



52 woodblock print playing cards with original hand-colour, with stencilled colour inscription to versos.

THE PARIS PLAYING CARDS, WITH GRAMMATICAL GAME

French Deck “Au portrait de Paris”

Author

MARC, P[ierre]

Publication date

[c1775].

Publisher

P[ierre] Marc,

Publication place

Paris,

Physical description

52 woodblock print playing cards with original hand-colour, with stencilled colour inscription to versos.

Dimensions

83 by 55mm (3.25 by 2.25 inches).

Notes

The Maker

The Jack of Clubs bears the imprint of the manufacturer “P. Marc” along with “G.D. Paris”, while the rest of the court cards have only “Marc” at the foot of the full-length illustration. The Jack of Clubs

also shows his printing device, suitably the 'Marc d'Or', which was registered in the 1770s.

The Cards

This rare deck of pre-Revolution French playing cards follows the standard design conceived in Paris during the seventeenth century, with plain pip cards whose value is represented by the number of suit symbols, and court cards representing figures from history, legend and scripture:

Clubs - Alexander, Argine, Marc

Diamonds - Caesar, Rachel, Hector

Hearts - Charlemagne, Judith, La Hire

Spades - David, Pallas, Hogier

Appropriately, the Marc found on the Jack of Clubs in the original Paris design here doubles as a reference to the card-maker. 'Argine' on the Queen of Clubs is simply an anagram of the Latin word 'regina', meaning 'queen'. Hogier on the Jack of Spades is a reference to Holger the Dane, first mentioned in the 'Chanson de Roland' as a Danist antagonist of Charlemagne's, while La Hire on the Jack of Hearts is the nickname of the French military commander, Étienne de Vignolles, Sieur de Montmorillon, Chatelain de Longueville, whose full name and title may not have fit on the card!

The Revolution was a period of fluctuation after the banning of representing royal emblems and all reminders of the monarchy. On occasion, playing cards from this era were reinvented towards educational purposes through stencilling on the versos with letters, phonemics, denotations, numbers, and punctuation marks.

The versos of these particular cards show parts of, or full, words in French and Latin that seem to have been designed to form a separate game concerning grammar and spelling. Abbreviations on some cards, such as "v[erbe] neut[re]" and "pr[onom] dém[onstratif]" indicate that the players, probably children, were required to match up the Latin vocabulary with the corresponding grammatical form.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £3200

Inventory reference: 20734