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RARE COMPLETE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY FRENCH PLAYING CARD DECK "*AU PORTRAIT DE PARIS*"

HAND-COLOURED, COMPLETE, IN PERFECT CONDITIONS

French playing card deck "au portrait de Paris". Paris, Pierre Marc-JeanTrioullier, [ca. 1775].

52 cards [8,3 x 5,5 cm], woodcut stencil-coloured on stiff watermark laid paper, manufacturer's name "*P. Marc*" at foot of all court cards, square corners, plain versos with stencilled colour inscriptions.



Complete desk of cards "*au portrait de Paris*" whose design was conceived in Paris in the 17th century, with characteristic names for the court cards: CHARLES (CHARLEMAGNE), JUDIC (JUDITH) & LAHIRE for the hearts, ALEXANDRE, ARGINE & MARC for the clubs (the jack is named after the master *cartier* in this series, PIERRE MARC), CEZAR (CAESAR), RACHEL & HECTOR for the diamonds, DAVID, PALLAS & HOGIER for the spades.

On the versos are carefully written words or parts of words in French and Latin, probably for a separate grammar or spelling game. This is confirmed by the abbreviated notes on some cards: ""*v[erbe] neut[re]*", "*pr[onom] dém[onstratif]*"), etc.

The court cards are made by the card printer PIERRE MARC (see his printer device on the Jack of clubs, « *au Marc d'Or* ») from the mould registered by TRIOULLIER, printer in Paris in rue Saint- Honoré, under the sign of "Roi David, in 1773. "*Nous avons bien retrouvé cependant dans le dossier 185, aux Archives Nationales, les lettres d'envoi*

accompagnant ces documents, mais malheureusement une seule de ces feuilles a subsisté, celle du nom de Jean Trioullier, dont le dépôt fut effectué le 10 juin 1765. Il est à supposer qu'à une époque plus ou moins éloignée, ou n'a pas cru devoir attacher d'importance à ces feuilles de ligures imprimées, et qu'elles ont été distraites des fonds où elles figuraient, pour être employées comme chemise et servir au classement d'autres documents d'archives, jugés plus dignes d'intérêt. »

(We have however found in file 185, at the National Archives, the letters of dispatch accompanying these documents, but unfortunately only one of these sheets has survived, that of the name of Jean Trioullier, which was deposited on June 10, 1765. It is to be supposed that at a more or less remote period, or did not think it necessary to attach importance to these sheets of printed figures, and that they were diverted from the funds where they appeared, to be used as folder and be used to classify other archival documents, deemed more worthy of interest. (see D'Allemagne, cit., 110-113, see References)

Card *"au portrait de Paris"*.

The most distinguishing feature of the Paris pattern is the names on the court cards (except the jack of Clubs). The four Kings and the Jack of Diamonds (Hector) bear names borrowed from the 'Nine Worthies' series.

CLUBS: The King, Alexandre, is shown with a small lion's head. He holds a sceptre in his right hand. The Queen, Argine, holds a fan in her left hand. The Jack holds a halberd in his left hand and a ribbon with a shield attached in his right. The shield often bears the sign of the cardmaker.

SPADES: The King, David, the Biblical figure, rests on his harp. The Queen, Pallas, is seen in profile, holding a flower (often a tulip) in front of her. The Jack, Hogier, is accompanied by a dog standing up, he wears a beret with a feather and holds a halberd in his left hand.

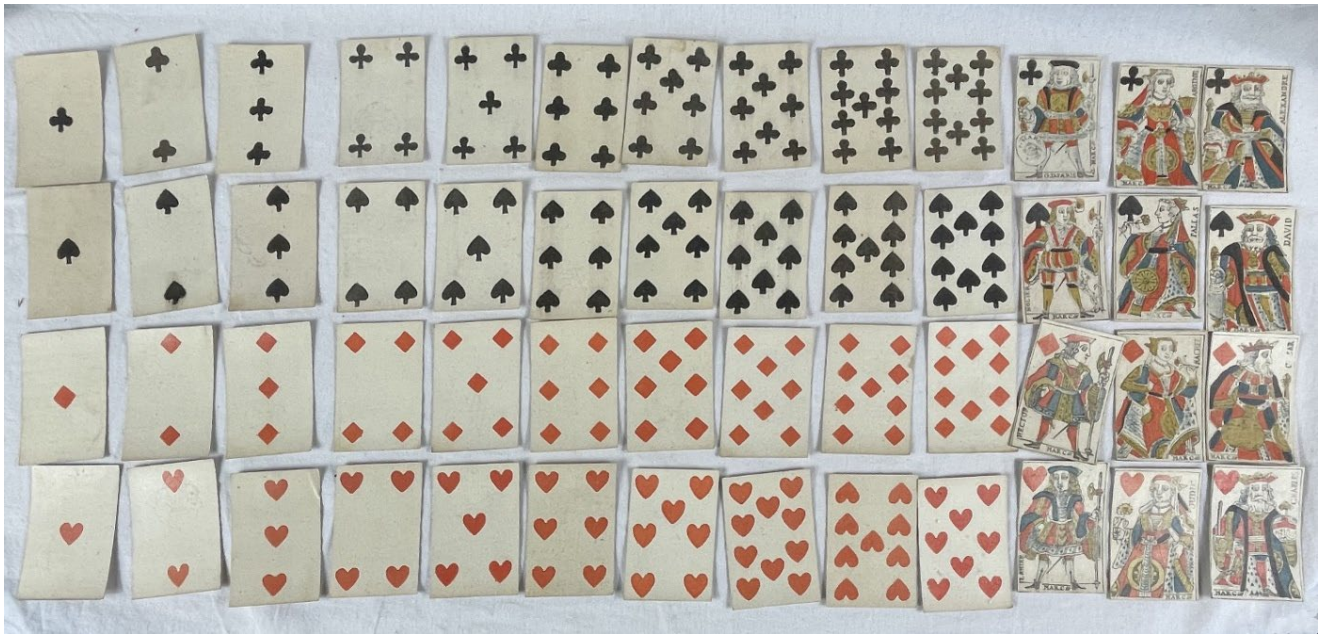
HEARTS: The King, Charles (as Charlemagne), carries a sword in his right hand and an orb bearing the cross of Lorraine in the other. The Queen is Judic (Judith). The Jack, Lahire, holds a halberd in his left hand.

DIAMONDS: The King, Cezar, is seen in profile. He holds a sceptre in his left hand and a shell-shaped ornament appears below his belt. The Queen is Rachel. The Jack is seen in profile and holds a halberd in his left hand.

The deck is hand coloured with the support of stencils, as it was usual for hand painting playing card deck in the past. The stencil is a thin sheet of pasteboard, parchment, or metal, in which outlines, and general forms of the figures are cut out, for the purpose of being stencilled on cardboard or paper.

By passing a brush charged with colour over the stencil, the colour enters the cut-out lines and imparts the figure to the material beneath. The pips, or common cards, require only one colour, either red or black, but the *têtes*, or *court cards*, require many colours.

THE PRESENT DECK, LIKE MOST PLAYING CARDS FROM THE 18TH-CENTURY, IT IS EXCEPTIONALLY RARE.





“Playing cards were invented in Imperial China, and specimens have been found dating back as early the ninth century, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Female players were some of the most frequent participants, and the first known book on cards, called Yezi Gexi (presumably written in the 860s) was originally written by a Tang era woman, subsequently undergoing additions by other Chinese scholars. By the eleventh century, playing cards could be found throughout the Asian continent. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), characters from novels such as the Water Margin were widely featured on the faces of playing cards.

Playing cards first entered Europe in the early fourteenth century, probably from Egypt, with suits (sets of cards with matching designs) very similar to the tarot suits of Swords, Staves, Cups and Coins (also known as disks or pentacles). The first documentary evidence of card playing' is a document written in Vitoria-Gasteiz (now Spain) in 1334, in which the Knights of the Band' (a Spanish military order







who wore a red sash across their torso) were categorically prohibited from playing cards.

Regarding France, in 1392, in the register of the Chambre des Comptes of Charles VI of France, there is an entry of the royal treasurer of moneys paid one Jacquemin Gringonneur, painter, for three games of cards 'in gold and diverse colours, ornamented with many devices, for the diversion of our lord, the King.' Seventeen of these strange old painted cards survive in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris.

In 1423 the Franciscan friar, Saint Bernard of Siena, in a famous sermon at Bologna, stated that playing cards were the invention of the devil. They increased rapidly in popularity after this statement. Other divines favoured the same theory, with similar consequences. A hundred and fifty years after St. Bernard's fiery outburst the Elizabethan puritan, John Northbrooke, in a treatise against gambling and theatregoing, published in 1576 or 1579, definitely asserted that playing cards were invented by the devil 'that he might the easier bring in Ydolatrie among men?

The earliest known playing cards in Europe seem to have been cards of the Italian variety, afterwards known as “Tarocchini'” or “Tarots.”

Moving across Europe it was possible to find three varieties of the four-suit pack: (1) The Italian and Spanish variety (almost identical); (2) the Germanic variety; (3) the French variety.

- ITALY AND SPAIN
  - CUPS. (Equivalent to our 'Hearts.")
  - SWORDS. (Equivalent to our 'Spades.)
  - MONEY- Denari in Italy; Oros, i.e. gold pieces, in Spain (Equivalent to our 'Diamonds'.)
  - BATONS or CLUBS. (Equivalent to our 'Clubs.")

- GERMANIC NATIONS
  - HEARTS.
  - ACORNS. (Perhaps equivalent to our 'Spades.")
  - BELLS, i.e., hawk-bells. (Perhaps equivalent to our
  - '"Diamonds.")
  - LEAVES. (Perhaps equivalent to our 'Clubs

- FRANCE
  - COEUR, a heart. (Our 'Hearts.)
  - PIQUE, a pike. (Our 'Spades.)
  - CARREAU, a paving tile. (Our 'Diamonds.)
  - TREFLE, a trefoil a clover-leaf. (Our 'Clubs.)



France quickly became the chief card-manufacturing nation, but the real stroke of genius that the French came up with was to divide the four suits into two red and two black, with simplified and clearer symbols. This meant that playing cards could be produced with stencils, a hundred times more quickly than using the traditional techniques of wood-cutting and engraving. With improved processes in manufacturing paper, and the development of better printing processes, including Gutenberg's printing press (1440), the slower and more costly traditional woodcut techniques previously done by hand were replaced with a much more efficient production. For sheer practical reasons, the Germans lost their earlier dominance in the playing card market, as the French decks and their suits spread all over Europe, giving us the designs as we know them today.



Throughout the 15th and 16th centuries the French cards, made in most of the chief towns of France, were the best in Europe, and during the 17th and 18th centuries the card-making trade--though greatly harassed by Government restrictions and exactions-continued to be of great importance. French cards were exported to England, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and most of the European countries[…]

One interesting feature of the French dominance of playing cards in this time is the attention given to court cards.

In the late 1500s French manufacturers began giving the court cards names from famous literary epics such as the Bible and other classics.

It is from this era that the custom developed of associating specific court cards with famous names, the more well-known and commonly accepted ones for the Kings being King David (Spades), Alexander the Great (Clubs), Charlemagne (Hearts), and Julius Caesar (Diamonds), representing the four empires of Jews, Greeks, Franks, and Romans.

Notable characters ascribed to the Queens include the Greek goddess Pallas Athena (Spades), Judith (Hearts), Jacob's wife Rachel (Diamonds), and Argine (Clubs). The Knaves were commonly designated as La Hire (Hearts), Charlemagne's knight Ogier (Spades), Hector the hero of Troy (Diamonds), and King Arthur's knight Lancelot (Clubs).

The common postures, clothing, and accessories that we expect in a modern deck of playing cards today find their roots in characters like these, but we cannot be certain how these details originated, since there was much diversity of clothing, weapons, and accessories depicted in the French decks of this time. But eventually standardisation began to happen, and this was accelerated in the 1700s when taxing on playing cards was introduced. With France divided into nine regions for this purpose, manufacturers within each region were ordered to use a standardised design unique to their region. But it was only when playing cards emigrated to England that a common design really began to dominate the playing card industry[…] "[GURNEY, *Op. cit.*]

Conditions: Perfectly preserved

References: W. Gurney Benham, *History of the Pack and Explanations of Its Many Secrets*, Read Books, 2019; Henry Rene D'Allemagne, *Antique Playing Cards: A Pictorial Treasury*, I:108-sq, 1996; Catherine Perry Hargrave, *A History of playing cards*, Dover publications, 2021; Henry Rene D'Allemagne, *Les cartes à jouer du XIV au XX siècle,* Paris : Librairie Hachette, 1906; The International Playing-Card Society, PATTERN SHEET 112.



HENRY RENE D'ALLEMAGNE, *Les cartes à jouer du XIV au XX siècle,*
Paris : Librairie Hachette, 1906, I, p. 113



BLUTEAUX DES MAITRES CARTIERS PARISIENS
DÉPOSÉS EN 1758 ET 1764
(ARCHIVES NATIONALES, G² 185)

Pierre Marc's printer device « *au Marc d'Or* »
HENRY RENE D'ALLEMAGNE, *Les cartes à jouer du XIV au XX siècle,*
Paris : Librairie Hachette, 1906, II, p. 84


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