

Personal Comments, Memories, and Acknowledgements

Franco Pratesi – 19.10.2012

Let me finish this booklet in an unconventional way, on the personal side, with some comments and memories before the more conventional acknowledgements. The aim of this part is to place this compilation more clearly within my research activity in the field.

Thinking of life as a parabola – admittedly not a very original idea – when I began my research on the history of games, I was already walking downwards, in its descending part.

A “revolutionary” step was then due to the great Italian chess historian Adriano Chicco. He had some envy for the various collections of ancient printed books and manuscripts that I had available in Florence and succeeded in convincing me that leafing through their pages was not necessarily a task reserved to professional specialists.

This occurred in the early 1980s; later on, it was actual practice over several years which taught me how to pass from reading old printed books to deciphering handwritten texts of five or more centuries ago. After a short time, other board and card games entered the field of my research, in addition to chess. I needed guides, especially to realise whenever a new finding was really new or it was such only for my limited knowledge. My bibles have been Murray’s and Dummett’s books, for the history of chess and of playing-cards, respectively.

In addition to the various stores of manuscripts available in Florence, I could visit other ones in many Italian towns, much less abroad. Whenever I found something that appeared to me as new and interesting, I wrote a short note for a journal of the sector. Let me thus recall my publications of those dozen years, limiting the list just to my contributions dealing with playing-cards and Florence. What is missing here concerns other games and other towns.

The Playing-card has been one of the best destinations for my writings. Sylvia Mann, in particular, was delighted by my contributions and gave to the series the name of *Italian Cards - New Discoveries*.¹ Then also *L’As de Trèfle* published some of my notes, and its Editor, Thierry Depaulis, worked amicably also as translator and revisor.² A few other articles appeared elsewhere.³

I systematically insisted by then on the relevance of the Florentine environment for the early history of *naibi* and *trionfi*, at a time in which most or all of the experts called attention to other places.

My articles were acknowledged as a useful contribution to the subject and therefore the IPCS accorded to me its honorary fellowship. At the same time, I was awarded the Modiano prize for the best research of the year – without having stood as a candidate.

This activity lasted for a little more than a dozen years, after which I considered my experience with the ancient manuscripts as finished for ever. I continued my studies at home, especially on the history of Go in Europe. For this, I had a lot of specific literature in my collection, or I had to visit a couple of libraries in Holland. At the same time, I have written a few booklets, on didactic subjects, and even on such trifling matters as God.

Rather unexpected, after an interval of about fifteen years, the second half of my game with the manuscripts has arrived. I may quote a couple of specific events that have let it be possible, apart from having still some life, mind, and interest available. First on 1st October 2011, 71 years old, I definitely became a retired person and had some impulse to change my everyday habits. The second fortuitous event has been that somehow I regressed back to the school years: after more than half a century, I again became familiar with the local transit. It seems as if precisely for me they have introduced again a tram line in Florence, after many years of suppression, now that using my car is no longer feasible as it had been earlier on.

My recent research has begun with a continuation of my old studies on the laws against gambling in the late Middle Ages, both in Florence and in Siena territories. After that, I was inspired to find in Florence the same kind of customs books, or similar inventories, which expressed as exports what Arnold Esch had found in Rome as imports. Now, the Roman archive of that kind is a real exception, impossible to find elsewhere with the same rich detail at the time. However, little by

little, I found new records of the playing-card trade, as in part documented in this publication.

In this case, I have been much advantaged by the web facility provided to me by Lothar Teikemeier. It has allowed to publish my notes as soon as I could write them, a fortunate situation completely new to me.

After having duly acknowledged the contribution of both retirement and tramway to this work, I have to do the same for several persons, who assisted my research during the last year. It is a normal situation that any curator of the archives is ready to assist a visitor in his second childhood, but Lucia Ricciardi must be cited here for her patience and specific learning.

Essential for passing from the lines written with pencil on my blocknote to published notes has been the box offered to me by Lothar Teikemeier in the web pages of *trionfi.com*. This has allowed me to write my comments without having to wait too long.

The English language that I have been using for a long time unfortunately echoes Latin lexicon and Italian syntax, when I succeed in avoiding real mistakes, so that a revision by Ross Sinclair Caldwell – who perfectly knows the subject – has been a providential help.

Last but not least, to Thierry Depaulis goes the credit for proposing, editing, and formatting this issue, after having entered the research itself with several suggestions. Here too, a kind of second half of the game, because he had already done something similar in the 1980s, with *L'As de Trèfle*, as mentioned above.

Notes

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- ¹ 15 No. 2 (1986) 29-34: Whist Against Minchiate in Florence During the 19th Century.
16 No. 3 (1988) 78-83: Tarot in Florence in the XVI Century: Its Diffusion from Literary Sources.
17 No. 1 (1988) 23-33: Notturmo's Gioco di Triomphi.
17 No. 3 (1989) 107-112: On the Introduction of Playing Cards in Florence.
18 No. 4 (1990) 128-135: Early Laws on Card-Playing in Towns under Florentine Influence.
19 No. 1 (1990) 7-17: Carte da gioco a Firenze: il primo secolo (1377-1477).
21 No. 4 (1993) 126-135: Florentine Cardmakers and Concession Holders.
26 No. 2 (1997) 38-45: Orpelli e naibi.
27 No. 2 (1998) 64-68, No. 3 111-116: In Search of Tarot Sources 1,2.
² N. 38 (1989) 9-10: Padovano et les "nouvelles" cartes Florentines.
N. 40 (1990) 6-8: Cartes florentines rescapees du deluge.
N. 42 (1990) 8-9: La mémorisation des numéros du minchiate.
N. 51 (1993) 4-5: Au commencement fut la diritta.
N. 52 (1993) 9-10: De l'utilité des jurons pour l'histoire de minchiate.
N. 54 (1995) 16-17: Les "Imperatori" des Florence à la cour.
³ Il Gioco Italiano dei tarocchi e la sua Storia. in: G.Berti, A.Vitali, *I Tarocchi* (1987) 111-129.
Ancient Card Tricks with Minchiate, *Playing-Card World*, No. 50 (1987) 23-24
Passatempi fiorentini di metà Ottocento. *Rassegna storica toscana*, 39 N. 1 (1993) 181-191.
Miracoli per giocatori. *Cartophilia Helvetica*, 10 N. 3 (1995) 26-28.
Fiorentini, Alemanni e Imperatori. *Cartophilia Helvetica*, 11 N. 4 (1996) 11-13.