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TAROCCHI DECK

Thierry Depaulis  
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**SAMPLE**

**U.S. GAMES SYSTEMS, INC.  
Stamford, CT 06902**

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Second Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Made in China

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This product was produced with assistance from  
Lynn Araujo, Rose Contadino, Jennifer Kaplan,  
Paula Palmer and Nora Paskaleva



Published by  
U.S. GAMES SYSTEMS, INC.  
179 Ludlow Street • Stamford, CT 06902 USA  
[www.usgamesinc.com](http://www.usgamesinc.com)

## THE CARY-YALE VISCONTI TAROCCHI DECK

by **Thierry Depaulis**

Italy is the birthplace of Tarot. The present state of research places the invention of Tarot around 1435, in either Florence or Milan. Both cities have produced some of the earliest known hand-painted Tarot card packs, with the twenty-two allegorical trump cards. During the fifteenth century, all documents that mention Tarot cards call them *trionfi* in Italian or *triumphi* in Latin (from which the English word trump is derived). After 1500, archival records use the word *tarocchi* instead. The change of names is still unexplained but is clear: the same cards, the same pack, and probably the same game received a new name. (The word *trionfi* did not disappear, but was used only for the trump cards.) The French word *tarot*, derived from *tarocchi*, has come into widespread use in English. Beautifully hand-painted cards, dating to the period before 1500, have been preserved. The present facsimile edition is the reproduction of one of the most extraordinary sets, called the Cary-Yale Visconti Tarocchi deck or, by historians, the Visconti di Modrone Deck. It comprises sixty-seven original cards to which have been added nineteen modern renditions of the supposed missing cards.

### THE CARY-YALE VISCONTI TAROCCHI DECK (VISCONTI DI MODRONE)

The Cary-Yale Visconti Tarocchi deck is also called the Visconti di Modrone deck, or just Visconti, because it has long been owned by the Visconti family. It is now one of the treasures of The Cary Collection of Playing Cards at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Also attributed to Bonifacio Bembo, it is unanimously recognized as painted for Duke Filippo Maria Visconti, and must therefore have been done before the duke's death in 1447.

As with all illuminated Tarot decks, the cards are quite large; they are almost 19 cm high, with slight differences between the cards due to the fact they were handmade. Among the Bembo decks, they are by far the biggest, since the Brambilla deck is more or less 18 x 90 cm, and the Pierpont-Morgan Visconti-Sforza (alias Colleoni-Baglioni) is only 17.5 x 8.7 cm. Although there is a clear tendency towards reducing the size of the cards in the course of time, the Este-Aragon pack being the smallest of all illuminated Tarot decks, and perhaps one of the latest (it is dated 1473; see Table 5), it would be unwise to infer from its size alone that the Cary-Yale Visconti Tarocchi deck is one of the earliest. But we will keep this in mind.

The pack is composed of sixty-seven surviving cards, although this does not mean only eleven are missing. Indeed, it is generally assumed that the total number of cards was higher than seventy-eight. This pack is unique in having three unusual trumps, namely the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, and female counterparts to the male knights and pages, which normally do not

appear in ‘standard’ Tarot packs. Because of these female figures, it is assumed that all courts had male and female counterparts: a king and a queen, a male knight and a female one (a mounted lady), a regular page and a female servant in each of the four suits. Therefore, the deck must have had twenty-four court cards instead of sixteen, and a total of sixty-four suited cards, for a grand total of eighty-six cards.

For the trumps (or ‘Major Arcana’), there are only eight of the familiar allegories—The Empress, The Emperor, The Lovers, The Chariot, Strength, Death, Judgment, and The World— but three more figures are present, Faith, Hope and Charity, that is, the three theological virtues. The reason for their presence is unclear, and it is difficult to understand why the series is changed from the standard series of trumps. We do not even know if the missing trumps are really missing. Save for The Devil, which is missing in all hand-painted Tarot decks of the fifteenth century because this card was often robbed in order to be used in magic rituals, there is no clear evidence that the Cary-Yale Visconti Tarocchi deck had all standard trumps. Were the theological virtues just added to the other twenty-two? Or did they replace some usual allegories? Or were they there at the start, and replaced by other figures in later decks? All these questions remain unanswered.

The presence of the three theological virtues is reminiscent of a later extension of the Tarot pack, designed in Florence around 1500, which is known as Minchiate (though called Germini in the sixteenth century). Indeed, in Minchiate, twenty extra trumps have been added to the basic series (and the Popess was eliminated), so that we have a total of ninety-seven cards (fifty-six suited cards plus forty-one trumps). This addition was composed of classic series, like the twelve signs of the zodiac, the four elements, the fourth cardinal virtue (Prudence) and the three theological virtues. But it is not certain that this expanded composition was really known to Tarot players much before 1500. And Minchiate has sixteen court cards, not twenty-four.

In the facsimile reproduction of the Cary-Yale Visconti Tarocchi deck, the three virtues substitute for three of the missing cards: Charity for The Popess, Faith for The Pope, and Hope for The Star. To make the deck complete for meditation, game playing and divination, artist Luigi Scapini has recreated the nineteen missing cards. Scapini used printing proofs of the authentic cards for the background. By means of collage and overpainting, the figures, costumes, symbols, heraldic devices and overall style are captured on each card.

If we consider the part of the deck that comprises the court and numeral cards, which we call the ‘four-suited’ cards (also called Minor Arcana by occultists), we find that all pip cards are almost complete (thirty-nine cards), missing only the Three of Coins. They are painted on silver backgrounds, like the Brambilla cards, but here Swords are straight, whereas in the Brambilla deck they are curved. The usual Batons are here

“maces” on the courts but arrows on the pips. (This is why we will call them ‘Staves’.) In the Brambilla deck, it is the opposite; numeral cards offer real clubs, painted blue with gilded ends, while the courts hold arrows. Also, as in the Brambilla pack, all courts are painted on tooled gold backgrounds. The decoration consists of repeating suns within a lozenge pattern. The decorative frames show flower designs made of repetitive dots.

## THE UNUSUAL COMPOSITION OF THE CARY-YALE VISCONTI TAROT DECK

TABLE 1

Name	Cary-Yale Visconti	Scapini Imitations
<i>Trumps</i>		
The Fool		✓
The Magician		✓
The Popess		none
The Empress	✓	
The Emperor	✓	
The Pope		none
The Lovers	✓	
The Chariot	✓	
Justice		✓
The Hermit		✓
The Wheel of Fortune		✓
Strength	✓	
The Hanged Man		✓
Death	✓	
Temperance		✓
The Devil		✓
The Tower		✓
The Star		none
The Moon		✓
The Sun		✓
Judgment	✓	
The World	✓	
Faith	✓	
Hope	✓	
Charity	✓	
<i>Swords</i>		
King of Swords	✓	
Queen of Swords	✓	
Male Knight of Swords		✓
Female Knight of Swords	✓	
Male Page of Swords		✓
Female Page of Swords	✓	

Ten of Swords	✓	
Nine of Swords	✓	
Eight of Swords	✓	
Seven of Swords	✓	
Six of Swords	✓	
Five of Swords	✓	
Four of Swords	✓	
Three of Swords	✓	
Two of Swords	✓	
One of Swords	✓	
<i>Staves/Arrows</i>		
King of Staves		✓
Queen of Staves	✓	
Male Knight of Staves		✓
Female Knight of Staves	✓	
Male Page of Staves	✓	
Female Page of Staves	✓	
Ten of Staves	✓	
Nine of Staves	✓	
Eight of Staves	✓	
Seven of Staves	✓	
Six of Staves	✓	
Five of Staves	✓	
Four of Staves	✓	
Three of Staves	✓	
Two of Staves	✓	
One of Staves	✓	
<i>Cups</i>		
King of Cups	✓	
Queen of Cups		✓
Male Knight of Cups	✓	
Female Knight of Cups		✓
Male Page of Cups	✓	
Female Page of Cups	✓	
Ten of Cups	✓	
Nine of Cups	✓	
Eight of Cups	✓	
Seven of Cups	✓	
Six of Cups	✓	
Five of Cups	✓	
Four of Cups	✓	
Three of Cups	✓	
Two of Cups	✓	
One of Cups	✓	

<i>Coins</i>		
King of Coins	✓	
Queen of Coins	✓	
Male Knight of Coins	✓	
Female Knight of Coins	✓	
Male Page of Coins		✓
Female Page of Coins	✓	
Ten of Coins	✓	
Nine of Coins	✓	
Eight of Coins	✓	
Seven of Coins	✓	
Six of Coins	✓	
Five of Coins	✓	
Four of Coins	✓	
Three of Coins		✓
Two of Coins	✓	
One of Coins	✓	

A feature that had not escaped the learned observers—Stuart R. Kaplan and Michael Dummett, to name just a few—is that the courts in the ‘long’ suits, Swords and Staves, have their robes adorned with quinces and fountains respectively, whereas the ‘round’ suits, Cups and Coins, show crowns with fronds on the Cups, and sunbursts on the Coins. While the latter are well-known Visconti emblems, the former belong to the Sforza repertoire.

#### THE VISCONTI EMBLEMS AND HERALDIC DEVICES



**VISCONTI VIPER**



**DOVE**



MOTTO *a bon droyt*



DUCAL CROWN



SUNBURST



IMPERIAL EAGLE

### SFORZA EMBLEMS



QUINCES



FOUNTAIN

Some Italian names of the Visconti emblems:

English	Italian
viper	<i>biscione</i>
turtledove	<i>colombina</i>
sunburst, radiating sun	<i>nazza</i>
crown with fronds	<i>piumai</i> ("feathers")
knotted headband	<i>capitergium</i>

### THE MOTTO "A BON DROYT"

The emblem and motto—a white turtledove within a golden sun with wavy rays, and the French phrase "*a bon droyt*" (with good right)—were created by the poet Petrarch for Giangaleazzo Visconti (1351–1402) on the occasion of his marriage to Isabella of Valois (1360).

## GENERAL OVERVIEW ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF PLAYING CARDS

As for the origins of playing cards, we are in a better position today than a century ago. Marco Polo, the Crusaders, the Kabbalah or the Bohemians have been ruled out as the creators because they have nothing to do with playing cards, a game that was not introduced in Europe until 1350–60. Indeed, the earliest serious reference to playing cards is a Catalan document of 1371 that mentions *naips*, a word that has no other meaning and that has been used for centuries in Catalonia, and still is in Spanish, as *naipes*, for playing cards. Along with Catalonia, a few northern Italian places have also preserved accounts of *naibi*, for example in Florence where *naibbe*—clearly the same word as *naipes*—were forbidden in 1377. In the same year, we find Siena also threatening to punish whomever "*ludens ad naibos*" (playing with cards). Very soon, however, the new game went north. In 1377 a Swiss monk, called John of Rheinfelden, wrote a treatise describing the playing card pack as a kind of courtly society, since it involved Kings and courtiers. John makes no reference to Queens or any ladies, though, and unfortunately does not say what the suit signs looked like. But the basic pack he describes has the same structure as today: fifty-two cards, divided into four suits, within each suit a king, followed by an "upper" officer, and a "lower" officer.

A few years later, playing cards are recorded in Brussels, Ratisbon (Germany), Dubrovnik (now in Croatia), and even in France. By the end of the fourteenth century, the core of Western Europe had adopted the new game. The British Isles, Scandinavia and Central Europe would come to playing cards in the early part of the fifteenth century. Where did playing cards come from? It is clear that they were not invented in Europe. The playing card pack is a complex object where each single element is defined by two criteria (a bit like in a mathematical matrix): values (or ranks), and suit symbols. So a playing card may be a king (value) of hearts (suit-sign), or a seven of clubs. Moreover, playing cards are small double-sided cardboard pieces, where the designation appears on one side, the other side (the back) being "mute" (and identical throughout the whole deck). This gives the game a very peculiar—and absolutely new—feature: imperfect information. (All traditional games that were current in medieval Europe, chess, dice, backgammon, merrelles, are games of perfect information.)

So who invented this extraordinary game? All evidence, including the very word *naipe*, *naibi*, and the like, points toward the Orient, that is, the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. For a long time, scholars have tried various hypotheses as to the origins of playing cards, some being quite fanciful, others including the Arabo-Islamic world, but they had no proof. In the late 1930s, an Israeli scholar, Leo Ary Mayer, discovered in the collections of the Topkapı Museum in Istanbul what appeared to be a pack of large playing cards of Mamluk

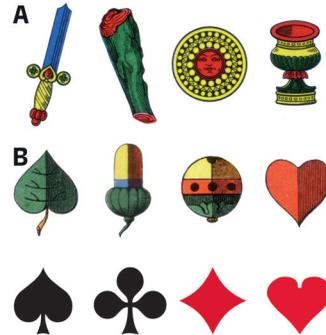
style, with Arabic captions on most of them. Although there are no human figures, the king being represented by a kind of cube with an inscription that says who he is, and to which suit sign he belongs, it was striking to read on his “followers” (second- and third-rank courts), the Arabic word *nā’ib* “governor” or “viceroyn”. Further research has yielded a few more cards that are considered older (thirteenth century), and some literary citations that refer to *kanjafeh*, an obvious Persian borrowing. In modern Hindi, *ganjifa* is the word used for traditional playing cards, introduced by the Mughals around AD 1500. Therefore, it is believed that the Mamluk got their cards from the Persians. Interestingly, Iran was then governed by the Mongols who, at the same time, ruled over China (the Yuan Dynasty, 1279–1368). It is highly probable that China is the birthplace of the new game, since we know that dominoes—a game very close to playing cards—was known there by 1120. From dominoes to cards it is just a change of material (paper instead of bone or ivory), and a more complex design.

Today, playing card historians think that playing cards were invented in China around 1200 and traveled westward through Asia with the Mongols in the second half of the thirteenth century, being adopted by the Persians and later by their westernmost neighbors, the Mamluks. It is likely that Latin merchants—Venetians, Genoans, Catalans, and others—trading spices, silk, and other luxury items with the Mamluks, discovered this new exciting game in Egypt and brought it back home to Barcelona, Genoa, Marseilles, Venice, and even to Florence and Siena. This must have happened before 1365, because in that year a raid of Crusaders coming from Cyprus sacked Alexandria. The Mamluk rulers got so angry that they put an end to all trading for a few years. Therefore, if playing cards are mentioned in a Catalan document in 1371, they must have come before 1365, and the years around 1360 are a good time for the introduction of playing cards in Europe.

The Topkapı Museum cards look strikingly similar in design and suit signs to hand-painted Tarot cards of the same time. Four suits are recognizable, all named in captions, *darāhim* or ‘dirhams’ (corresponding to the Coins of the Tarot system); *suyūf*, or scimitars (the typical Oriental swords); *tūmān*, literally ‘ten thousand’, though a strange (Turkish or Mongol) word for the Cups; and *javkān* or ‘polo sticks’ (from Persian *čavugān* ‘polo’) that clearly stand for the Batons of Tarot. These are the four suit symbols that are still current in Italy and Spain for ordinary cards. They are known as the Latin suit signs. Historians think this is the earliest suit system of Europe, being introduced from the Orient. Of course, Coins, Cups, Swords, and Batons are familiar to Tarot lovers, but they are shared by ordinary cards in large parts of Italy and in Spain. They are still used in Morocco and western Algeria, in all Spanish-speaking America, and as far as Japan, in a highly stylized form. A second suit system

arose once playing cards had crossed the Alps and came to German-speaking countries in the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century. This is why we call it ‘Germanic’ (see Chart). Today, they are known in two variants: the typical Swiss-German suit signs (also called *Jasskarten*) and the German suit signs, still proudly used in Bavaria, parts of Baden, Saxony, eastern Poland, Bohemia and Hungary.

## SUIT SYSTEMS



During the fifteenth century, many experiments were made with playing cards: variations in the suit symbols were tried, some added a fifth suit, others included more courts and even ladies! It seems it was the French who decided to replace the “upper officer” by a queen. Elsewhere, this second-ranked court has remained a man: *Obermann* (or just *Ober*) in Germanic countries, or knight (or cavalier) in southern Europe. Spanish and Italian packs still have *caballos/cavalli* (literally horses) instead of queens. With the French came a third suit system, which is now internationally widespread: it seems the idea was to simplify and speed up the manufacture of playing cards. With Clubs and Spades being plain black symbols, while Hearts and Diamonds are just red, it was easy to make numeral cards with the help of stencils only, without being obliged to cut woodblocks. This probably gave the French a real advantage—coupled with a good supply of paper—and they soon conquered the European market, being unrivaled in parts of Europe (the British Isles, Scandinavia, Portugal) where playing cards were not made at that time.

## THE ‘INVENTION’ OF TAROT IN THE 15TH CENTURY—WHAT IS A TAROT DECK

As we said, the fifteenth century was a time of trials. Princes were eager to have their own playing cards, decorated with fancy suit symbols and sometimes complemented with extra cards. Some even invented exclusive games with special cards. There are records of such decks, some of which have survived. In Milan, around 1420–25,

Duke Filippo Maria Visconti, who reigned from 1412–47, designed a new game of cards with the help of his court adviser Marziano da Tortona (also known as Marziano Rampini da Sant'Alosio). Marziano was requested to complete the rules and write them down (in Latin). He came back to his Prince with a special pack made of four suits, symbolized by birds—Eagles, Phoenixes, Turtledoves, and Doves—together with an extra series of sixteen cards, showing Roman gods and semi-gods, from Jupiter (No. 1) to Cupido (No. 16). The game was dubbed ‘Deification of the Sixteen Heroes’. Whereas Marziano mentions only kings, although it is possible that knights and pages were also present, it is clear that the sixteen extra cards had more power over the other cards. The rules of the game, which seems to have been a trick-taking game like Bridge or Whist, implied that the Roman gods and semi-gods were played as trumps. This idea was absolutely new; the notion of trumps had always been unknown to the Chinese (and Indian) traditions of card games, and it seem to be a true European find. To give more importance to his invention, Filippo Maria Visconti ordered his court painter Michelino da Besozzo (ca. 1370–ca. 1455) to paint the cards according to Marziano’s sketches.

We would never have known about this new game had Marziano’s rules not been copied some years later (in 1449) for the purpose of a gift one Jacopo Antonio Marcello wanted to send in November 1449 to Queen Isabella of Lorraine, the wife of King René (René I of Anjou). Marcello was an admirer of René, who had tried to take the throne of Naples (and Sicily), which he had inherited, but was opposed by rival pretender Alfonso of Aragon. Alfonso won, but René had supporters in Italy for whom he appeared as a much better candidate. In 1449, René I of Anjou and his wife Isabella were living in Angers (France). It was there that Marcello sent the game Filippo Maria Visconti and Marziano da Tortona had designed, and Michelino had painted some twenty years before. Because Milan was under Republican rule after Filippo Maria Visconti’s death (1447), and therefore besieged by Francesco Sforza, Marcello had to send spies in order to recover this wonderful pack of cards he had heard of. Once holding it, he had Marziano’s Latin rules beautifully copied by a good calligrapher, so Queen Isabella would know how to play with these strange cards. Although the cards are lost, the booklet was kept and has found its way to the French royal collections. It is today in the French National Library where scholars can study it.

This early fancy game of the 1420s, with its extra series of powerful cards, can be held for a “proto-Tarot” pack, since it inaugurates the particular composition of all Tarot decks: a group of ‘regular’ cards, divided into four suits, plus an extra series of ranked cards that serve as trumps. However, as we shall see, we have to wait for a further twenty years before we hear of the true Tarot.

Most Tarot packs have seventy-eight cards that can be divided between a set of four-suited ordinary cards (called by occultists Minor Arcana), and a series of extra cards that function as permanent trumps (the so-called Major Arcana), and are numbered from 1 to 21, plus a Fool. The four-suited set has, however, fifty-six cards instead of fifty-two: Queens have been added. Since Tarot comes from Italy, it first used Latin suit-signs—Coins, Cups, Swords, and Batons. The Knight is therefore no extra card, it belongs to the Italian regular pack. The special cards—or trumps, or Major Arcana—show figures that are borrowed from a common stock of profane and Christian allegories, from earthly activities to heavenly representations. From this basic structure, shortened or expanded decks have been designed, either eliminating some lower pip cards as in the Bolognese ‘Tarocchino’ pack (62 cards), or adding some extra trumps as in the Florentine ‘Minchiate’ pack (97 cards). In German-speaking countries, when Tarot was introduced in the early eighteenth century, French suit signs and animals instead of Christian allegories were preferred. The number of cards was later reduced to 54 cards. In his seminal book, *The Game of Tarot* (1980), Michael Dummett has shown that in Italy the trump cards were arranged according to three orders or traditions, that he called A (for Bologna and Florence), B (for Ferrara) and C (for Milan). The C order is also that of the Tarot de Marseille.

## THE ‘MAJOR ARCANA’ (TRUMP) CARDS

TABLE 2

	(A) Bologna	(B) Ferrara	(C) Milan	(C) Marseille	English names
– ANGELO		XXI IL MONDO	XXI IL MONDO	Le Monde	The World
– MONDO		XX LA GIUSTIZIA	XX L'ANGELO	Le Jugement	Judgment
– SOLE	XVIII L'ANGELO		XVIII IL SOLE	Le Soleil	The Sun
– LUNA	XVIII IL SOLE		XVIII LA LUNA	La Lune	The Moon
16 STELLA	XVII LA LUNA		XVII LA STELLA	L'Etoile	The Star
15 SAETTA	XVI LA STELLA		XVI IL FUOCO	La Maison-Dieu	The Tower
14 DIAVOLO	XV IL FUOCO		XV IL DIAVOLO	Le Diable	The Devil
13 MORTE	XIII IL DIAVOLO		XIII LA TEMPERANZA	La Temperance	Temperance
12 TRADITORE	XIII LA MORTE		XIII LA MORTE	[La Mort]	Death
11 VECCHIO	XII L'IMPICCATO		XII IL TRADITORE	Le Pendu	The Hanged Man
10 RUOTA	XI IL VECCHIO		XI IL VECCHIO	La Force	Strength
9 FORZA	X LA RUOTA		X LA RUOTA	La Roue de Fortune	The Wheel of Fortune
8 GIUSTA	VIII LA FORTEZZA		VIII LA FORTEZZA	L'Hermite	The Hermit
7 TEMPRA	VIII L'AMORE		VIII IL CARRO	La Justice	Justice
6 CARRO	VII IL CARRO		VII LA GIUSTIZIA	Le Chariot	The Chariot
5 AMORE	VI LA TEMPERANZA		VI L'AMORE	L'Amoureux	The Lovers
– PAPA	V IL PAPA		V IL PAPA	Le Pape	The Pope
– PAPESSA	III L'IMPERADORE		III L'IMPERATORE	L'Empereur	The Emperor
– IMPERATORE	III LA PAPESSA		III LA PAPESSA	L'Impératrice	The Empress
– IMPERATRICE	II LA IMPERATRICE		II L'IMPERATRICE	La Papesse	The Popess
– BAGATTINO	I IL GABBATELLA		I IL BAGATELLA	Le Bateleur	The Magician
– MATTO	IL MATTO		– IL MATTO	Le Fol / Le Mat	The Fool

As one can see, not all trumps follow the same order. Two major differences occur: in Bologna and Florence, the ‘Angelo’ (The Last Judgment) comes first, and is followed by The World; and the three virtues are grouped together, between The Chariot and The Wheel of Fortune. In Ferrara, whereas The World is the top trump, it is followed by Justice, a very unusual position, then by Judgment (l’Angelo). The two other virtues are in sixth and eighth positions, respectively. Finally, the Milanese order is more or less the same as in the Tarot de Marseille. It has been shown that this French adaptation has its roots in Milan and Lombardy. In Italian, some trumps have names that the French and English words do not always translate properly. The Last Judgment is regularly called ‘l’Angelo’ (The Angel); The Tower (French ‘la Maison-Dieu’) is more commonly called ‘la Saetta’ (The Lightning) or ‘il Fuoco’ (The Fire); The Hanged Man (French ‘le Pendu’) is more rightly named ‘il Traditore’ (The Traitor), because hanging someone by his feet (most often in painting) was the usual punishment of traitors. The ‘Juggler’ or ‘Magician’, in French ‘le Bateleur’, is never called so in Italian, but is dubbed ‘Bagattino’, ‘Bagatella’, or ‘Bagatto’ (whence German ‘Pagat’). The idea of a Hermit is unknown in the Italian list; instead the figure is better named ‘il Vecchio’, The Old Man (or sometimes ‘il Tempo’, Time), because he clearly is a representation of Time as an old man. Of course, The Fool is ‘il Matto’ (The Madman).

### THE FOUR-SUITED CARDS (OR MINOR ARCANA) ARE THE SAME IN ALL VARIANTS TABLE 3

The suit signs are:

Italian	French (modern)	English	Corresponding to
Spade	Épées	Swords	Spades
Bastoni	Bâtons	Batons	Clubs
Coppe	Coupes	Cups	Hearts
Denari	Deniers	Coins	Diamonds

The four court cards in each suit are:

Italian	French (old)	French (modern)	Corresponding to
Re	Roy	Roi	King
Regina	Royne	Reine / Dame	Queen
Cavallo	Chevalier	Cavalier	Knight, Cavalier
Fante	Valet	Valet	Page, Knave

Three main centers have thus been spotted with both preserved Tarot cards and with archival documents: Florence (and Bologna), Ferrara (and Venice), and Milan (and Pavia). Florence and Ferrara are the

best documented places: a rich array of literary sources and account books help us understand how Tarot became a craze in these cities during the fifteenth century. Recent research has shown that Tarot was known in Florence as early as 1440, while it is mentioned in the Ferrarese archives in 1442. There are fewer written records for Milan, but three wonderful Tarot decks, painted by Bonifacio Bembo and his brothers for two dukes, Filippo Maria Visconti (r. 1412–47) and his successor Francesco Sforza (r. 1450–66), are there to confirm that the Milanese court did not lag behind.

The earliest list of Tarot trumps was found in the late nineteenth century by British scholar Robert Steele, and published by him in 1900. He found the list in a collection of Latin sermons by an anonymous preacher, who is now identified as a Franciscan friar. Indeed, the sermon ‘*De Ludo cum Aliis*’ appears to be based on a similar sermon by St. James of the Marches (1393–1476), but adds references to card games and a full description of a 78-card Tarot deck. This text, known to historians as “The Steele Sermon”, may date to the end of the fifteenth century. The list of trumps, all with numbers and names, follows the B order, that is, that of Ferrara and Venice.

From these three main centers, one of them must be the birthplace of Tarot. If Ferrara does **not seem** to be the place where Tarot was ‘invented’, today scholars hesitate between Florence and Milan, both having good arguments in their respective favor. While the Milanese tradition and order of trumps went West, arriving in France around 1500, then in Switzerland around 1550, the Florentine form of Tarot went South, to Rome first (as early as 1454), then to Naples, and finally to Sicily, the only place where it survives today. Bologna must be a northern branch of the Florentine Tarot, because the local Tarocchino and its Florentine cousin share the same order (A) of trumps. Although a very popular place for Tarot in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Ferrarese tradition died out around 1600, perhaps because the Este family had been ousted from Ferrara by Pope Clement VIII, who had rights over it. The Este family took refuge in their second city, Modena, but it does not seem to have helped maintain the art of Tarot there. Venice, which had been following Ferrara as far as Tarot was concerned, also gave up. Finally it was the foreign offshoots of the C order that proved to be more durable and widespread. Firmly established in France, where the game was extremely fashionable between ca. 1570 and ca. 1650, Tarot was exported to Belgium and Germany soon after 1700. Reshaped with French suit signs and ‘lay’ trumps in Germany, Tarot spread rapidly to other countries: Scandinavia, Central Europe, and even to Russia. Between ca. 1750 and ca. 1850, Tarot enjoyed a heyday in Europe. Only the British Isles and the Iberian Peninsula were kept apart: the game of Tarot did not reach them.



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