



## ARCHIVO DE LA CORONA DE ARAGÓN ARXIU DE LA CORONA D'ARAGÓ

### *Playing cards at the ACA. A remarkable collection*

In many a historical archive, every now and then a playing card is found (more often, just a fragment of a playing card), which was used to reinforce the original binding of a volume. The Archive of the Crown of Aragon is blessed with a goldmine in the bindings of the volumes of the *Mestre Racional*, more exactly in the 16th-century books of the *Procuració Reial dels Comtats del Rosselló i la Cerdanya*.

Since these bindings are contemporary, and most likely a little earlier, to the use of the volumes, we have an ante quam date for the manufacture of these cards. A dating tool of this level of precision is extremely uncommon in the study of playing cards. It allows us to know, for instance, that some of the playing cards found in the ACA were produced prior to 1514. There are not many playing cards of such confirmed antiquity anywhere in the world.

However, what makes this collection remarkable is not so much its potential value for research as it is the uniqueness of some of the found items.



*ACA, COLECCIONES, CURIOSOS, NAIPES, 014*

The Moorish ace of clubs (*ACA, Colecciones, Curiosos Naipes, 014*) is one of the exceptionally unusual witnesses that allow us to reconstruct the history of the establishment of the playing card suits from its Arab origin. The shape of this club is still significantly different from the one that later developed on the Iberian and Italian peninsulas.

Likewise, the lower fragment of a valet of swords with the mark of the maker "H PAUMIER" (*ACA, Colecciones, Curiosos Naipes, 0026*), as well as the upper fragment of a four of coins with his initials (*ACA, Colecciones, Curiosos Naipes, 0024*), are the first positively identified cards by this Thiers-based playing card maker, famous for having been mentioned in the Journal of Montaigne's Travels.



*ACA, COLECCIONES, CURIOSOS, NAIPES, 024 and 026*

On the other hand, we should not be surprised by the French origin of some of these cards, as most of them were discovered in volumes that were bound in Roussillon or Cerdanya. Not only do we have in our collection cards from unequivocally French decks, but, among those with Spanish suits, the majority belong to the model known to experts as "Toulouse-Girona." This model, named after the cities where the first two cards were identified, is one of the oldest known, although few instances have been found. At the time of writing, we can say that the majority of known examples of this model, at least those produced during the 16th century, are in the ACA.



ACA, COLECCIONES, CURIOSOS, NAIPES, 022 and 031

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3. (1916) Miquel i Planas, Ramón. "El joc de naibs a Catalunya" en *Bibliofilia, Recull d'estudis, observacions, comentaris i notícies sobre llibres en general y sobre qüestions de llengua y literatura catalanes en particular*. Barcelona : Miquel-Rius,págs. 181-207
4. (1886) Brunet i Bellet, Joseph.*Lo joch de naibs, naips, o cartas. Passatemps en Caldetas durant lo colera de 1885*. Barcelona: Imprenta "La Renaixensa"

