considered, due to the general lack of old references) large time intervals still remain to be explored in the search of documentary evidence about this old local variant of tarot; i.e., that which, with respect to every else tarot variant, has been played in the smallest area and for the longest time. Don't forget the traditional attribution of the invention of tarocchino Bolognese to Prince Fibbia. Should it be true, it could correspond to the very origin of tarot in general, in the 1410s.

## Notes

- (1) M.Dummett, *The Game of Tarot*. London 1980, 315-337.
- (2) See, for instance, D.Scorzoni "Il tarocchino bolognese..." in: *Pergio* vol.5, n. 5-6, 1984, p.89-90.
- (3) G.Dossena, *Giochi di carte italiani*. Mondadori, Milano 1984, pp.136-147.
- (4) *Istruzioni necessarie per chi volesse imparare il giuoco dilettevole delli tarocchini di Bologna*. In Bologna Per Ferdinando Pisarri 1754 - Arnaldo Forni, Bologna 1984.
- (5) G.F.Laghi, *Il giuoco dei tarocchi bolognesi*. Bologna 1983.
- (6) L.Frati "Indice dei manoscritti italiani della R. Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna" in G.Mazzatinti, A.Sorbelli, *Inventari dei manoscritti delle Biblioteche d'Italia*, Vol. 15,17,19,25,27 Forlì 1909-Firenze 1923. Even more books of the same series by A.Sorbelli and other librarians describe the manuscripts of Archiginnasio: 30, 32, 36, 40, 43, 47, 65, 66, 69, 100, 102. On the whole, we have a description of the Bolognese funds which is by far more detailed than usual for Italian libraries. These catalogues were my only source for finding in the two mentioned libraries the items here described.
- (7) L.Frati, *La Tavola Metodica dei Giuochi di Ulisse Aldovrandi*. Bologna 1904.
- (8) A.Chicco, in *ARCI-Dama-Scacchi* (1978) 10.
- (9) *Barzeletta sopra del Giuoco nella quale si narrano tutti i vitii che nascono del giuocare*. Stampata in Verona, e ristampata in Bologna per Vittorio Benacci. University Library of Bologna: 3878. Caps.51, tom.IX.
- (10) L.Frati, *La vita privata di Bologna...*, Bologna 1900, p.184.
- (11) (Per far una partita a tarocchino / i tedeschi, i francesi e i moscoviti / contro al re di Prussia si misero un dì a tavolino / con il pensiero di ricavarne un'acquavite. // Lui, che stima i giocatori poco meno d'un "sin"/ alzò per far lui le carte la sua mano dritta / e scartando a quel re, che gli era vicino / gli fece un rifiuto che sta scritto.// Lui ha la presunzione di andare avanti / e di poter portare un marcio a tutto il mondo / a forza di



questi prussiani belli ed eleganti. // Ora cacciano a sminchionare da cima a fondo / Signori alleati, bisogna badare al suo cattivo gioco / guardatevi negli occhi, e lasciatelo però al piatto.)

- (12) In the contribution by P.Marsilli to same exhibition and catalogue (pp. 95-110), three out of the ten items here described are also reported and briefly discussed. I found, however, no reason to modify my present communication, which was ready several months before the Ferrarese exhibition and which – having been marked among the last works in the series – appears so late in the press due to the publication times of the journal.
- (13) If I am right, it may be observed how some utilizations of tarot outside of the common game and belonging to the literary domain can indeed be considered as reversed: an utilization of literary matter into the tarot game.