

The Tarock of the Skat Inventors

Part I: Grosstarock Redefined

A discussion on the IPCS forum was initiated by me under the title of this series of articles. The posting was motivated by a new found document which contains previously unrecorded rules of German classical Tarock during its heyday. The posting triggered a lot of additional comments, as was remarked by Peter Endebrock in an earlier number of *The Playing Card*.

Further couch potato research through the internet has revealed a lot of additional information on the Tarock and card playing culture in Germany around 1800.

The series has three parts: After the presentation of the document found, this first part will deal with Grosstarock. It turns out that that the split into Classical Tarock and Grosstarock, which goes back to Dummett's *Game of Tarot* is no longer tenable. Furthermore, contrary to our previous understanding of Grosstarock as a multi-purpose game, the ultimo feature (to win the last trick with a particular card) was always the main attraction of the game.

In part II we will look at the popular type of Tarock in Central Germany and the origin of Skat. Previously, it was thought that the game of Tarock was not a major influence for Skat, despite giving it its name. Once we look more closely into the card playing culture of the Saxonian petty states, which include Weimar and Altenburg, and compare the conceptual game elements ("ludemes") of the most popular form of Tarock, Tarock Hombre, with Skat, we find that this argument must be reversed.

Finally, while tracing the history of Tarock in Germany after 1800 in part III, we will look into the influential *Berliner Spielalmanach* series of rules books to find a copyright case in the early 19th century and meet rather illustrious characters.

1 The document

The title is *Taschenbuch der Freude und der ernstern Unterhaltung* (Pocket book of joy and more serious entertainment). There is no author and no date, but a publisher and printer, and a place: Wilhelm Webel of Zeitz, Germany.¹ Wilhelm Webel (b. 1759, d. 1830) founded his small bookshop, printing, and publishing

¹ The document appears in *Digitale Sammlung der Bayerischen Landesbibliothek* and Royal Library of the Netherlands. Library catalogs list copies of a second "changed and enlarged" edition at Anna-Amalia-Bibliothek, Weimar, which gives c. 1807 as the date, and Universitätsbibliothek Augsburg. References cited more than once are in the bibliography. References tagged with "@" can be found via internet search; most of the times I give a search hint.

business in 1798 and handed it over to his nephew around 1815 after trouble with Prussian censorship.² Zeitz was one of the centers of Stift Naumburg-Zeitz, which came to Prussia with the Viennese Congress 1815. Relevant in the Skat context: Zeitz is located just 5½ *Wegstunden* west of Altenburg.³ Since Skat is first recorded in 1813 in Altenburg by a member of the *Bromme'sche Gesellschaft*, we are right at the place and the time when that game was invented.

The work is composed of two independently numbered parts. The first or “joy” part has 77 pages and is concerned with party games (*Gesellschaftsspiele*), some of which are card games. Part two, about “more serious entertainment”, runs to page number 104 and is entitled “Taroc, L’Hombre, Whist”. It also contains rules for *Amüsette* (a Rouge et Noir style gambling game) and Chess. Of the latter two, only rules are given, whereas the first three also have advice on play. 42 pages are devoted to Taroc, 27 to L’Hombre, 16 to Whist. It was clearly Tarock which the author was most concerned with.⁴

The text has all the quality of being original, not copied from other accounts, though maybe with some knowledge of them: There are some rule variants, procedures, and terminology not previously recorded, the author sometimes expresses strong opinions about particular rules and strategies. The presentation has a straightforward no-nonsense attitude. We are presented with the rules and strategy, no alternative terminology, no allusions on alleged origins of the games and suchlike which we find in other accounts. Also, the author uses first person language (“*ich*”) when stating his opinions instead of the more usual third (“*man*”) or other means of diverting from authorship. It is clear that he knew what he was writing about from first-hand experience at least of Taroc, L’Hombre, and Whist.⁵

The *Taschenbuch* presents three types of Tarock: “*das eigentliche Taroc*” (Tarock proper which is classical Grosstarock); “*Taroc unter Zweien*” (Tarock for two); and “*Taroc L’Hombre*” (I will use Tarock Hombre as the generic English term). The presentation is integral, there are back and forth references and the same terminology is used throughout. The *Taschenbuch* devotes 11 pages to *eigentliches Taroc*, but this includes the general outline of the games and generic advice on the play of important cards such as the Fool or Pagat. *Taroc unter*

² “Webel, Wilhelm”, in: Schmidt, *Deutsche Buchhändler*.

³ Both about 9 *Wegstunden* south of Leipzig. Using the unit of distance on Saxon post milestones = league, literally walking hour, 4½ kilometers or 2¾ statute miles. Quite a few of these milestones can still be seen in the area.

⁴ I shall use the standard spelling with “ck” for the games played in Germany unless specifically referring to game rules of particular sources. That spelling was already used by Adelung so it is not anachronistic. Page references to the *Taschenbuch* are to part two.

⁵ This was corroborated on the forum for Taroc by John McLeod: “He definitely knew and played the games, and the advice is pretty good. It’s interesting to see how he gives different advice appropriate to the different variants of the game.”

Zweien gets less than two pages. The entire remaining text (29 pages) is concerned with rules and strategy of *Taroc L'Hombre*. This will be important when reassessing the role of Tarock in the history of Skat.

The terminology is the usual mixture of German and French of the age, generally in line with other texts on Tarock as presented by Michael Dummett and John McLeod in the chapters 3, 4, and 7 of their *History*. There are minor differences, perhaps most interesting the Fool being called "Sciü" without the characteristic final "s" sound which we find in all other texts and present day accounts that I know ("Sküs", "Stiess", etc.).

2 The Grosstarock of the *Taschenbuch*

The author of the *Taschenbuch* likes to think that older games were simpler – which, we know, is not true – and advances from older = simpler modes of the game to more recent = more complex ones.

The basic rules of *eigentliches Taroc* are those of standard three-player Tarock without complications.⁶ The full French-suited 78 card pack is used. In the suits the cards rank king, queen, knight ("Caval"), jack, followed by ten down to ace in black but ace down to ten in red. The trumps ("Tarocs") rank XXI down to I ("Pagat").⁷ All play for themselves, players are dealt 25 cards each in fives, the extra three go to the dealer who discards three from his hand of 28, this is called "Scat legen". The rules for the discard vary, the author prefers that kings, trumps and the Fool should not be discarded unless the player can clear his hand of trumps entirely in which case it is legal to discard the Pagat. The author is quite strict in insisting that the Fool should not be regarded as a trump. Then follows a round of declarations of card combinations in hand. After that the cards are played out: Eldest leads to the first trick, players must follow suit if possible, otherwise play trump if they can. The highest trump, or, if none played, the highest card of the suit led wins the trick and the winner leads to the next. The Fool serves as an excuse: it may be played instead of obeying the usual rules of trick play. If the Fool is led to a trick the next card determines the suit the third has to follow. The Fool is normally taken back and counts for its owner, who gives a card from their tricks won in exchange. But if played to the last three tricks the Fool is taken by the winner of that trick. Cards are then counted in threes,⁸ the effect being the same as if counting one point for each group of three cards plus for Pagat, Fool, XXI and each king 4, queen 3, caval 2, jack 1. Each player pays or receives the difference to the average, 26.

The *Taschenbuch* presents three stages of the game which differ in their additional scoring features.⁹

⁶ *History*, ch. 2.

⁷ There is no special name for trump XXI.

⁸ See *History*, ch. 2, or "Counting card points in Tarot games" @ John McLeod's *Card Game Rules*.

⁹ The *Taschenbuch* also discusses many variations in details which I have left out.

Variant a) “*Das alte ursprüngliche Taroc*” (the old original Tarock) has the following declarations: ten or more trumps, three or more matadors (at least the principal matadors – Pagat, XXI, Fool – which may be followed by an unbroken sequence of trumps from XX down), a whole cavalry (all four court cards of a suit), half a cavalry (three courts of a suit and the Fool), full kings (all four kings). What is missing from the “original” rules is a half kings declaration (three kings and the Fool) which we know was already present in the earliest German rules of Tarock.¹⁰ During trick play owners of the Pagat pay 5 if they lose the card in a trick before the last, or 10 if in the last, and win the same amount if they win the trick with that card. The higher score for the Pagat in the last trick is the *Pagat ultimo* feature.

Variant b) is “*Taroc mit allen Honneurs*” (with all honors). Here “*scüsierte*” (excused) kings, queens, cavals, and jacks are introduced (three of a kind and the Fool). Strangely, the author omits full queens, cavals, and jacks (four of a kind) – this is probably an oversight. Up to now the first known record of sets of queens, cavals, and jacks was from 1820.¹¹ Matadors may now be declared also from below (unbroken sequence of II, III, etc.). 18 or more “*Ladons*” may be declared (non-court suit cards, reckoning the Scü as a Ladon). Previously known sources allowed 16 or more Ladons.¹² A player may attempt to remain “*stichfrei*” (trick-free, i.e. winning no trick) for a large bonus. In addition to the Pagat there are now also ultimo kings.

Variant c) is “*Taroc mit sieben Königen*” (with seven kings). The ordinary kings declaration is now replaced by treating kings proper and the principal matadors together as nominal kings: three or more may be declared (thus, at least one player must have such a declaration in hand, as the *Taschenbuch* observes). Perhaps the most striking feature is that there is now an ultimo bonus for winning the last trick with trump II (or a penalty if lost). – This is a century before the “owl” appears in Habsburg Tarock!¹³ The *Taschenbuch* author considers this variant preferable to the previous ones:

“*Da jeder sich bemüht etwas zu ultimiren, diese Absicht aber doch nur einer erreichen kann, begegnet es auch, dass ein König penultimo, ein anderer, oder wohl der Pagat ultimo verloren geht, indem zugleich die II. gemacht wird.*”¹⁴

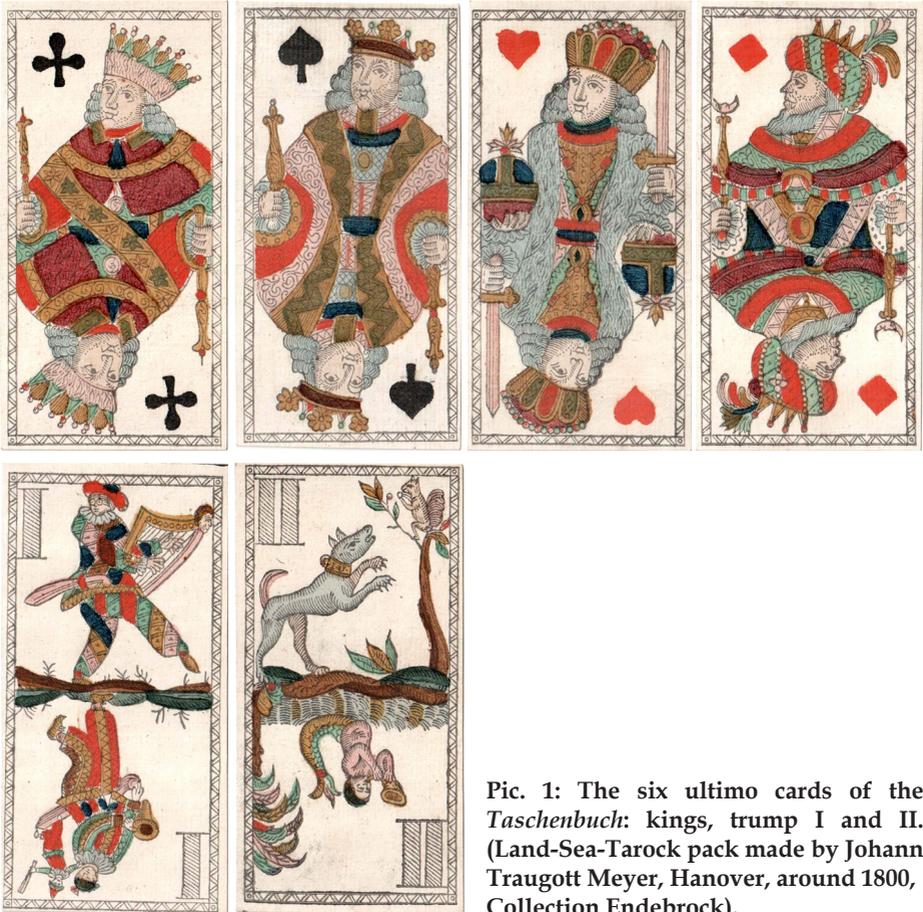
¹⁰ *History*, game 3.1.

¹¹ *History*, game 4.3.

¹² *idem*.

¹³ John McLeod, “Playing the Game: Owl or Eagle? The Uhu in Austrian Tarock”, *The Playing-Card*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2003).

¹⁴ “Because everybody tries to ultimate something, yet only one can succeed, it happens that a king is lost penultimo, and another, or perhaps the Pagat, is lost ultimo while at the same time the II is made.” *Taschenbuch*, p. 11.



Pic. 1: The six ultimo cards of the *Taschenbuch*: kings, trump I and II. (Land-Sea-Tarock pack made by Johann Traugott Meyer, Hanover, around 1800, Collection Endebrock).

3 Use of the terms “Grosstarock” and “Siebenkönigsspiel” around 1800

Apparently, at that time there was a fashion to add more ultimo cards. Prof. Wildt of Göttingen, in a letter of 1803 to his friend Breiger in Harburg upon Elbe, proposed a three player hexagonal Chess board game.¹⁵ In the introduction he wrote:

“Schon Kästner behauptete in der Vorrede zu seinen Anfangsgründen, dass ein Frauenzimmer, das Taroc spielt, ebensoviel Aufmerksamkeit und Verstand anwenden müsse, als viele Gelehrte, wenn sie tiefsinnige Werke schreiben; ja, nach genauerer Untersuchung scheint es nur zu gewiss, dass das sogenannte Gross-Taroc, in welchem

¹⁵ As far as I know, hexagonal Chess is currently thought to be first invented by Wladyslaw Gliński in 1936. So we may have another discovery here, unrelated to card games, more something for the Board Game Studies....

6 bis 7 Ultimo's möglich sind, und mehrere zugleich versucht werden, wirklich mehr Anstrengung der Geisteskräfte voraussetzte, als das gewöhnliche Schachspiel."¹⁶

The "genauere Untersuchung" (accurate examination) might be an allusion to their analysis of games at some *Studentenkneipe* (student pub) when they were fellow students in Göttingen after 1790.¹⁷ – The passage is remarkable in several ways.

a) We learn about up to seven ultimo cards. Wildt doesn't say which ones, but judging from the six of the *Taschenbuch* it is hard to avoid the assumption the seventh must be trump III.

b) The ultimo feature renders the game comparable to Chess in terms of the game play intellect required. This is a view is still shared by present day Danish Grosstarock players (they call the game just "Tarok").¹⁸

c) The game is called "Gross-Taroc". It was previously thought that the term Grosstarock arose in the mid 19th century to distinguish the old game from the more recent one with the shortened 54 card pack.¹⁹ It turns out that the term must have been fairly common already around 1800. We know of two works

¹⁶ "Already Kästner asserted in the preface to his *Anfangsgründe* that a woman who plays Taroc needs to apply as much attention and intellect as many scholars when they write profound works; indeed, after accurate examination it appears only too certain that the so-called Gross-Taroc – in which 6 or 7 ultimos are possible and many are attempted at the same time – requires really more mental strength than the ordinary game of Chess." Prof. Wildt, "Das Burgspiel, ein Schachspiel für Drei", in: *Neues Hannö-verisches Magazin, 13ter Jahrgang* (Hanover 1803: Schlüter @ Google Books), 89tes Stück (7 Nov.), columns 1409–1416. Abraham Gotthelf Kästner (1719–1800) is the author of *Anfangsgründe der Arithmetik [...]* (6th ed. Göttingen 1800: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht @ Google Books). Kästner actually writes that he intends that his work can be read and understood by anybody as intelligent as women who play Tarock.

¹⁷ The same may hold for a shared interest in *Frauenzimmer* (women)... Göttingen and Harburg upon Elbe were cities of the Electorate (*Kurfürstentum*) of Brunswick-Lüneburg, aka "Kurhannover" as it was reigned by the House of Hanover. Johann Christian Daniel Wildt (b. 1770 Hanover, d. 1844 *ibid.*) studied in Göttingen 1789–1793, was a protégé of Kästner, and associate professor 1797–1811, according to Ulrich Joost, "Zwei rätselhafte Bemerkungen Lichtenbergs", in: Promies, Wolfgang, ed., *Photorin: Mitteilungen der Lichtenberg-Gesellschaft*, Heft 4, 1981 (@ tprints, TU Darmstadt), p. 63. Gottlieb Christian Breiger (b. 1771 Hanover, d. 1854 Harburg upon Elbe) studied theology in Göttingen from 1790 and was later deputy headmaster in Harburg until 1805 (@ Wikipedia). Georg Christoph Lichtenberg noted in his "Staatskalender" (state calendar, actually a diary) that Breiger visited him on 5 Aug. 1792, while Wildt visited and corresponded with him several times from Nov. 1791 to Feb. 1796, see: *Schriften und Briefe* (Frankfurt upon Main 1994: Zweitausendeins), vol. 2. Lichtenberg was not fond of Wildt as professor and called him "Savage" (Joost). He himself played Whist several times during 1791 to 1794 according to his *Staatskalender*.

¹⁸ Møller, *Two Centuries*, p. 2.

¹⁹ *History*, p. 55.

specifically dedicated to the game: Haberland's *Anleitung das deutsche oder Gross-Tarocspielen zu lernen* (Jena 1803: Cröcker) and *Das deutsche oder grosse Taroc; eine Anleitung selbiges spielen zu lernen* (Leipzig 1816).²⁰ The earliest appearance of "Gross-Tarok" I am aware of is from 1797.²¹ "Gross-Tarok" is also reported as the German name of the game in the Danish account by Jacob Christian Bendz of 1840.²² It is perhaps worth noting that it is probably anachronistic to distinguish between separate German and Danish games before the 1880s.²³ Until 1864 the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein were part of the Danish Union,²⁴ so Bendz describes variants which might well have been played for example in Altona, the second biggest city of the Union in early and mid 19th century. – Nowadays, Altona is a district of Hamburg (as is Harburg upon Elbe).

The term "*Siebenkönigsspiel*" was already current around 1800 too.²⁵ For the game so-called, a dictionary of 1807 reports the technical term "*Ableger*" (lay-down) as an alternative for "*Ski*". The entry on the game itself is "*Tarok (Siebenkönigsspiel)*".²⁶ An internet search yields more hits from before 1850.

Although we do not know of Tarock being played with 54 cards in Northern Germany it is possible that the adjective "*gross*" (big, grand, great)²⁷ was introduced in Southern Germany where the shortened pack must have been used by mid 18th century.²⁸ The term might have spread to the North with the game.

²⁰ Oettinger, *Contingent*, no. 83, and no. 85 respectively. It is not known if copies of either work still exist. They seem to be the only German works specifically on Gross-tarock. Other rules we have are from games collections. It is interesting that the title of both works attribute the game to be "German". With reference to what other form of the game, if any, is an open question.

²¹ "Klopstock's Sieg über den frischen Häring", in: Wilhelm Schmidt and Friedrich Lautsch, ed., *Klamer Eberhard Karl Schmidt's Leben und auserlesene Werke* (Stuttgart and Tübingen 1828: Cotta @ Google Books), vol. 3, p. 371.

²² Bendz lived 1802–1858, if he is the one @ Danish Wikipedia. The PDF available by DTF has no title. There is a *Veiledning i Tarok* (Randers 1840: J. M. Elmenhoff) available and digitalized @ Royal Library Copenhagen, which is not identical to Bendz's work and is not listed by Møller. In the *History* the remark that the game is called "Gross-Tarok" in German is attributed to a document dated "late XIX century" which is the foundation for game 4.6. I suspect that this is actually Bendz's document because all the rules and variants he reports are found there.

²³ The presentation of *History*, games 4.5 to 4.7, suggests a specific Danish tradition starts already in the 1840s.

²⁴ *Helstater* in Danish, *Dänischer Gesamtstaat* in German.

²⁵ The *History*, p. 70, fn. 4, only mentions a dictionary of 1902 using the term.

²⁶ Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Brunswick 1813: Schulbuchhandlung @ Google Books). The volume "A-E" dates from 1807. *Ski* is of course the Fool – another instance of a spelling without final "s". Adelong reports the use of "*Ableger*" for the "*Skis*" in "*Tarok*" too.

²⁷ I shall continue to use the German word, but I think the best English translation would perhaps be Grand Tarock.

²⁸ *History*, p. 412.

It is one thing to track the origin of the term “Grosstarock”, it is another what criteria should be used to classify a game as a Grosstarock.

4 The definition of Grosstarock

The early classical German three player Tarock is distinguished from the basic three player game by three features: The particular set of declarations, the rule that the Fool must not be played to the last three tricks, and the penalty or bonus for losing or winning the Pagat, raised in the last trick, *Pagat ultimo*.²⁹ However, already in the *Game of Tarot* Michael Dummett decided to take the appearance of “*Stichfreispiel*” (a special score for winning no tricks) as the criterion to distinguish “Grosstarock” from “Classical Tarock”.³⁰ Danish players call this feature “*nolo*,” I shall use the Danish term because it is current (and less typing...). *Nolo* inspired a series of similar features to be added. By 1820 players allowed slams (all tricks, called “*Vole*” in German and “*Tout*” or “*Bolo*” in Danish) and *nolos* to be announced at various stages during play.³¹ Dummett noted that when the *nolo* initially appeared in the rules it was hardly ever mentioned.³² He also already observed about the later developments:

“It is evident that there is an intrinsic difficulty about combining bonuses for bringing home certain cards and penalties for losing them with a special score for making no tricks, and also with suspending these bonuses and penalties when a *Vole* [slam] is made; [...] The problem of adjusting the rules to provide due incentives for difficult feats of play seems not to have been satisfactorily solved.”³³

The observation rests on the decision that by definition Grosstarock should be a game with multiple objectives.³⁴ I think it is important to see what players from the living tradition regard as the game’s peculiarity.

Before we look at this, we should note that the idea to admit a special bonus for a player who remains without a trick was introduced to other games around the same time it was to Tarock, for example to Hombre as “Nullissimo” and Boston as “Misere”, so it is not a feature unique to Grosstarock.³⁵

We already saw that to Prof. Wildt the up to seven ultimos cards rendered the game comparable to Chess. The *Taschenbuch* author’s enthusiasm for the game with six ultimo possibilities was cited. The *Taschenbuch* also notes that even with twenty Ladons it is very difficult to remain *stichfrei* – it was not a

²⁹ *History*, p. 31–34.

³⁰ *Game*, p. 240; also in *History*, p. 56.

³¹ Abenstein’s rules of *Berliner Spielalmanach*, *History* game 4.3.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Quoting here *History*, p. 69–70, but the argument is the same in *Game*, p. 247.

³⁴ *Game*, p. 257.

³⁵ For Boston see *Das Neue königliche L’Hombre* (Hamburg 1783: Herold @ Google Books), p. 206. According *History*, p. 56, this work contains one of the earliest reports of *nolo* in “*Tarocspiel*” (it can be found on p. 140). For Hombre see Schwetschke, *Geschichte des L’Hombre*, p. 42.

frequent occurrence.³⁶ In the *Berliner Spielalmanach* of 1800 we find the statement that the game loses all interest after all the ultimo cards have been played.³⁷ According to Bendz in 1840 there are two peculiarities that set the game apart from any other: the special pack and “[...] spilllets ejendommelige formål, som nemlig går ud på at ultimere, det at gøre det sidste stik i spillet med et vist kort, [...]” (the game’s peculiar purpose which namely is to ultimate, that is to win the last trick in the game with a particular card).³⁸ Sometimes other ultimo possibilities were recognized: win the last trick with XXI,³⁹ or the last two or three tricks with kings.⁴⁰ The use of a special pot to increase the value of the ultimos was common,⁴¹ and even quite modest pots ensure that ultimos are the highest scoring feature.⁴²

³⁶ In the following I focus on nolo and omit the slam. According to Danish players, the slam is rare to the point of being a mythical event (Møller). There is no special score for a slam in *eigentliches Taroc* of the *Taschenbuch*.

³⁷ *History*, p. 64; *already Game*, p. 244.

³⁸ *Tarok* (with “help” of Google Translator), p. 2. The particular cards being kings and the Pagat.

³⁹ This is a variant in Abenstein’s *Berliner Spielalmanach* (*History*, game 4.3) if seven kings are recognized. It appears that this is an over-generalization of the seven kings rule: any “king” may win ultimo, XXI is a nominal king thus it must be an ultimo card. Such a transfer from name to rule seems to happen quite often. For example in Skat the official rationale for the high value of the game in which jacks are the only trumps is: “Der Grand soll seinem Namen nach das alles beherrschende Spiel sein.” (According to its name the Grand shall be the all-dominant game), section Wissenswertes für Skatspieler of Internationale Skatordnung @ Skat-online.com. — Had the game been named “Bauernspiel” instead, maybe it would have been valued lower than suit games.

⁴⁰ Bendz, part 1, § 6, p. 10. Bendz also reports the rule that when all ultimo cards have been played the last trick is worth 5 units.

⁴¹ *Eigentliches Taroc* of the *Taschenbuch*, *Danish Tarok*, *Tarok* of *Berliner Spielalmanach* (*History*, game 4.2).

⁴² Take the *Taschenbuch*’s tariff: At a four player table everybody pays 10 game points to the pot and pays or receives for ultimos, including the player sitting out. If, as in the quotation in section 2, one player wins II ultimo while another loses Pagat ultimo then the II ultimo winner would receive 10 from each = 30 + pot 40 = 70 game points, while the Pagat ultimo loser pays 15 to each and 40 to the pot, a loss of 85 (adding up for the balance: II-ultimist +85, Pagat loser -95, the other two +5 each). The rare nolo gains 26 from the two active players, 52 in all. So, the very least ultimo is worth about 20 more than the next highest possible score. And the value of the ultimo can rise to much more if ultimo losers have to double the pot! (The *Taschenbuch* actually says that each pays “eine Marke” to the pot in a context where one *Marke* equals one game point. This would be a very low pot. I assume the author meant one *Marke* equals ten points here because this is the equivalence in the subsequent *Taroc L’Hombre* section. Fool-proof descriptions of scoring methods are not a primary concern of the author for any game. In addition the *Taschenbuch* author takes a strict anti-gambling position, so I think higher pots might have been common in other circles.)

Then there is the particularity of a penalty for playing the Fool to the last three tricks. Bendz explains: "*En grænse for dens [Scusens] virksomhed er nødvendig, da ultimationer ellers bliver alt for vanskelige; [...]*" (A limit for the Fool's power is necessary because otherwise ultimos would be too difficult).⁴³ Bendz also reports that German players penalize playing the Fool in the fourth last or fifth last trick.⁴⁴ — Thus, the feature was introduced to clear the endgame zone from Foolish distraction from ultimos!

Game book writers, other observers, and players tell us: As long as the game was or is a living tradition it is the ultimo feature that makes it interesting and particular.

5 Cleaning up the rules of Grosstarock in the ultimate interest

The "problem of adjusting the rules" was solved precisely so as to emphasize the ultimo feature: The Danish players eventually cleared the game from rare or distracting declarations.⁴⁵ They established an intricate interaction between ultimo and nolo: If one player remains free of tricks ultimos don't count. Initial experiments in this direction are already reported from Berlin in 1820.⁴⁶ And ultimos were valued so high that there is now an incentive to support a nolo attempt when the third player threatens to make an ultimo. As to the Fool in the sight of the ultimos the Danish players observe intricate rules for the last three tricks.⁴⁷

It turns out that the Danes were not the first to clean the game from distracting features.

Thierry Depaulis convincingly argues that Tarock must have been introduced to Germany from France not much earlier than 1720 and observes:

"The style of play [of the German game] too is typically French: as described by the *Regeln bey dem Taroc-Spiele* of 1754 (as well as in *Palamedes redivoius*, 1755) and by *Die Kunst die Welt* etc. of 1756, the game is first of all a three-handed

⁴³ *Tarok*, p. 36, footnote.

⁴⁴ The fifth last trick is also the Fool's limit in Abenstein's 1820 edition of *Berliner Spielalmanach*.

⁴⁵ Like announcements of nolos and slams, or declarations with "leaping Fool".

⁴⁶ In *History*, game 4.3, a nolo prevents ultimo kings but apparently not Pagat ultimo. The more general rule already appears in Bendz's *Tarok*, p. 8: "*En anden regel er, at skaffe stik på alle hænder; for spiller én nolo, skal de 2 andre spillere ikke alene betale ham 26 (25) points men kan da hverken ultimere eller vinde i tælling.*" (Another rule [tactics for a player] is to ensure that all players have at least one trick, because if one player has a nolo the other two not only pay him 26 (25) points but also cannot score for ultimo or card points. Emphasis removed). Bendz does not report any different rule for German players which he normally does, so the rule was presumably already widespread not only among Danish players.

⁴⁷ It may be "called" to the third by another player, must not be played to the second, and is lost in the last.

simple game, without bidding but with many card combinations, very similar to the game as described by Abbé Michel de Marolles.”⁴⁸

But there are crucial differences. There are much less declarations in the early German game than in the French one.⁴⁹ And while the Fool must not be played to the last trick in the French game, the German Fool-free endzone is already three tricks wide. There are Pagat and king ultimo in Abbé de Marolles’s game but they are somewhat buried under the other scoring features. Ultimos are not mentioned in the later 17th and 18th century French accounts, while the German players had etched out the ultimo feature by 1750.

So we have effectively two “waves” of cleaning up the game. The early German game emphasizes Pagat ultimo. Subsequently more ultimo cards were added and other scoring features tried. The rules got cluttered. Eventually, the Danish players again removed everything that distracted from the ultimate interest. It is not quite the case that “The Danish game, [...] is not fully representative of the family to which it belongs, [...]” as Dummett originally thought.⁵⁰ On the contrary, the Danish players worked out the essence of Grosstarock. Initially, there was only Pagat ultimo. But this was the nucleus of this particular tradition of card play.

6 An ultimate stage play

Classical (or basic) three-player Tarock is a game in which all play for themselves, there are 25 tricks, and each pays or receives the difference from the average of the available card points.⁵¹ Built on this foundation, Grosstarock is a game of 25 tricks, in which the whole interest is in the very last of them, when eventually “everybody tries to ultimate something” (*Taschenbuch*). So, all games of that type should be classified as Grosstarock.⁵²

⁴⁸ Depaulis, *When (and how)*. French rules (underlying *History*, games in ch. 2 and 3.2) and the German *Regeln bey dem Taroc-Spiele* @ Hans-Joachim Alschér’s Tarock.info.

⁴⁹ In the French game there are up to seven “Tarots” (kings, XXI, I, Fool) and from two kings with Fool up to four kings with Fool declarable, while in the early German there are only kings declarable (and later *either* kings or “kings out of seven” but almost never both). There are “*impériales*”, sets of queens, cavals, and jacks in the French game but not yet in the German game. Highest and lowest trump holdings, “*brizigoles*”, may be declared in the French game, but only Matadors from above in the early German ones. Extra scores for “*la belle*” (ace of coins) are also absent from the German game.

⁵⁰ *Twelve Tarot Games* (London 1980: Duckworth), p. 53.

⁵¹ For example *History*, games 2.7, 5.3, 6.2, 6.7, 8.1, 8.31, or 8.35.

⁵² *History*, games 3.1, 3.3, and 3.4. — At present, in a hypothetical new edition of the supplement to the *History*, one would have to put the *Taschenbuch*’s variant a) into chapter 3, but b) and c) into chapter 4, thereby splitting an integral account of the game into two distant places. — One could turn Dummett’s original argument around: If multiple objectives were to be taken as defining features of Grosstarock, then the earliest reported games already have them. There are *three* possible objectives: (1) declare card combinations; (2) win more than an average amount of card points; and/or (3) save or catch the Pagat, preferably in the last trick. The objectives can contradict each



Pic. 2: Expert player Lucinde (left) and clueless Leander (right) at Grosstarock. — Actually a French engraving from around 1780, found in Roland Gööck, *Freude am Kartenspiel* (Gütersloh 1967: Bertelsmann), p. 32.

That the ultimo feature was a major attraction of the game by 1760 is testified by Karl Franz Romanus's comedy *Das Tarocspiel* in which "*Pachat*" ultimo is the climax of the plot.⁵³ — It must be the only German stage play which requires knowledge of Grosstarock rules for full appreciation!⁵⁴

Synopsis (and spoiler warning!): Lady Simone wants to engage her friend Lucinde to the well-to-do Leander (counting on some pecuniary reward if successful). Lucinde is a *Taroc* addict. As she enters the stage she is in a good mood: She has just saved the *Pachat* with only seven little trumps. Leander says he is not a good player, Lucinde finds this unconvincing. In the test match Leander disqualifies himself more than expected by losing the *Pachat* despite holding twelve trumps. He manages to recover his position somewhat by pre-

other. Thus, according to the original criterion, the introduction, not only of nolo, but already of Pagat ultimo should qualify a game as as a Grosstarock....

⁵³ In: *Comödien* (Dresden and Warsaw 1761: Gröll @ Google Books), a collection of plays by the author, p. 317–352. The author is identified by Karl Goedicke, *Grundrisz zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung aus den Quellen* (Dresden 1862: Ehlermann), vol. 2, no. 242, § 215, p. 592. The main piece, *Die Brüder* (The Brothers), received extensive treatment in Lessing's famous *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*. The play is mentioned by Depaulis, *When (and how)*.

⁵⁴ Players of Habsburg style Tarock games won't be off too much, though. In addition, Depaulis, *When (and how)*, lists two Latin plays.

senting valuable jewelry to the ladies. The game continues without Leander, and Lucinde is distracted enough to lose *Pachal ultimo* with thirteen trumps! — This does *not* win him over. Lady Simone is rather confused about the mysterious *Pachal*: that little piece of paper seems to spoil her arrangement. Leander's butler Merlin explains: the *Pachal* is the soul of *Taroc*! He complains to his master: the situation would be different had he responded to the many attempts to teach him *Taroc*. In the end, Leander finds game addiction and being valued just for his wealth not a good future prospect and takes two decisions: not to engage Lucinde, but to learn to play the game of *Taroc*.

Unhappy marriage avoided and one card player more in need of the valuable collectibles: IPCS members will agree that this is a Happy End by any standard! — In the next part we will look at the other Tarock games of the *Taschenbuch*: Tarock for two and Tarock Hombre and find that the latter was popular with some rather famous people at Weimar at the time.

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Mit Kupfern.

3 e l f ,
bei Wilhelm Webel.