

FLORENTINE CARDMAKERS AND CONCESSION HOLDERS (1477-1751)

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In a previous study the first century of cards in Florence has been reviewed by indicating the extant documentary sources and the main information deriving from them (PC 19, 1990, 7-17). When the research is extended to more recent times, further documentary evidence becomes available; thus the present study has been mainly based on official Florentine legislative acts as well as on other documents kept in Florentine Archivio di Stato, and particularly: *Camera e Auditore Fiscale*, 3012-3019; *Bandi e Ordini – Appendice*, 96-98; *Arte dei Medici e Speziali*, 11-15.

To begin with, the date of 1619 has to be mentioned as the essential starting point for more detailed information on the production of playing-cards, since it then gets under government's control. For the long period between 1477 and 1619 we have mainly to resort to literary sources.

There are, however, fortunate exceptions, such as that pointing to Francesco Rosselli as a maker and dealer in the 1520s (T. Del Badia *Misc. fior. di erud. e storia* II (1894) 14, 24-30). The list of his properties is kept in the archive of Magistrato dei Pupilli among many other inventories. This list is longer and more detailed than usual; it appears to correspond to a big shop containing wares from haberdashery to stationer. What lets the list become of interest in card history is the part recording various printing blocks for peculiar "games" as *Giuoco d'Apostoli chol Nostro Signore*, *Giuoco di sete virtù in 5 pezi di lengno*, *Giuoco del Trionfo del Petrarca in 3 pezi*, *Giuoco di Pianeti chon loro fregi in 4 pezi*. However, it is now difficult to select among Rosselli's items which could really correspond to playing cards and the whole evidence appears as being too isolated for providing a true insight into the actual situation of card making. In any case, even if they were playing cards, they could not antedate tarot or Minchiate packs which were by then already fully standardised.

Apart from Rosselli, the evidence commonly derives from literary sources. Here the situation is even worse: only hints on games provided by single words or short sentences can generally be found. Alongside with them, some longer pieces entirely devoted to card games begin to appear such as the renowned *Capitolo sulla Primiera* and the corresponding *Commento* attributed to Berni; the *I Germini* poem, printed several times on mid 16th century; other texts already indicated in previous articles (PC 16, 1988, 78-83; PC 17, 1988, 23-33).

The evidence which stands out as the most relevant to our topic is however that referring to Padovano. On the basis of aforementioned *I Germini*, of poems by Alfonso Pazzi (As de Trèfles 38, 1989, 9-10) and especially of *Le Carte Parlanti* by Pietro Aretino, Padovano appears to be a craftsman of extraordinary skill, by far the best maker among those working in Florence. Unfortunately, the details of his production are lacking.

Further information is available in another source, the list of fabricants enrolled in the Arte dei Medici e Speziali. This guild, nominally limited to physicians and chemists, was actually the most open to the various professions not included among the established arts. Several original handwritten registers are kept in Florence Archivio di Stato. In vol. 11, folio 71b, we find that on 27 October 1531 "Dominicus Francisci Da Padua cartarius" pays 12 florins in order to be matriculated in the Arte.

The sum is relatively high and seems to prove a first entrance for Florence; in fact, a much smaller fee was required when, for instance, a son replaced his father in the job. In conclusion, we cannot exclude that the profession of card makers in the family had already begun with his father Francesco or even earlier; Domenico, however, apparently was the first of his family to introduce the craft in Florence.

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The stamp on playing-cards was introduced in Florence in 1619; a specific and detailed law was promulgated, which was quoted many times later on. In correspondence to the first years of the law,

a handwritten book can be found in the Florentine Archive, where the number of packs stamped by various Florentine makers is recorded from 1619 to 1630. We thereby obtain the names and the production of eight Florentine cardmakers, only two-to-four appearing to be active together. Probably, several of them were at the end of their production while others were at the very beginning. Some were already known to us from other documents and belong to families of cardmakers which worked for long times, others (Catelli, Piergiovanni) seem rather to represent occasional participation to card production. The data are reported in Tab. I and will be briefly discussed below.

PADOVANI is certainly the name best known to us from information of the previous century. Padovani is here found only in correspondence to the year 1620, but the production is as high as to guarantee to that maker the third overall place. Evidently, the family of Padovano, the reportedly best Florentine cardmaker around 1540, had continued to produce playing-cards. That card-making often was a family job which continued after the death of the master is known from many examples. Indeed, by looking the above mentioned enrolment books of *Arte dei Medici e Speziali* one finds names of family components which continued the job, even entering general book-printing production with Antonio in 1573: Francesco di Domenico on 30.4.1558; Antonio di Francesco libraio on 16.12.1573; Francesco e Domenico di Antonio, brothers, on 3.1.1609. By the way, this may better explain the pack described by Alberto Milano (PC 14, 1986, 61-67) with Padovano label and 1615 stamp.

PAGONAZZI gains by large first place. During the 1620s, Pagonazzi alone makes three-fourths of the whole reported production of Florentine cards stamped. Later on we find him among the concession holders or as a warrantor for them.

FELICI has the most constant production, not too much deviating from a mean value of 200 stamped packs each year. Probably he was the same “Domenico di Zanobi di Felice cartaio al Fortuna” who was enrolled on 25 August 1588 (*Arte Medici Speziali*, n.13).

BORGHIGIANI, LANDI and NERI – even if represented here by a rather low production – are known Florentine families of cardmakers, and later they also held the concession of card taxes.–

The number of makers represents a reasonable value; even for later times it is common to find two or three makers in full activity with somebody else occasionally taking part. The overall production instead appears to be very low. One wonders whether the great decrease of packs recorded can be related to a real strong decrease in the production or else to other facts, for instance to some contrivance that allowed taxes and stamps to be avoided. It must be considered that Florence was in decline, that it was a full Counter-Reformation period, and that the rage for cards only came back in the 18th century. However, a number of 2-4 thousand packs per year would not represent a sufficient production for the town, whereas the quantity later recorded of only about 200 packs cannot in any case be considered as a plausible value for the Florentine yearly consumption.

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Beginning with 1630, an auction was held every five years in order to assign the concession of collecting the taxes on playing cards; this procedure went to the 1780s, when the administration kept the whole subject under its own control. Thus, after 1630, taxes on playing cards were no more directly collected by the administration. Correspondingly, in the official books of the revenue information is only found about concession holders and no longer about card makers. However, concession holders commonly were the card makers themselves; one or two of them often won the auction for holding the concession in next five-year period, other card makers of same or different family warranted to the revenue.

The amount that the contractors had to give to the administration was generally paid by monthly instalments. Therefore we have in the official books long lists of records for these single payments. If things went smoothly, the only additional information that we usually obtain is the name of the

person actually bringing the money each month. This was often the concession holder himself, but sometimes he distributed the task among those card makers who were indebted to him. It is by these records, for instance, that we can assess that Antonio MARCHIONNI had become the most active among the various Florentine card makers during the second half of the 17th century.

Most of these records are of little interest to us; much more useful are the documents when something unexpected happened. It could be the death of the concession holder, or his insolvency. In these cases, many things could happen except one, that the revenue renounced his credit. Thus, in case of the contractor being no more capable to pay, we find lists of payments by heirs and warrantors during many years to follow. We also find mention of concession holders being imprisoned; in some cases, real estate of warrantors is sold out, in others marriage settlements of the women of the family are forfeited.

A particularly significant case is that of Santi MOLINELLI, nicknamed Il Perugino. We don't know much about him, we don't even know whether his father, Alessandro, was already a card maker or whether Santi himself gave origin to one of the longest-living families of Florentine card makers. We encounter him as a winner of the auction for holding the concession on cards for the 1654-9 five-year period. Warrantors for him are two persons, G.M.Calvani and P.Domenico, who don't seem to have been card makers.

For reasons we don't know, Santi is unable to pay, he is imprisoned in the Stinche, the dreadful Florentine big prison, from 7 August 1655 to 15 January 1656. In full health did he not come out from there, since we find him dead a few days later. The revenue interrupts the contract and holds another auction; the money due is obtained by heirs, warrantors, and especially subcontractors: Calvani and Donnini for Florence, G.B.Trapani for Livorno, soon replaced by I.Lucena. On the basis of this information, we would suppose that the fortune of Molinelli card makers was then completely exhausted. It was not so. Two sons of Santi, Giovanni Domenico and Giovanni Francesco were some years later both renowned card makers and concession holders.

Not every concession holder was a card maker. For instance, a noble from Cortona, Cristofano Alfieri, obtained the concession in 1672 by the round figure of 10 thousand ducats. To him also, and to his family, the concession did not represent a stroke of luck; later on, the family had to pay his debts for many years. A different example is that of the immediately preceding contractor, Antonio di Francesco ROSSI. He is stated to have been a junk dealer, but he originated one of the most important families of Florentine card makers. On the other hand, for a few contractors we cannot be certain whether they corresponded to makers or not.

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In several "bandi" marks and signatures are mentioned and three can be found for the 17th century in *Legislazione toscana*, the big collection of Florentine laws which was published in the beginning of the 19th century by L.Cantini. The first bando refers to Pagonazzi-Borghigiani 1641-46 but gives some information about the previous holder too. The second one concerns the auction after Santi Molinelli's death and is therefore rich of details on subcontractors for Livorno and so on. The third one concerns the first contract by Giovanni Domenico Molinelli. These sources together with others for following centuries have already been exploited by Alberto Milano for his communication at the 1980 IPCS convention (PC 10, 1982, 102-6).

Some of the many lacking items can be found in other collections, although completing the list represents a hard task. Within collections of original Florentine printed bans, I could find a few others, see table II. (There may be errors of one-two years owing to several reasons: for instance, the dates were then computed in Florence starting the New Year on the 25th March, which may have caused wrong transcriptions; in a few cases the end of the concession occurred earlier than expected; a revised version will hopefully be published later on.)

The lacking bans may have been lost or may even have never been published. In the absence of further evidence, it may be assumed that marks and signatures on cards remained the same when the

concession was obtained for the second time. On the other hand, cards already stamped but not yet sold out by the previous concession holder were stamped again by the new holder, without any further tax payment. Thus a certain number of surviving packs should contain two stamped cards instead than one.

By inspecting the original contracts in the handwritten collections of notarial deeds we only find the statement that the contractor can change stamp, signature and the specific cards selected to this aim, in order to avoid frauds to his detriment. Moreover, the contractor is allowed to introduce slight changes into the printing blocks in order better to mark the production during his concession. This may well explain several quite slight changes currently observed among Florentine cards, both in the figures and in the backs.

Apart from names of makers and of concession holders, we don't obtain information about patterns of the cards made. In particular, it would be welcome to find some correlation between names of makers and trade names as marked on the cards. (For the 18th century, it may be noted that same name of Paragone was given to one of the paper mills of Colle Val d'Elsa – which were sole suppliers for stamped paper – conducted by Certosa friars .)

The interest of the revenue was only for rough grading: the range considered by the law for taxing reasons began with 2 kinds, Minchiate and common cards. Common cards were later divided as French or Italian suited groups. The Italian-suited ones were then divided into fine and ordinary cards and finally a third separate group of hombre cards was considered; as a result, toward the end of the period Italian suited Florentine cards could be “carte fine, carte ordinarie o dozzinali, carte da ombra”.

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Following the interplay between card makers and concession holders we can follow over the course of time the evolution of Florentine families insiders of playing cards. Often the list of contractors is the source which provides us with the last information about them. Thus, among the makers mentioned in the 1619-30 records,

- Lorenzo NERI wins the auction for 1636-41 but already in 1637 he passes the contract to other colleagues, and we don't hear anything more of that family;

- Francesco BORGHIGIANI keeps the very first concession and, with colleagues, he is later implied in some others. He dies around 1645 and we find his heirs mentioned as holders in partnership for the following 1649-54 years. Thereafter, no more indications is found of the family;

- Francesco PAGONAZZI, whom we found to have produced three fourths of all Florentine cards stamped in the 1620s can be traced only to about 1645, even considering his son Jacopo.

Certainly, by the mid of the 17th century new families had entered the job replacing the old ones and some of them were to remain at the top of the production for many years to come.

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A favourable opportunity again to pin-point the situation of Florentine card makers occurs in 1683, after the death of another Molinelli holder of the card concession, Giovanni Domenico. (Evidently, his brother Giovanni Francesco worked independently and was involved with the debts only as any other maker.) A list of card makers and of the amount they had to pay to the revenue can be found in this occasion,

Antonio MARCHIONNI	476.1
Andrea PORRI	310.-6.8
Piero CICCI	137.
G.Fancesco MOLINELLI	55.5.13.4
Zanobi ROSSI	9.1

where the first figure indicates ducati or scudi, followed by lire (7 of them corresponding to one previous unit), by soldi (20) and denari (12), a complicated reckoning way not unfamiliar to most British readers. Separately recorded are: the late G.Domenico MOLINELLI; Jacopo CAMBI, reported as by then living permanently far from Florence; Francesco BIZZARRI, a former card maker.

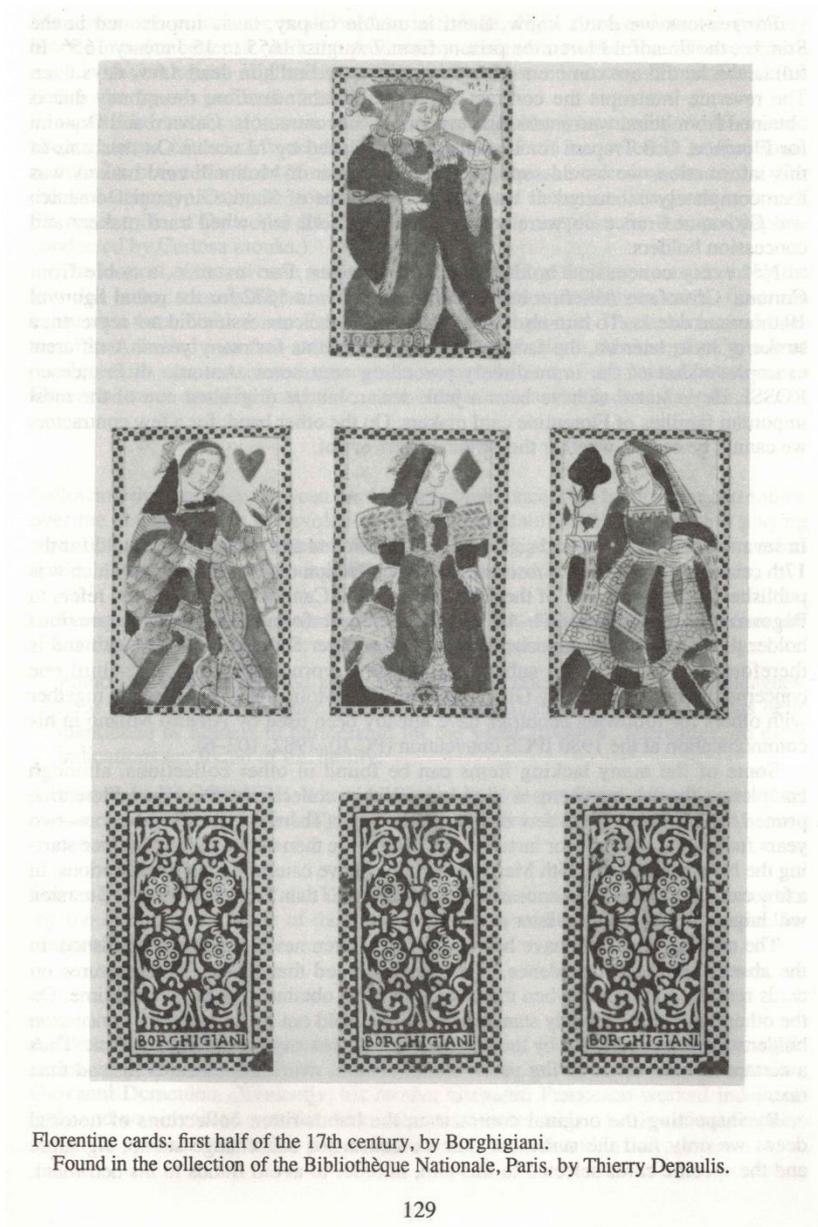


Figure 1. Florentine cards – Copied from the article in The Playing-Card.

As mentioned above, Antonio MARCHIONNI is often recorded as personally bringing the monthly instalments to the offices. About Piero CICCÌ we have no indications from other sources; he was imprisoned for his debts and he seems never to have been an important maker. Andrea PORRI was instead active as a concession holder from 1682 up to 1707, in last occasions in partnership with Giovanni Francesco Molinelli. While the late Giovanni Domenico actually corresponds to a closed branch of the family (at least so when considered from the playing-card point of view), Giovanni Francesco MOLINELLI will again contribute to the evolution of the activities of the family both as concession holders and as card makers. He, his sons and his grandsons will be active, and on front line, until about 1804! Also Zanobi ROSSI, probably a son of

the junk dealer, will be followed by Francesco and another Zanobi who will compete with Molinelli and a few other makers during the whole 18th century.

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We thus arrive to the 18th century, when card production underwent a rapid development throughout Europe. The turn of the century was not a marking point for Florentine cards; more influence had the 1737 change from Medici's to Lorraine House in the government of Tuscany. Control on card production became more detailed and efficient, since the Lorraine House directly – and more and more lucratively – took the incomes. However, as often happens, the changes needed a few years to be fully accomplished. Thus a significant demarcation point (here used for marking the end of the study) can probably better be placed in 1751, when Domenico Aldini obtained for the first time the concession of card taxes.

Useful information about this last period derives from a book listing the packs sent abroad in different occasions, without the usual stamps. It was very important for the revenue to verify that cards for export were really sent abroad. In general any allowed shipment was recorded on a book and the cards were accompanied by a delivery note which had to be signed by customs collectors and brought back to the Florentine office. One of such books has been preserved, corresponding to years 1729-51. In it two licences are commonly recorded per page, and details are reported as for quantity, producer, destination, bearer, and so on. Most cards were Minchiate and the main destination was Rome, even if a lot of places can be read (including far and rather unexpected ones such as Lisbona, Cadice, Marsiglia and Vienna).

As for producers, most shipments originate either from Francesco Rossi or from Anton Giuseppe or Giovanni Domenico Molinelli, apart from a few records by a third less important maker, Benedetto Piattoli. Near to mid-century Zanobi Rossi is for some years quoted together with Francesco and then replaces him. On the other hand, Pietro Molinelli suddenly appears instead of the mentioned relatives and the exact relationship with them is not clear; a scheme of the family tree is shown in Tab. 3.

In the same book, records can also be found of imported cards, mainly Minchiate from Bologna and French-type cards from Liguria. In case of Minchiate, the extensive Bolognese production was helpful in a time when the local demand was not entirely met by the Florentine supply. On the other hand, low-priced French-type cards mainly arrived from Ligurian towns (especially Finale, Oneglia and Nizza) where card production and trade occurred without obstacles, being still uncontrolled by Savoy law. Then Florentine makers adopted in their own production also “piccole” and French pattern, a process which – even if its beginnings belong to the final range of this research – became remarkable from the second half of the 18th century.

Tab. I

NUMBER OF CARD PACKS STAMPED BY FLORENTINE CARD MAKERS

(Cosimo PAGONAZZI, Domenico FELICI, Domenico PADOVANI, Francesco BORGHIGIANI, Alessandro PIERGIOVANNI, Ambrogio CATELLI, Michele LANDI, Lorenzo NERI).

	1619	1620	1621	1622	1623	1624	1625	1626	1627	1628	1629	1630	TOT
PAG		3145	2427	2730	1470	1575	630	420	210			210	12817
FEL	120	310	630	315	300	105	210		53		158	30	2231
PAD		1173											1173
BOR			317	112									429
PIE				231									231
CAT								63	105				168
LAN									52	105			157

NER										52			52
TOT	120	4828	3374	3388	1770	1680	840	483	420	157	158	240	17258

TABLE II

Concession Holders and Corresponding Data

Years	Names	Ducate	Min	Fre.	Italian	Stamp	Handwritten Mark
1. 1631-36	BORGHIGIANI	10835					
2. 1636-41	NERI	11901	2b	Jf	2b	Fortuna	
3. 1641-45	PAGONAZZI & BORGHIGIANI	14001	26	Jp	Cd	Gallery	
4. 1645-49	CALICI & LANDI	13300					
5. 1649-54	VANDI, BORGHIGIANI, LUTI	11308					
6. 1654-56	S.MOLINELLI	13601					
7. 1656-58	CALVANI & DONNINI		24	Jf	Jb/4d		
8. 1658-63	POGGI & RESMINI						
9. 1663-68	POGGI & SACCATELLI	10800					
10. 1668-73	ROSSI	11141	28	Jp	Jd/2b	Tower between Horse and Lion, both rampant	Antonio Rossi
11. 1673-78	ALFIERI	10000	26	Jp	Cd/3c	A crowned Lion rampant with a lily in the **	Osservanza
12. 1678-82	G.D.MOLINELLI	9300	32	Jc	Jb/2c/Js	Sea-horse with a Putto on its back and S.A. below	Giustificazione
13. 1682-87	PORRI	8612	30	Jf	Cs/6b/Jb	Fortuna with inscription Andrea Porri Appaltatore	G.Francesco Molinelli
14. 1687-92	PORRI	5000	3	Jf	Cs/6b/Jb	Fortuna with inscription Andrea Porri Appaltatore	G.Francesco Molinelli
15. 1692-97	PORRI	5000	0	Jf	Cs/6b/Jb	?Fortuna with inscription Andrea Porri Appaltatore	G.Francesco Molinelli
16. 1697-01	PORRI & G.F.MOLINELLI	5000	30	Jf	Cs/6b/Jb	?Fortuna with inscription Andrea Porri Appaltatore	G.Francesco Molinelli
17. 1702-06	PORRI & G.F.MOLINELLI		31	Jc	Cd/6s/Cc	Porri-Molinelli emblem topped by Star	G.Francesco Molinelli
18. 1707-11	G.F.MOLINELLI	5525	31	Jc	Cd/6s/Cc	Porri-Molinelli emblem topped by Star	G.Francesco Molinelli
19. 1712-16	G.F.MOLINELLI	5525	30	Jp	Cs/6b/Cd	Initials GFM with Lion	G.Francesco Molinelli
20. 1717-21	G.F.MOLINELLI	5525	30	Jp	Cs/6b/Cd	?Initials GFM with Lion	G.Francesco Molinelli
21. 1722-26	A.G.MOLINELLI	5525	32	Jc	Cd/6s/Js	AGM between two Lions topped by Fleur-de-lys	Ant.Gius.Molinelli
22. 1727-31	A.G.MOLINELLI	5525	2	Jc	Cd/6s/Js	AGM between two Lions topped by Fleur-de-lys	Ant.Gius.Molinelli
23. 1732-36	G.F.G. & P.X.MOLINELLI	5525	32	Jc	Cd/6s/Js	AGM between two Lions topped by Fleur-de-lys	nt.Gius.Molinelli
24. 1737-41	G.D.MOLINELLI	5525	31	Jp	Cs/6b/Cd	GDM topped with arabesque	Gio.Dom.Molinelli
25. 1742-46	G.D.MOLINELLI	6500	31	Jp	Cs/6b/Cd	GDM topped with arabesque	Gio.Dom.Molinelli
26. 1747-51	G.D.MOLINELLI	6500	31	Jp	Cs/6b/Cd	GDM topped with arabesque	Gio.Dom.Molinelli

Abbreviations: Courts: J,C,Q,K – French suits: p(icche), f(iori), c(uori), m(ottoni) – Italian suits: c(oppe), d(enari), b(astoni), s(pade)
 The amount in ducats was paid for obtaining the concession. A single card is always indicated for Minchiate and French-suited packs, for Italian-suited cards the succession is for packs of: 1) best quality, 2) ordinary quality, 3) hombre cards.
 (** right fore leg and a fox under the left back one).

TABLE III

MOLINELLI FAMILY
 (dates refer to activity)

