

## New Documents from Palermo

Franco Pratesi – 13.01.1992

It is not easy to find something new concerning cards and card playing in Sicily. There are two main reasons for that, the objective lack of documents and the pioneering interest to the topic by Michael Dummett. Not to mention his remarkable contributions from oral witnesses, it is unlikely that any relevant archival evidence has escaped his attention! Nevertheless, I recently studied in some public Libraries and in Archivio di Stato of Palermo a few documents which provide further useful information.

Let us begin with Archivio di Stato located in a fine Palazzo near Cala and Vucceria, the old port and market of Palermo, respectively. Here are kept the already known impressions of wooden and copper blocks for Sicilian cards (Misc. I n.225); a 1846 edition of Chitarrella rules for mediatore and tresette (Misc. II n.212); some bandi, as that of Ferdinando II dated Naples 10.12.1844 (Misc. II n.654) – Four kinds of cards are allowed: Carte ordinarie, Italiane fine, Francesi, Tarocchi. They have to be stamped in colour in Palermo with 3 gigli semplici (fleurs-de-lys) under the royal crown. The mark must be on the 2 spades for French cards and 5 swords in the others; the duty to be of 4 Neapolitan grana for each kind; moreover the price for the sheet to be 3 grana for ordinarie and 6 for others, the makers to print their names on a card of each pack.

However, the series of documents which looks most promising is the collection of *Ministero e segreteria di Stato presso il luogotenente generale. Ripartimento delle finanze*, which may be simply referred to as Finanze. I have leafed through its inventory and so I could select a dozen files for further inspection. Although dust on similar documents is the rule, all these files are much more dusty than usual. After digging under its thick layers, I could find much less than I might expect, mainly owing to the unsuitable selection of records preserved, as will be stressed below. Let us examine the files selected for inspection and what I could find within them.

Nr 1269 (1827) The file contains two letters dated 1827. Signora Claudia Guillaut requests to introduce in Palermo 250 packs of cards manufactured in Naples under her contract. The request is accepted, on the obvious conditions that the cards receive the stamp for Sicily and pay the corresponding duties.

Nr 1288 (1828) There is a number of various documents. The printed contract of 1826 with Signora Claudia Guillaut may be of interest for comparison, referring to Naples. She assumes the task of selling 300,000 packs assuring to the government yearly 18,000 ducats. The points are

- six years duration from 1.1.1827,
  - the place will be the same, in the house of Amministrazione Generale at Dogana del Sale, three further rooms are available in the flat above for printing the sheets,
  - everything is at her charge and risk,
  - manpower has to be maintained: at present 16 maestri, 17 lavoratori, 7 giovani, 14 donne and 22 discepoli. [Thus there were 76 persons employed.]
  - for the whole work up to the complete packing the price is 19 cavalli. Printing will be achieved by means of copper or brass blocks.
  - The patterns are:
    - Riversino similar to those of Barcelona
    - Francesi similar to those of Vienna
    - del Re similar to those of traditional cards
    - Napolitane similar to those of present cards del Re.
- Two stamped specimens must be kept for each one.

- The tax of the stamp is 6 grana for each pack and another 3 grana for Napoletane or 6 for the others. The price within Naples is 12 grana for Napolitane and 20 for the others. Outside, the prices are different but not exceeding 13 1/2 for Napoletane and 21 1/2 the others.

Except for the printed contract, the documents concern Palermo and Sicily. The contract is in fact inserted here as an addition to several handwritten documents related to the request of establishing a stock in Sicily and/or of directly assuming the sale for Messina. Among other things, there are some requests for using additional stamps after the end of the “arrendamento” contract.

A page toward the end of the file keeps the names of card makers in Palermo. Due to the interest in the Cimino family, it is reported here in full (only neglecting the Sig. before the names of the Masters and Sig.a D.a before the Pincitrici or women card painters).

*Nota, che si presenta a S.E. il Sig. Direttore Generale Sig. Duca di Serradifalco dal ceto de' Cartari.*

*1. Maestri di Bottega: Antonino Cara, Felice Cimino, Francesco Paolo Nobili, Domenico Nobili, Francesco Sperandio, Gaetano Faraone.*

*2. Lavoranti: Gaetano Galofaro, Giuseppe Costa, Antonio Fositta, Giuseppe Crisafici, Salvatore Briguccia, Antonio di Nardo, Antonino Galofaro, Carlo Crisafurli, Francesco Cimino, Antonino Allegra, Giuseppe Coppolino, Francesco Martino, Carmelo Nobili, Vincenzo Nobili, Antonino Martino, Agostino di Martino, Michele Galofaro, Paolo Ragusa, Antonino Meli, Michele Meli, Sebastiano Buscemi, Giuseppe Palmeri, Carmelo Meli.*

*3. Pincitrici: Carmela Fernandes, Giuseppa Di Lorenzo, Teresa Cimino, Anna Cimino, Rosalia Cimino, Antonina Catania, Elisabetta Picciotto, Rosalia Crisafia, Giovanna Caccamo, Rosalia Castellana, Rosalia Martino, Provvidenza Martino, Giuseppa Caccamo, Caterina Caccamo, Anna Palmeri, Teresa Ragusa, Serafina Ingraiti, Marianna Meli, Maria Teresa Meli, Giuseppa Franco.*

*L'E.S. si previene, che tutti i soprascritti Nomi, e Cognomi, o sia individui si mantengono le loro rispettive famiglie col lavoro sopra enunciato. Per copia conforme, Il Secretario Generale della Direzione Generale de' D.I.*

The presence of members of the same family is evident in several cases, even though no further indication can be deduced as the actual leading ones. Taken as a whole, the 48 persons involved can be compared with the 76 before mentioned for Naples.

Nr 1307 (1829) A letter dated 19.11.1829 has some indication useful for understanding the ratio between Palermo and Messina incomes:

	da gennaio a giugno	Totale a fine agosto
Fruttato		
Palermo	423.29.10	511.20.-
Messina	45.17.10	58. 4.-
	-----	-----
	469.17.-	569.24.-

Nr 1325 (1830) Here are kept several monthly letters about the situation of the incomes. Unfortunately for us, the bureaucracy made its own choice as regards the material to be preserved. The usual procedure was to send a letter together with a sheet of tables summarising the actual situation. Already in the letters, the joined material is stated as something shipped for any use chosen by the receiver, and he or his office has systematically chosen that the sheets were not worth preserving. Obviously, for us this represents the worst choice. Much better would it have been if the letter had been discarded and the tables preserved. Month after month the situation repeated itself, only changing slightly the forms in the accompanying letters: *ne farà l'uso che le aggraderà, per servirsene all'uso conveniente*, and so on.

Nr 1396 (1833). The file on cards is very thin and mostly contains documents about the stamps. There is an offer for taking the arrendamento or contract for Messina with documents of the years 1832 and 1833. Again for Messina, there is the requirement to change the stamp since it still represents the late Francesco I. There are some complaints dated 31.12.1832 about forgeries of blocks and stamps.

Nr 1496 (1835). It contains two big files in which I have found nothing concerning cards. A fact that has occurred for other files in that follow, where I will write briefly, "nothing on cards". Here the records are mostly applications for 29-days leaves of absence, customs questions, and so on.

Nr 1721 (1842). Apart from some initial sheets for the year 1842, most of the remaining documents are from about 1833.

Felice Montuoro and Mariano Buonocore arrendieri, i.e. holders of the tax contract, suggest a different procedure for shipping the sheets from Palermo to Naples and vice versa.

There are several questions concerning smuggling and stocks. These documents are mixed with others concerning tobacco.

Nr 1781 (1844). There is a file, about 10 cm thick, devoted only to cards. There are thus many documents concerning applications, information on changes of the system and so on. Predominant are questions of stamp shapes and duties. The corresponding dates vary, mostly 1826-38. The impression is that before a change of administration, all the relevant documents of the previous years have been collected here. There are also several copies of contracts or arrendamenti. Let us limit ourselves to the examination of a few documents.

A leaflet on coloured paper of 29.1.1838 reports the kind of cards and prices (old and new, respectively in the two columns) in grana:

carte	- da tresette	24	26
italiane	- da bassetta	20	26
ordinarie	- tarocchi	40	45
carte fine italiane		40	40
carte fini francesi		50	50

In the second half of the file there are several specimens of stamps both coloured and plain. Typical is the figure of 3 fleur-de-lis and crown with letters I over RD over P; the year is 1827. An interesting document may be that of 24.3.1828 with an opinion signed by Pietro Oliveri bidder and Felice Cimino together with Livigni. It appears that the renowned card maker was here a consultant of the tax office.

Nr 2028 (1851). The file has many documents about the ports and others concerning rents. Nothing on cards.

Nr 2086 (1852). Two big files, the first essentially of small expenses, the second of rents. Nothing on cards.

Nr 2132 (1853). The file about playing cards is 2 or 3 cm thick and contains material for the year 1853. There are several documents concerning the visit of an inspector in Modica. A leaflet with yellow cover printed in Palermo in 1845 contains the *Real Decreto sulle carte da gioco* dated Naples 10.12.1844 and the following *Regolamento di servizio* dated 31.5.1845. These are laws valid for Sicily promulgated by King Ferdinando II. The cards are divided into four kinds: 1. ordinarie, 2. italiane fini, 3. francesi, 4. tarocchi. Card makers need a licence and the same holds for the sellers.

There are some discussions about a supposed decrease in income from taxes and in answer some comparisons with previous years are submitted by the offices. The following table of incomes

derives from two documents; the more recent is dated 10.8.1853 and does not report the values for 1850. Most values are coincident.

Year	Ordinarie	It.fine	Tarocchi	Francesi
1846	81673; 91673	298	2199	866
1847	82919	98	2198	816
1850	22709	==	278	33
1851	58385; 59215	54;117	1299	180
1852	60826; 60426	26	1074	240

Apart from the slight differences between the two reports, the situation is clear. Italiane fini and francesi were only a negligible amount, whereas Tarocchi were still in use, providing about 2% of the total income.

In the following, there are some petitions by Salvatore Cosentino Platania and Gaetano Chiarenza for obtaining a refund of import expenses on a batch of cards which had been “unduly” confiscated. In Trapani on 19.2.1853 Giuseppe Calamia sells cards obtained by smuggling. In January 1853 all the card makers apply for the abolition of tax stamps due to the increase in price from 1 tornese to 3 baiocchi of the paper sheets to be used for cards.

A report contains some useful information about costs and prices at 4.4.1851:

	to sellers	to public	tax	mater.	fabric.	gain
It. fine	18	20	4	6	6	2
It. ordinarie	10/5	11/5	4	3	3/5	1
Francesi	26	28	4	6	16	2
Tarocchi	20/5	22/5	4	6	10/5	2

Let us now pass to Biblioteca Comunale, located inside the imposing palace of the Jesuits. Among other things of interest, here are kept the manuscripts by Emanuele e Gaetani Marchese di Villabianca. While verifying the passage on Sicilian tarot studied by Prof Dummett, I found two scarce books which may be of some interest for the experts.

The first book contains several leaflets bound together. The first booklet is the relevant one here. It is a 4-folios booklet without date and printer. The dates of the other leaflets are Palermo 1736, Siena 1786, Palermo 1798, Palermo 1794, Palermo 1794, Palermo sd. Thus, a date in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century would be tentatively suggested, even if a date toward the beginning of the century still appears to be possible.

## **Il Giuoco dei Tarocchi moralizzato da D.G.P.**

The author (likely a Jesuit himself) begins his work with some historical references to “alea” games, as supposedly invented by Lidians, Troians or Egyptians. Brief quotations follow from late-Renaissance writers such as Lilio Gregorio Girardi, Francesco Patrizio, Angelo Rocca. Moreover, references are provided also from the ancient philosophers and poets as Plato and Petrarca and particularly the Fathers of the Church (Agostino, Cipriano, Basilio, Giovanni Crisostomo, Antonino, Bernardino da Siena, Tommaso, Francesco Borgia). Finally, the author quotes more recent contributions by Baldassare Cavasio and Paolo Segneri. The conclusion is that a difference has to be acknowledged between professional gamblers and occasional players. Then the author enters the tarot question – the game is common but the cards are odd and a better series can be suggested in substitution.

“Del Giuoco però de’ Tarocchi per quanto mi ricordo aver letto in Scipione Bargagli ne’ Giuochi Sanesi, e in altri Autori, non trovo, chi ne parli in particolare, e chi ne sia stato l’inventore. Che che sia di ciò, essendo detto Giuoco de’ Tarocchi oggidì molto frequentato nella nostra Città di Palermo, e le figure, che compongono i Trionfi (che chiamano) de’ medesimi Tarocchi, non avendo fra di loro veruna annessione né proporzione, se non qualcheduna per accidente, mi è paruto riformarle nella seguente maniera, ad effetto che, anche giuocando, potesse ognuno approfittarsi col fuggire il Vizio, e fare acquisto della Virtù, giacché anche il divertimento non dee esser vacuo di profitto; quindi è, che il Tarocco, o sia Trionfo rappresentante il Matto, da noi detto Fuggito, si è convertito nell’Inganno, per dinotare, che l’Inganno deve fuggirsene dalle buone, ed oneste conversazioni;...

Then the author describes the other triumphs as invented by him (for numbers and names see first columns in table below, where the last column reports – apart from Fuggito, as named here – the traditional names according to M.Dummett. The author adds for each card a typical Latin motto, here reported in the mid column of the table.

0 INGANNO	(Procul)	Fuggito
0 POVERTÁ	(Omnibus invis)	Miseria
1 CARITÁ	(Major omnia Charitas)	Picciotti
2 CONVERSAZIONE	(Veh Soli)	Imperatrice
3 CONSERVAZIONE	(Ut ducet)	Imperatore
4 CONCORDIA	(Difficile rumpitur)	Costanza
5 EGUALITÁ	(Invicem)	Temperanza
6 AFFIDABILITÁ	(Omnibus omnia)	Fortezza
7 DISCREZIONE	(Moderatrix virtutum)	Giustizia
8 LEALTÁ	(Esto fidelis)	Amore
9 SINCERITÁ	(Simplices ut colombarum)	Carro
10 MODESTIA	(Nota sit omnibus)	Fortuna
11 SOBRIETÁ	(Sobrii estote)	Impiccato
12 TOLLERANZA	(Rebus me? servo secundis)	Eremita
13 PRUDENZA	(Estote prudentes)	Morte
14 FERMEZZA	(Fortiter, sed suaviter)	Vascello
15 VERITÁ	(Omnium fortissima)	Torre
16 ASTRONOMIA	(A signis coeli nolite meteora)	Stella
17 LUNA	(Stultus ut luna mutatur)	Luna
18 SOLE	(Super bonos, et malos)	Sole
19 ATLANTE	(Aeterna vi desiderio)	Atlante
20 GIOVE	(Aequaliter)	Giove

It may be noted that the highest cards are the most similar to the Sicilian conventional ones. Very interesting is the presence of the “typical” 22 triumphs, instead of the 21 Sicilian ones. In fact, below the 20 numbered cards corresponding more or less precisely to the Sicilian sequence, we have two lower cards, i.e., Inganno and Povertà.

The second scarce book is more recent but it appears to have escaped due attention by experts too (to begin with A.Lensi who does not include it in his well-known bibliography): *Il Tesoro dei perditempo – ossia Raccolta dei più dilettevoli giuochi di carte pel divertimento di più persone nelle società numerose per cura d’un sfaccendato con l’aggiunta d’un trattato sul giuoco del whist*. Palermo. Stabilimento tipografico di Fr. Lao. 1859. 112 p.

It describes many card games which seem to derive from the French *Académies des jeux*, even though they are commonly “translated” to the 40-cards pack. Moreover, it includes some

independent descriptions of games, among which an original description of Trionfi. The game of Trionfi has a great history. However, its descriptions in the common “complete” books of card games are very scant and unsatisfactory. They either derive from foreign texts or only summarise the rules, so that it becomes impossible to reconstruct the game. Therefore, let us outline here the rules as recorded in this new source.

1. The game is played with the 40-card pack among 4, 6 or 8 players divided into two teams.
2. Only the two team leaders are allowed to speak and to organise the play.
3. Everybody sits between two opponents.
4. With 8 players the decreasing order of the cards is: Paolina or trumps 4, Gran Torre or trumps 3, Maniglia or trumps 2, Re-King, Cavallo-Horse, Donna namely the feminine Jack used in South Italy, Ace, 7,6,5.
5. With 6 players the decreasing order is the same as for 8 players except for the Gran Torre being the highest and trumps 4 the lowest card.
6. With 4 players the decreasing order is the same as for 6 players except for Maniglia being the highest and Paolina and Gran Torre the two lowest cards.
7. The object of the game is to reach a score of 12 points. 11 points is Chiarella: if the team holds the game either it obtains the 12<sup>th</sup> point or loses 3.
8. Having 11, the leader may fail; in this case, the team loses 1 to the opponents and cards are shuffled again.
9. Dealer is the player cutting the highest card. He deals three cards to everybody and then a further card face-up; the last marks the trump and does not belong to any player.
10. Each leader has the right to see and organise the play of the cards of his own team; then who is on play begins.
11. Two tricks won form the basis, which counts 1 point only if there were no bets.
12. The bets are: Treppiè worth 3 points, Smassà worth 6, Smalò worth 9, Fuori Partita corresponding to all the 12 points, without remaining at Chiarella.
13. The bet always begins with Treppiè; if the opponent says “giocate”, or play, the basis counts 3. If he drops, he loses 1 point and cards pass for shuffling to next dealer.
14. If on Treppiè the answer is Smassà, the basis becomes 6 points; if he does not hold the loss is 3 points. The same for Smalò and Fuori Partita, in which cases the loss for not holding is 6 and 9 points, respectively.
15. Following suit is not compulsory and trumps can be played unrestrainedly.

The game is evidently of an ancient kind; its gambling character is rather strong, even if it is played in partnership between two teams of 2, 3 or 4 players. There are several bets and raises, enhancing the fighting and/or gambling character of the game. The aim of the game is simply to make two tricks out of the three possible ones. No bonus is mentioned for making all the tricks. The very fact that only three cards each are in play indicates a simplified game, compared to any similar one in which all the cards are dealt at the beginning.

It may finally be noted that Biblioteca Regionale, the richest in Palermo, also keeps documents worth inspecting. For instance, there is a rare poem on the game of Scopone published in 1925 by S.Grisafi and a dissertation by S.Barberi, *Il giuoco delle carte in Italia*, discussed in Palermo University in 1945. In the manuscript section, a printed specimen of the Bando of 22.3.1625 about cards and gambling in Sicily is preserved. It forbids dice games and permits board ones. Card games must be played with stamped cards; two such games, Cartetta Svolta and Quaranta are forbidden in any case.

On the whole, however, the “new” documents found in Biblioteca Regionale appear to be of lower interest for us. Apart from private collections, there are in Palermo at least two further

libraries which I could not visit but which should be inspected by card researchers; namely, those of Deputazione di Storia Patria and Museo Pitré.