

ORIGIN OF THE SWISS NATIONAL CARD-PLAY "JASS"

(In various library archived research papers the following is recorded)

Playing cards were invented in ancient China. They were found in China as early as the 9th century during the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The first reference to card games in world history dates from the 9th century, when the Collection of Miscellanea at Duyang, written by Tang Dynasty writer Su E, described Princess Tongchang (daughter of Emperor Yizong of Tang) playing the "leaf game" in 868 with members of the Wei clan (the family of the princess' husband).

The Song Dynasty (960-1279) scholar Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) asserted that playing cards and card games existed at least since the mid Tang Dynasty, and associated their invention with the simultaneous development of using sheets or pages instead of paper rolls as a writing medium. The first known book on cards called *Yezi Gexi* was allegedly written by a Tang era woman, and was commented on by Chinese writers of subsequent dynasties.

By the 11th century, playing cards could be found throughout the Asian continent. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), characters from popular novels such as the *Water Margin* were widely featured on the faces of playing cards.

Playing cards first entered Europe in the late 14th century, probably from Mamluk 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), and pentacles, and which are still used in traditional Italian, Spanish and Portuguese decks. The first documentary evidence is a ban on their use in 1367, Bern, Switzerland.

Their presence is attested in Catalonia in 1371. Wide use of playing cards in Europe can, with some certainty, be traced from 1377 onwards.

In the late 14th century, the use of playing cards spread rapidly throughout Europe. Documents mentioning cards date from 1371 in Spain, 1377 in Switzerland, and 1380 in many locations including Florence and Paris. A 1369 Paris ordinance (on gaming!?) does not mention cards, but its 1377 update does. In the account books of

Johanna, Duchess of Brabant and Wenceslaus I, Duke of Luxemburg, an entry dated May 14, 1379 reads: "Given to Monsieur and Madame four peters, two forms, value eight and a half moutons, wherewith to buy a pack of cards". In his book of accounts for 1392 or 1393, Charles or Charbot Poupart, treasurer of the household of Charles VI of France, records payment for the painting of three sets of cards.

In Switzerland, the national game is Jass. It is played with decks of 36 cards. West of the Brünig-Napf-Reuss line, a French-style 36-card deck is used, with numbers from 6 to 10, Jacks, Queens, Kings and Aces. The same kind of deck is used in Graubünden and in parts of Thurgau.

In Central Switzerland, Zürich, Schaffhausen and Eastern Switzerland, the prevalent deck consists of 36 playing cards with the following suits: Roses, Bells, Acorns and Shields (in German: Rosen, Schellen, Eicheln und Schilten). The ranks of the alternate deck, from low to high, are: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 ("Banner"), Unter (lower jack), Ober (higher jack), King and Ace.

In Germany suits may have different appearances. Many Eastern and Southern Germans prefer decks with Hearts, Bells, Leaves, and Acorns (for Hearts, Diamonds, Spades, and Clubs), as mentioned above. In the game Skat, East German players used the German deck, while players in Western Germany mainly used the French deck. After the reunification a compromise deck was created for official Skat tournaments, with French symbols but German colours (green Spades and yellow Diamonds).

There are of course in many countries in other parts of the world cards are now days played, and the cards of these decks are illustrated with a special picture series, usually on a theme with particular relation to the historical background of those countries.