



Playing Cards of the World: A Collector's Guide

Kathleen Wowk

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A fascinating and increasingly popular field for the collector is to be found in playing cards. Their history in Europe dates back 600 years, when it seems they had their origin in Italy. Such was their appeal then they quickly spread and were manufactured throughout much of Europe, including Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Russia and Great Britain. The story of their arrival in America is particularly interesting as they came firstly via the Spanish sailors and later via the colonies of France and England. One of the principal points brought out in the author's account is the great diversity found in playing cards. They reflect the traditions of many countries and vary greatly in style, size, numbers, shape, artistry, colour and usage. In addition to the standard packs used for gaming, there are a host of non-standard packs which usually have a secondary purpose such as to educate or to publish political or religious propaganda. The chapter on tarot cards is of special interest. The origin of these cards is obscure and because of their hidden meanings they are sometimes referred to as the 'magical tarot' cards. Thematic ideas for a collection are discussed as well as the preservation and presentation of packs. The author additionally gives valuable hints about where to obtain packs, collector's societies to join and the various printing techniques used for playing cards. There is also an extensive bibliography, and over 290 playing cards are illustrated, including 123 in full colour. Colourful and pictorial, playing cards present a kaleidoscope of artistry and a study of history in minuscule. In this one volume, the enthusiastic collector will find all the information they need to know.

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