# 1752-1780 – TAX STAMPS ON TAROCCHI IN FLORENCE ?

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## Introduction

For a long time I had one or another opportunity to write something about the history of playing cards in Florence. A recurrent topic has been the initial spread of Naibi, the games that were played with them, how these were considered by the law in the course of time, both in Florence and in many smaller cities of the territory.

Let us neglect here these early stages and focus our attention on subsequent developments. Particular problems are met when alongside of Naibi we encounter Trionfi, as well as when alongside of Trionfi we encounter Germini and Minchiate. In the following centuries, only Carte and Minchiate are usually mentioned in Tuscany.

Now, I have nothing to add to what I have already written about all these names of packs and games. I will only refer here to some notes, in which I have outlined the main questions open to discussion.

The reason why I am coming back to this complex situation is that I am wishing to deal with Tarocchi in Florence, mentioned exactly with that name. The name of Tarocchi can be variously used. Its main use that I have found in Florence was for indicating the triumphal cards of a Minchiate (or Germini) pack. This occurred for instance in the Notturno’s performance. (1) Let us again neglect this example, as well as others with a similar meaning. I will intend here as Tarocchi the “usual” pack of 78 cards and the related game.

In other words, I will not consider here all the quotations of the pack and game of Trionfi, but only when we find the explicit mention of Tarocchi. Let me just indicate an article, (2) in which I have reported on unfruitful research of any possible source of Trionfi, intended as Tarocchi. The same subject I have studied again, after fifteen years, and again unsuccessfully. (3)

Therefore, I leave here the question open, which was the relation between Trionfi and Tarocchi, maybe different, maybe identical. (4, 5) It is true that searching for other structures for Trionfi did not provide better results. (6)

After limiting the research to Tarocchi, we surprising see a huge reduction in the local information. Just for a typical situation, let me quote another of my studies, of several years ago. (7) At the time, I searched in the dictionaries for references to card games in Florence and wrote an article with the title of *Tarot in Florence in the 16th Century: Its Diffusion from Literary Sources*. Well, what remains now of all those quotations if examined with the limits accepted here? Nothing at all: everywhere, when I intended to deal with Tarocchi, I was actually dealing with Minchiate.

In the beginning of the 17th century, however, we find a hardly questionable mention of Tarocchi played in Florence, together with Germini. A formal decree of April 1605, extended and published in printed form in June 1606, quoted precisely these names for the only two card games allowed, in addition to Bocce. (8)

Then, in 1753, half a dozen Tarocchi packs were recorded in Florence, just in transit however from Bologna to Messina. (9) To confirm that this tradition was extraneous to Florence, they were indicated as “alla Milanese”, the kind in use in Milan.

Even later on, what I found among the cards produced in Florence in the years 1775-87 (10) and 1815-61 (11) were just Minchiate, never could I discover any Tarocchi locally produced.

## 1752-1780 – Tax stamps in Tuscany ?

After mentioning above some documents that I have discovered and studied, let us pass to examine some data published by other authors. We can thus run into further sources of information, and actually we do find sure traces here of Tarocchi produced and used in Florence.

The kind of proof is the best that one can imagine: not only we obtain information on Tarocchi employed in Tuscany, we also realise which were the tax stamps authorised and printed on them and exactly in which tarot card.

In particular, in 1752 and up to 1762, there was the stamp of ADA with the autograph signature of Domenico Aldini on the Page of Swords and further on in the following years up to at least 1780, the same stamp and signature were applied on the Knight of Batons of each Tarocchi pack.

This information was communicated to participants in the 1980 Convention of the IPCS by Alberto Milano, an influential expert of card history, for many years the Italian delegate in the IPCS. An abridged version of that communication was then published in the official journal of the Society (12). Moreover, a few years later, the same information was reproduced in a fine table form in the well-known *Encyclopedia* by Stuart Kaplan, (13) thus reaching a wide scope of collectors and tarot experts.

The following table is copied from the last work.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Years | Tarot | Minchiate | Italian | French |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 1752 Jan 1 - Jun 30 | Page Swords | 38 (Sun) | Knight Batons | King Clubs |
| 1752 Jun 30 - 1762 | Page Swords | 21 (Water) | Knight Batons | Jack Diamonds |
| 1762 - 1780 | Knight Batons | 21 (Water) | King Coins | Jack Diamonds |

Another short article on Florentine cardmakers and concession holders was published later on, which has been forgotten by everybody, including myself. (14) There was no trace of Tarocchi, but unfortunately the extended list of tax stamps only reached the year 1751, thus leaving the question unsolved.

## 1752-1780 Tax stamps in Tuscany !

Now, after verifying how the previously reported data (14) continued in the following years, I am able to solve the question. In the contracts that established which stamps and on which cards had to be printed on the various card qualities made in Florence, there are no traces of Tarocchi!

The relevant information is summarised in the following table, with the corresponding references.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Years | French | (Ital.) Fini | (Ital.) Ordinarie | Spanish | Minchiate | References |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |  |
| 1752-56 | King Clubs | Page Swords | Knight Batons | King Coins | 38 (Sun) | (15) |
| 1757-62 | Jack Diamonds | Page Swords | Knight Batons | King Coins | 21 (Water) | (16) |
| 1763-71 | Jack Diamonds | Page Swords | Knight Batons | King Coins | 21 (Water) | (17) |
| 1772-80 | Jack Diamonds | Page Swords | Knight Batons | King Coins | 21 (Water) | (18) |

In all contracts, the concession holder indicated was Domenico Aldini, and this explains that in most cases he preferred not to change the previous stamp and its location. The extent of the concession was typically for five years, but in these four cases it was obtained for 5, 6, 9, and 9 years, respectively.

In 1763, however, the concession holder was changed after a few months, as we read in an official register of the administration. (17) According to the same source, and differently from the information reported by Cantini, the name of the concession holder for the nine years 1772-80 should have been Giuseppe Almano, in his quality of Appaltatore Generale.

In any case, there were no less than five qualities of cards, for which the position of the stamp had to be distinguished:

1) French, “alla francese”, more commonly indicated in the registers as “picche fiori”;

2) “Fini”, which we might call Italian, usually indicated as “spade bastoni”, produced in an extra quality;

3) “Ordinarie”, same as above, produced however in a common quality;

4) Spanish, “alla spagnola”, often explicitly indicated for playing Ombre (namely, Hombre);

5) Minchiate.

No sign of Tarocchi, in no individual concession contract.

## Conclusion

I could not provide any additional contribution on the initial question of Trionfi and Tarocchi in Florence, nor could indicate any mention of Tarocchi played under that name in Florence before 1605.

However, I could show that what had appeared to be a certain proof that Tarocchi were produced in Florence in the years 1752-1780 was only associated with a wrong reading of the corresponding laws.

In other words, after 1606 I am still finding no pack or game of Tarocchi used in Florence, apart from Minchiate.

## Notes

(1) The Playing-Card, 17 No. 1 (1988) 23-33.

(2) The Playing-Card, 27 (1998) No. 2 64-68, No. 3 111-116.

(3) <http://trionfi.com/search-tarot-sources>

(4) <http://trionfi.com/evx-reflection-on-marziano-pack-of-cards>

(5) <http://trionfi.com/trumps-trionfi-tarots>

(6) <http://trionfi.com/evx-reflection-on-marziano-pack-of-cards>

(7) The Playing-Card, 16 No. 3 (1988) 78-83.

(8) <http://trionfi.com/evx-germini-tarocchi-minchiate>

(9) <http://trionfi.com/evx-minchiate-export-tuscany>

(10) <http://trionfi.com/evx-playing-card-production-tuscan-grand-duchy>

(11) <http://trionfi.com/evx-tuscany-playing-card-production-1815-1861>

(12) The Playing-Card, 10 No. 3 (1982) 102-106.

(13) Stuart R. Kaplan, *The Encyclopedia of Tarot. Vol. 2*. New York 1986, 248.

(14) The Playing-Card, 21 No. 4 (1993) 126-135.

(15) Lorenzo Cantini, *Legislazione toscana*. Firenze 1807, Tomo XXVI, 345-349.

(16) Lorenzo Cantini, *Legislazione toscana*. Firenze 1807, Tomo XXVII, 116-119.

(17) ASFI, Camera e Auditore Fiscale, 3013.

(18) Lorenzo Cantini, *Legislazione toscana*. Firenze 1807, Tomo XXX, 218-221.