

Recommended name:

Paris pattern

Alternative name: Portrait de Paris.

History

The Paris is one of seven regional patterns that flourished in France before 1810. Since Paris had a special weight in the Kingdom, the pattern that was set there soon spread to nearby regions, like Normandy, Brittany, Champagne, the Loire Valley, and later Alsace and the North.

The oldest example of the Paris pattern dates back to *ca* 1510, and is housed in the Musée français de la Carte à jouer at Issy-les-Moulineaux. It is the ‘Guymier sheet’. The design has remained much the same, but around 1600 the size of the cards was reduced from ‘large’ (100x70 mm) to ‘narrow’ (85x55 mm). Depaulis has dubbed this pre-1700 pattern the ‘Hector de Troyes’ pattern. Pre-1700 examples of the Paris pattern are extremely rare.

A great change occurred in 1701, when a new tax was imposed on playing cards. In order to prevent frauds the old printing blocks had to be destroyed, and the cardmakers were forced to print their cards from new blocks provided by the tax concession-holders (‘farmers’). Although the new blocks followed the traditional designs, many changes were introduced to help distinguish the ‘old’ and ‘new’ patterns.

However, in some provinces, like Normandy, the northern part of France and Alsace, the old, pre-1700 pattern survived, with few modifications. This gave rise to the so-called ‘Provincial Variant’ (PV). The taxation on playing cards ended in 1719, but was renewed in 1745 in much the same way as previously. But times had changed, and the enormous demand for playing cards were a shock for the system, for the woodblocks were rapidly out of order. From 1746 on new printing blocks made of brass were introduced, and this contributed to simplify and stiffen the court cards. Normandy and the Northern provinces were now aligned on Paris, while Alsace kept the old pre-1700 design.

This situation did not change until the Revolution, and neither was it different afterward. Although the 1745 system had been abolished in 1791, cardmakers continued to produce the same pattern. From 1793 to 1795 the Revolutionary government banned crowns, fleurs-de-lis and sceptres, but once the terrible

Year II Terror was over, crowns and sceptres were discretely re-introduced. It is not before 1810 that the old regional patterns were given up. No surprise if the new French official pattern (‘portrait français officiel’) which was issued in 1813 was based on the old Paris pattern.

Characteristic features

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.

Composition

52 cards, King, Queen, Jack, Ace to 10. Or 32 cards, King, Queen, Jack, Ace, 7 to 10 (Piquet packs).

Some Makers

All Paris and Rouen cardmakers in the 17th and 18th centuries made Paris-pattern cards. Those of Troyes, Lille, Caen, Rennes, Orléans, Angers, Nantes, and later Poitiers, Nancy and Épinal, also made Paris-pattern cards. Before 1745, Rouen and Strasbourg used the PV1 pattern, which Strasbourg cardmakers made until very late in the 18th century.

Some references

D'Allemagne, H.-R: *Les cartes à jouer du XIVe au XXe siècle*, 2 vols., Paris 1906; Berry, John: The history of the Paris pattern, *The Playing-Card*, XIII, 1984, pp. 1-23; Depaulis, Thierry: Les Guymier, cartiers parisiens du XVIe siècle, *Nouvelles de l'Estampe*, no. 114, Dec. 1990, pp.

4-23; Seguin, Jean-Pierre: *Les cartes à jouer au portrait de Paris de 1701 à 1778*, Paris 1989; Depaulis, Thierry: *Les cartes à jouer au portrait de Paris avant 1701*, Paris 1991; Id.: Essai de généalogie du portrait de Paris, *The Playing-Card*, XXIII, 1995, pp. 62-74.

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Pierre Marc, Paris, ca 1760, DSM Inv.Nr.1988-166.