

SOME FACTS ABOUT FACSIMILES

By Rod Starling

In my last article dealing with fortune telling cards, I wrote approvingly of facsimile decks and most of the decks featured, were in fact facsimiles. I thought a few more words on the subject along with some further examples might reinforce the point.

Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary defines the word facsimile as "an exact copy" and gives the word "reproduction" as a synonym. It also states *Reproduction implies an exact or close imitation of an existing thing.* The words *close imitation* have a practical application to facsimile decks because such decks often differ from the originals in some respect, usually in size and/or back design and there are often other differences as well. If imitation is the best form of flattery, owners of the original decks of which facsimiles have been made, should be proud of that fact and also pleased that the integrity of the originals has been protected by the differences just mentioned. I know that I would not be pleased if a facsimile of any of my original decks was ever produced as an exact copy in every detail as I believe that such a facsimile would have a very negative effect on the value of the original. That said, I still believe that there are many facsimiles that make nice additions to any collection and the following examples from my own collection will, I hope, make that point.

Most facsimiles are of European decks. This is not surprising when it is realized that (a) the oldest decks were those made in Europe and that (b) generally, European cards are much more ornate than those produced in America. Therefore, I shall, but for a few exceptions, limit the examples to facsimiles of European decks.

That first exception is a particular Pharo deck by Samuel Hart, c.1885, described in the Hochman Encyclopedia of American Playing Cards under reference number NY42. The Encyclopedia advises that in 1954 a reprint of that deck, and the original box, was made by the New Development Co. Fortunately, there were several differences to distinguish it from the original, the main one being that the Ace of Spades was printed with black ink whereas in the original deck it was printed in blue.

However, more recently there have been facsimiles of the original deck that have the Ace of Spades printed with blue ink, albeit of a brighter shade than that of the original, and issued in a copy of the original box that may or may not be exact. I have

such a facsimile in my collection. Currently, there are other facsimiles of this deck with a blue Ace of Spades but in an inexact copy of the box and with court cards that do appear to have the right coloring when compared with the originals.

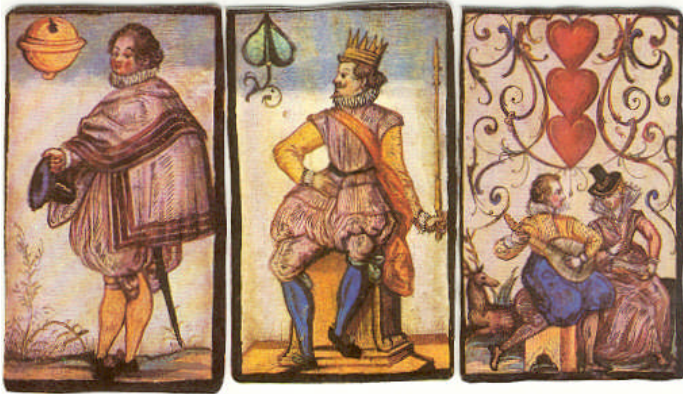
The second exception is the facsimile of the c1865 Andrew Dougherty Great Mogul Illuminated deck listed in Hochman as AD3. This facsimile was produced by U.S.Games, Inc. and over all it is not a bad copy although I think that the packaging of the deck in a very nice telescoping box is a little misleading. This box features a display card of the King of Hearts and simulates, with a "hot gold foil stamping" process, those parts of the picture that on the original card were done with gold leaf. This process actually produces a very good simulation of gold leaf.

However in the facsimile deck itself, that process was not used. Rather, it has been produced with gold colored ink that does not, in my opinion, give anywhere near the same effect as either the original gold leaf or the "hot gold foil stamping process". I cannot understand why the gold foil process was not used throughout the deck as it would have been so much better. Also, the colors on the court cards appear to be a little off when compared to the original and the Ace of Spades is done in sepia color whereas in the original deck the Ace is a gray tone.

Of course, I am comparing the facsimile with my own original deck but, as is disclosed by extra cards included with the facsimile, it was taken from an original deck owned by Bob and Rhonda Hawes and it may be that the colors on their original differ in tone from mine. The facsimile deck is 1/16th of an inch smaller all around than the original and the stock is plastic coated. It also has rounded instead of square corners. As I said, over all, it is not a bad copy but there is certainly no fear that it will ever be mistaken as an original.

The first European facsimile deck that I present is my favorite. The deck is known as "Das Kupferes-tichspiel des I.M.F. von 1617" which I think translates to *The Copper Engraved Game of I.M.F. from 1617.* The facsimile of this deck was issued in 1979 by *Editions Leipzig* as a limited numbered edition of 999 copies. It includes a very informative 56-page booklet written in German/English and the set of cards and booklet are very handsomely boxed. This deck has 48 German-suited cards, measuring roughly 3¾ x 2¼ inches and made on hard pasteboard. The rank of the cards in each suit is deuce through ten, plus Unter, Ober and Konig.

All of the pip cards have characters or vignettes of some sort on them and, as the booklet informs us, all of the pictures on the face cards and pip cards were first engraved and then hand-colored.



Now, this facsimile comes close to violating the rule against being too similar to the original and here is why: The original deck is one of a kind and was made as a collectible, not as a deck to be played with. We know this to be the case because each card has a different floral back design which makes the deck useless for play because the identity of each card could easily be identifiable by its individual back design. The back designs were not engraved but were painted free hand. Necessarily, the facsimile had to include those floral back designs as such a vital feature of the deck could not very well be omitted.

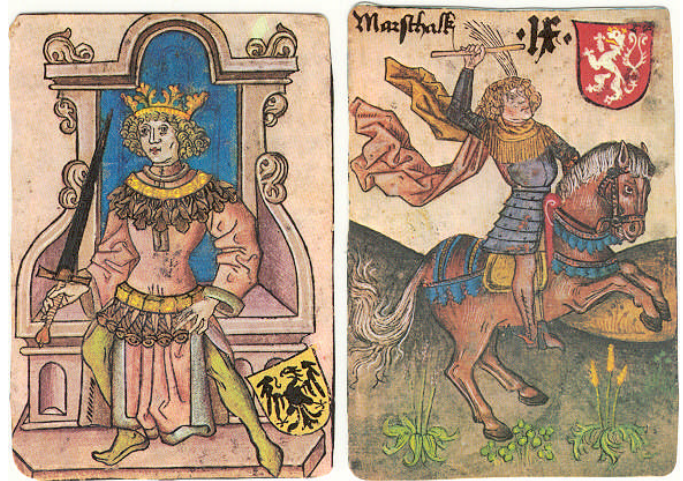
Also, according to the booklet, the size of the original deck is just about the same as the facsimile and furthermore, the cards of the original deck have slightly irregular edges and the facsimile has been die-cut in exact replication thereof. Of course, I doubt that anyone would actually mistake a 1979 facsimile for a hand-engraved and hand-colored deck of 1617. Nevertheless, the facsimile is wonderful in its own right and is justifiably my favorite.

The next European facsimile that I want to discuss is a mid fifteenth century deck that is believed to have been produced in either Germany or Austria. It is called *Hofamterspiel*, a German term that refers to the fact that all the cards picture members of a typical princely court during the late Middle Ages.

There are 48 cards in the deck and the four suits are in the form of Coats of Arms for the countries Germany, Bohemia, Hungary and France. In each suit there are twelve named cards, ten of which are numbered with Roman Numerals, plus a King and a Queen. The number on the card corresponds to the rank that the pictured character held in the household, for example the number one card pic-

tures the fool, or Jester, as the lowest rank. The other characters include a barber, a cook, a doctor, a priest, all the way up to the King and Queen.

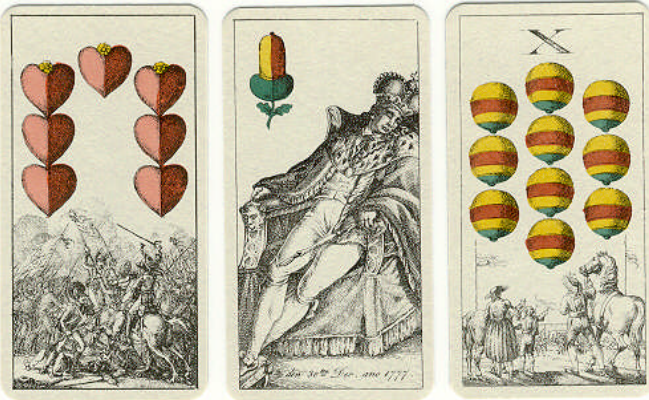
In 1976, Piatnik of Austria issued this as a facsimile deck in an attractive boxed, limited edition of 1000 numbered copies together with a very scholarly 137 page German/English book that provides historical details concerning the deck as well as other decks of the period (the English section is only 56 pages.) This facsimile is ideal for the serious collector but even the casual collector will appreciate these very nice cards. They measure approximately 5½ x 4¾ inches and are made on heavy stock to simulate the original pasteboard. As I mentioned before, here again is a facsimile edition that comes with valuable historical information that would not be readily available even if one had the good fortune to come across an original of the deck.



Here is another of my favorites. I am not able to provide a great deal of information about this deck because although the facsimile was issued with two booklets, they are both in German. Nevertheless, with the help of my German/English dictionary, here is what I have been able to make out. The deck is named *Teutschen Spielkarten fur das Bayrische Volk*. I could not find that first word in my German/English dictionary but in English, the word *Teuton* means *German*. I therefore think that the title of the deck translates to *German Playing Cards for the Bavarian Folk*.

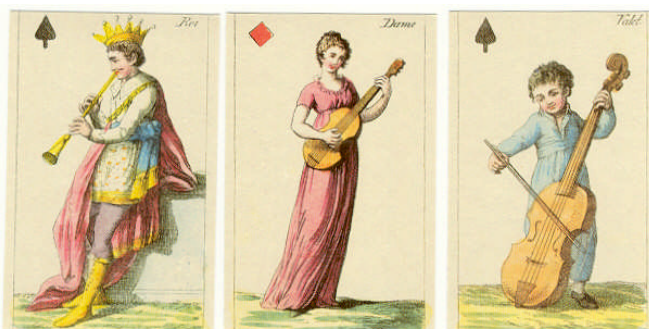
The original deck was made in 1819, has 36 cards and is German suited and appears to have been issued to commemorate 800 years of the House of Wittelsbach. The facsimile deck was issued in 1980 by F.X. Schmid of Munich in a limited, numbered edition of 2000 copies. The cards measure 4x2¼ inches. The pip cards depict wars, battles and military characters that participated in them.

The court characters and scenes in each suit are identified respectively on the number six spot card in each suit. The cards have very nice engravings and have reproduced very well. However, in the original deck, as shown in *Fournier: Germany #67*, all the cards are colored whereas in the facsimile, only the suit symbols are colored whereas in the facsimile, however the engravings are so good in the facsimile edition that it is worthy of any collection.



With respect to the two booklets issued with the facsimile, one is quite small and appears to be a copy of the one issued with the original deck. It is printed in old German script and has 39 pages. The other booklet is larger and was produced for the facsimile edition. It is printed in German, regular type, and describes every card in the deck, possibly in greater detail than the original booklet.

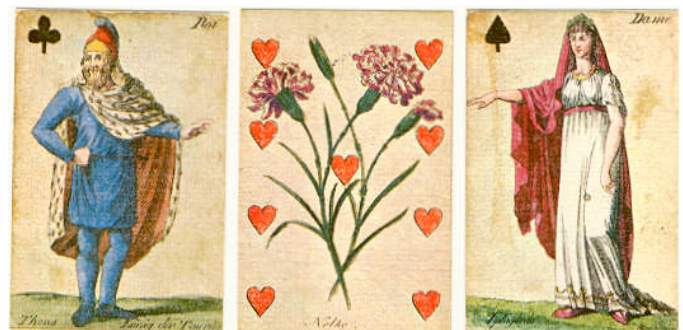
In 1806, Johann Hieronymus Loschenkohl, a Viennese engraver, produced a copper-engraved, hand-colored deck of *Musical Playing Cards*. There is only one set known to exist and it is housed in the Historical Museum of the City of Vienna. In 1981, Piatnik issued a numbered facsimile edition of the deck, nicely boxed with a German/English booklet of 107 pages, 47 of which constitute the English section. There are 52 French suited cards measuring approximately 4x2½ inches. The suit signs of the spot cards are overlaid on sheets of music, some of which are songs and some of which, when properly laid out, are actual pieces by Mozart.



The court cards are absolutely delightful. Each King is pictured in theatrical clothing playing a musical instrument and the Queens are pictured variously as a pianist, a singer, a dancer and a guitar player. The Valets are shown as little boys, one playing a small double bass, one a drum, one a tambourine and one the triangle. All of the court cards are delicately colored, almost, I would say, in pastel. The booklet provides wonderful historic details regarding the maker and the development of the deck, all of which we would never know but for this facsimile.

In 1806 J.H.Loschenkohl produced a second copper-engraved deck, *Botanisches Kartenspiel* (Botanical Playing Cards). The original of this deck as well as the *Musical Playing Cards*, were produced shortly before Loschenkohl's death. In regard to this particular Botanical deck, legal action was taken against Loschenkohl by other Viennese card makers that resulted in an injunction by the court against its publication. As a result, only three copies of this deck are known to exist! Two are uncolored and one is colored but missing six cards.

In 1978, Piatnik issued a nicely boxed, numbered facsimile edition of the deck with a 129-page German/English book. It was produced by permission of the Austrian Museum of Applied Art, (which holds the colored deck missing the six cards), and the Cincinnati Art Museum who permitted reproduction of those six missing cards from its uncolored deck thus completing the facsimile edition. The book carries the number of the deck and describes the historical setting for its creation. It also gives biographical details of the artist and identifies various elements of the deck. Each pip card is graced with a delicate floral design and the court cards are full figure, named, historical characters.



Attributing the complete uncolored deck to the Cincinnati Art Museum was not entirely accurate. In point of fact, that deck is part of the collection of the United States Playing Card Company but at the time the facsimile deck was produced the collection was on loan to the museum. The deck is docu-

mented as being in the collection of the USPC in the excellent book, *A History of Playing Cards* by Catherine Perry Hargrave. (*Ed's. note; this is one all card collectors should probably own, either in paperback or in the original hardback which contains stunning color plates*). In the early 1980's, USPC took back this collection and put it on display in its own museum which it established on its own premises. Regrettably, the museum has been recently closed and as far as I can tell, the collection languishes untended and unhonored. What a pity.

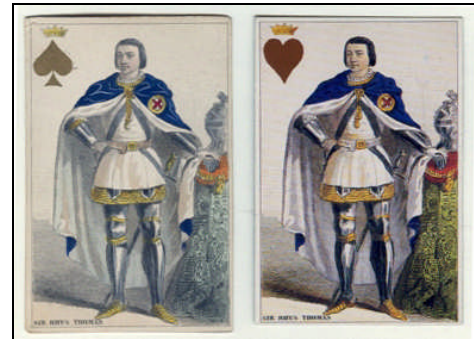
I have too many other facsimile decks to cover in this article but there is one more that is of significant importance which should not be overlooked. The original deck is known by two names, to wit: *Cartes Parisienne* and *Jeu de Historique*. The original deck was produced c1840 by O. Gilbert, Paris, France. It is an engraved, hand-colored deck that features historical characters as the court cards. Of course, it is French suited but the Spades and Club suit symbols are done in yellow-gold tone and the Heart and Diamond suits are done in pink-gold tone. The deck has gold edges and it is one of a series of wonderful French costume decks produced around the same period.



The December 2006 issue of *Clear the Decks* has an article by our esteemed editor, Judy Dawson, featuring four other specimens of decks from this period which were viewable in full color on the club's website. These original decks are rare and valuable. It was therefore with some consternation

that I found a facsimile of *Jeu de Historique* that was published by the Stichting Nederlands Kansspelmuseum although I do not know when.

This facsimile is the same size as the original, has gold edges and the yellow-gold and pink-gold suit symbols have been very closely replicated. The cards also have plain blue backs. All of the original decks of this sort that I have seen have had either plain blue, white or pink backs. Thankfully, I have an original of the deck in my collection so that by careful comparison I was able to distinguish the original from the copy.



To add to the confusion of distinguishing original from facsimile, two or more specimens of a given original deck can be found wherein the suit symbols are ascribed to different court cards. That is to say that in one deck a particular court card will be in a certain suit while in another specimen of the same deck the same court card will appear in a different suit. Furthermore, the coloring of the court cards differs from deck to deck even though the underlying engraving is identical. This is simply because the decks were hand colored, not mass-produced, so the artist did not follow a strict system in coloring the cards or in affixing the suit symbols. Differences of this sort are the hallmark of hand made objects.

To sum up - in my opinion facsimile decks deserve a place in collections. They allow us to see what certain old and rare decks looked like and sometimes, as we have seen, even decks of which only one specimen exists. The alternative would entail visits to museums in various countries at great expense. Add to this the fact that the facsimiles are usually limited, numbered editions and their status of respectability is further enhanced. They also usually include booklets that provide very interesting information.

The only objection that I have is to facsimiles that are exact copies in every visual respect. I say visual because while modern facsimiles do not duplicate the old paper and ink used in producing the

original decks, the average collector, not being readily able to test such factors but having to rely solely on the visual aspect, could be easily deceived should a facsimile ever be passed off as an original, intentionally or otherwise. Fortunately, as I have already noted, with the exception of the French Costume deck discussed above, all of the facsimile decks that I have seen differ in some significant respect from the originals.

One last point - usually facsimiles are copies of rare or otherwise interesting decks. It would hardly seem worthwhile to go to the expense of reproducing a deck that is neither rare nor interesting. Nevertheless, as Judy, pointed out in her article *Antique Shows and Ebay* in the June, 2007 issue of *Clear the Decks*, she almost, but for the honesty of the eBay dealer, found herself out \$215.00 for the purchase of a deck that did not seem a likely candidate for reproduction. So, as Judy warned, beware of facsimiles that would seem likely to be originals simply because they do not appear to be the sort of deck that would merit reproduction.

The idea of reproducing run of the mill decks reminds me of the rationale behind counterfeiters of currency who print bogus dollar bills when they could just as easily print bogus \$100.00 bills. They correctly reason that when passing off the bogus money, the recipients do not look as closely at dollar bills as they would at \$100.00 bills. Similarly, a card collector coming across a deck that appears to be rare will scrutinize it to see if it is genuine but when finding a deck that is interesting but not especially old or rare, may part with more money than it is worth if it turns out to be a facsimile that did not invite such scrutiny. Fortunately, I have found most facsimiles are identified as such but again, beware.



I was about to close at this point but three incidents just recently occurred on eBay merit attention. The first incident involved the auction of a deck by the English card maker, I. Hardy dating from the reign of King George 111 who reigned from 1760 to 1820. The deck was offered in what was described

as the original wrapper and the starting bid was \$200.00. As it happens, I own five facsimile copies of this deck which was produced for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Williamsburg, Virginia. I purchased those decks in 1979 for \$3.25 each and understand that the decks are still being made today although I think the cost is now about \$9.00.

Having seen the facsimile on eBay many times before, I seriously doubted that the eBay offering was for an original deck. I contacted the seller, provided him with scans of my facsimile, advised him of the production of such facsimiles to this day by Colonial Williamsburg and asked him if he could document the authenticity of his deck. He promptly replied that he had thought that his deck was too good to be true and withdrew it from eBay.

The second incident involved the same deck but this time it was offered framed and, of course, absent the wrapper. In the offering, the seller claimed that he had a letter from the English Playing Card Society authenticating the deck as original. I contacted the seller and asked him for the name of the person at the Society who authenticated the deck. He told me it was the President of the Society and gave me his name. I found it difficult to believe that a deck framed under glass could be properly evaluated so I contacted the Society, gave them the eBay item number and asked for comments. I received a reply from the Society thanking me for my diligence, denying that any such letter had ever been written and informing me that eBay would be contacted and advised that the offering was fraudulent. The offering was withdrawn the next day.



The third incident involved an offering on eBay of just the wrapper of the deck, not the deck itself and the starting bid was \$49.00. In fact, the seller listed two such wrappers under two separate item numbers. This time around, I could not believe that anyone would fall for such an offering, particularly when two such wrappers were being offered, so I took no action. Of course, I could not actually

prove whether or not the seller actually had original wrappers anyway. Regretfully, there was one bidder for the first listing and I did not have the heart to see if anyone bid on the other listing.

These incidents serve to show what can happen when a facsimile deck is too close to the original. The I. Hardy deck is really something to see. Not only are the cards exact replicas, having square corners and looking like they were colored by stencil, but the wrapper is also an exact replica. It carries the original wording required by the then existing law in regard to taxation and actually has two embossed tax stamps on it. Finally, the deck is tied with a string as was also required by law. Nowhere does it indicate that it is a facsimile and that, as can be seen, can cause problems.

I hope that this information is helpful and that as a collector you will not hesitate to explore the possibilities offered by some of the facsimile decks that have been produced. Actually, the better ones that I mentioned having been issued in limited, numbered editions are now quite hard to come by and have taken on a collectable value in their own right.

Editor's Note; This subject is one we would like to continually investigate and I would appreciate any information from members who might have or know of a deck that has been reproduced. We have already done three articles on reproductions or facsimiles which include the fabulous Army and Navy decks produced by USPC that when taken from their presentation boxes are very difficult to distinguish from the originals. I feel it is important to keep our members informed of as many of these decks as possible as none of us want to make mistakes, costly or otherwise.

The one I personally find particular frightening is the "Jeu de Historique" published by the Stichting Nederlands Kansspelmuseum as when I queried Rod about the differences he repeated that it is very hard to tell the facsimile from the original. I recently bought a costume deck on ebay and breathed a sigh of relief when I realized it was not this one. When you buy anything in an auction where you can not feel the texture of the paper or see the colorings, which in this case are hand-applied, it is wise to err on the cautious side. We should constantly remind ourselves to beware of imitations, it is easy to be fooled. Caveat emptor!

I applaud Rod for his efforts in keeping these items from being misrepresented on eBay and hope other members might be vigilant as well.