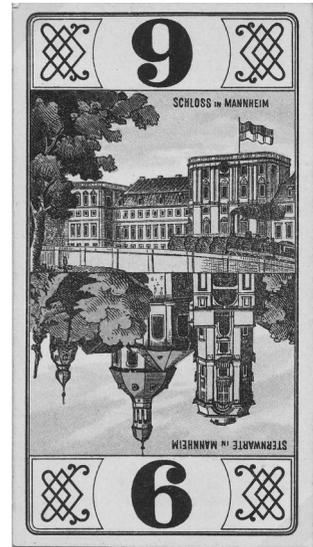


Playing the Game: Dreierles

The 2018 IPCS Convention in Leinfelden-Echterdingen and the following days were particularly fruitful for card game research. Not only did we enjoy the experience of playing the Württemberg games Gaigel and Binokel with local players during the Convention itself, but we also took the opportunity to learn several other fascinating card games during our subsequent travels in Southwest Germany. In a future article we will write about the various types of Schafkopf we discovered in the Palatinate. Meanwhile this article is devoted to a little-known Tarot game played in Central Baden.

The former state of Baden, now part of the Land Baden-Württemberg, is so far as we know the only region in Germany where the tradition of playing games with the Tarot cards has survived. In this region the special 54-card French-suited Tarot pack known as Cego is used. There are two designs – the one most often used is an animal Tarot, but another version with domestic scenes on the trumps, somewhat like the modern French Tarot design, may still occasionally be found. Cego is also the name of the Tarot game most often played with these cards, and it is sometimes described as the “national card game of Baden”. But the same cards are also used for at least two other games. One is Strassenwart, also known as Vier-Anderle, which is not a Tarot game proper. The other is Dreierles (“Dreierle”, “Dreier”), a true Tarot game with some resemblance to Austrian Tapp-Tarock.

The existence of Dreierles was already known to us from an article by Friedrich Schlager¹ and it is mentioned in history of Tarot games by Dummett and McLeod², but until recently we were unsure whether the game had survived, and we had no detailed description of it. Recently, thanks to mentions of Dreierles on various websites,



From a pack made by
Jacob, Mannheim, c.1890

¹ Friedrich Schlager, *Das badische Nationalspiel "Zego" und die andern in Baden und an Badens Grenzen volksüblichen Kartenspiele*. In *Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft und Volkskunde: Festschrift für Ernst Ochs*. Lahr (Schwarzwald): Moritz Schauenberg 1951, pp 293-307.

² Michael Dummett and John McLeod, *A History of Games Played with the Tarot Pack*, Lewinston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2004, vol 2, pp 446-447.

we have been able to establish contact with some players, and this resulted in a visit by John McLeod and Ulf Martin to Steinmauern near Rastatt in Central Baden. There our contact Richard Götz kindly organised an evening of Dreierles with players Elke and Martin Becker and Otto Fettig from Steinmauern and Annette Hafermann from Iffezheim. We also had email correspondence with Thomas Wimmer of Achertal (in the northern Black Forest, 30 km south of Rastatt) and Walburga Rademacher of Malsch (10 km to the east in the district of Karlsruhe).

Because the rules of Dreierles are relatively straightforward compared to most Austrian Tarock games, it may be a good introduction to this style of game. A detailed description will be published on pagat.com and should be online by the time this article appears. Meanwhile here is an overview of the game and also the local terminology, some of which is the same as that used in South Baden for Cego.

The 54-card pack used for Dreierles (and also Cego) has the same composition as a standard Austrian Tarock pack, but the trumps bear Arabic numerals instead Roman ones. Trumps are called "Druck" or "Drock". The top trump is the unnumbered "Stiess" or "Gstiess" and the trump 1 is called "Pfeiff" or "Pfeife" (pipe, whistle). In Iffezheim the top trump is "der Alt", the 21 is called "Eisen" (iron) and the 1 is known as "Pfiff". The three trumps Stiess, 21, and 1 together make up the "Droll" (or "Druckrolle" in Mr. Götz's Steinmauern round). The Kings are sometimes called "Hanore". The derivations of "Drock" from "Tarock", "Droll" (like the Austrian term "Trull") from the French "tous les trois", and "Hanore" from the French "honneurs" are clear.



Droll, from a pack made by Jacob, Mannheim, c.1890

Like both Austrian Tapp-Tarock and Cego, Dreierles is a trick-taking game in which players bid to play alone against the others acting as a team, the aim being to take more than half the card points in tricks. The key difference between Cego and Dreierles is in the deal and the use of the “blind” – the spare cards that do not initially belong to any player. In Cego the blind has almost as many cards as a player’s hand, and the winner of the bidding first discards most of their original hand, keeping just one or two cards, and then picks up the blind and plays with those cards instead. In contrast, the blind in Dreierles consists of just 6 cards, like the talon in most Austrian Tarock games, while the three players are dealt 16 cards each. The winning bidder is given not more than 3 cards from the blind and then discards an equal number of cards in their place.

The basic score depends on the number of card points the bidder manages to take in tricks, and can also be affected by some other circumstances. For example there is a multiplier depending on the number of cards the bidder was given from the talon. Also, before play begins an opponent of the bidder can knock to double the score after which the bidder can knock to double it again. An extra point can be scored for holding ten or more Docks or all three cards of the Droll or all four Kings (known as a “Königsrolle” in Steinmauern). The bidder can also score a point for winning the last trick with the lowest trump, the Pfeiff, and a further point if the intention to do so is declared before play starts by laying the card out face up. If all three players pass, there is a special negative game called Räuber (robber), which aims to punish the player with the best hand.

According to our informants, in the area around Rastatt in Central Baden Cego cards are used only to play Dreierles. Cego proper is played only in South Baden, in a region that reaches as far as the river Acher. For example, Mr. Wimmer tells us that there used to be a regular Cego round in Oberachern (Achertal) until the pub closed a few years ago. Dreierles was formerly quite widely played in Central Baden and perhaps even further north. Unfortunately, in common with so many traditional card games, Dreierles is less popular with younger generations, and it is probably no longer played in Karlsruhe or other parts of North Baden.

While some writers such as Schlager have assumed that Dreierles is a simplified 20th century variant of Cego, the truth is almost certainly the opposite, that Dreierles was the earlier game and Cego was created from it by superimposing a different method of using the blind. This method could have been borrowed from the Spanish Hombre variant Cascarela, which would account for the story that Cego was brought to Baden by Napoleonic soldiers after 1812.³ The implication is that Dreierles must date from the start of the 19th century or even earlier.

Now that we know in detail how Dreierles is played, we can see that its basic rules are consistent with that dating. There are a few features that were probably

³ For a fuller discussion of this topic see Dummett/McLeod, op cit, pp 416–421.

added later having been borrowed from other games, such as the doubling and redoubling perhaps taken from Skat, and Räuber probably from Cego itself, which has the same option with the same name when all players pass. If those additions are stripped away from Dreierles we are left with a game that is rather close to the earliest known description of Austrian 54-card Tapp Tarock, published anonymously in Vienna in 1821 by a “*genauer Kenner*” (connoisseur).⁴ The key to this comparison is the use of the 6-card talon or blind. The bidder draws cards only from the top of the talon. Unlike all later versions of Tapp Tarock, there is no option to reject the first cards drawn and look further, nor to expose the whole talon and choose the most favourable part of it. In Dreierles too, only the top cards of the blind can be used by the bidder and the remainder of the blind remains out of play.

There is a great deal of literature on various forms of Tarock from the central part of the Habsburg empire (Vienna, Prague) and neighbouring countries (Saxony, Thuringia, Franconia) but no indication that Tapp Tarock with the 54-card pack was known there before 1800. Yet that game was described by the “*genauer Kenner*” in 1821 as popular in many places. We now have an indication that the closely related 54-card game Dreierles was being played rather far away in Baden before 1812.

How could previously unknown game become so widely popular within 20 years? One possible explanation has to do with the Napoleonic Wars, specifically the consequences of the battle of Austerlitz in 1805. Before this date South Baden was a part of Vorderösterreich (Further Austria), a remote territory of the Habsburg Empire jokingly referred to as a “tail feather of the imperial eagle”, but in the peace of Pressburg (December 1805) this area was ceded to Baden. Maybe many administrators and other officials moved to the remaining eastern part of the empire afterwards and brought the game with them. This could also explain why Dreierles has survived in Baden with so little change, unaffected by the major developments to Tarock games that took place in Austria during the 19th century.

This reasoning implies that Dreierles is possibly the direct ancestor of Tapp Tarock and therefore of the whole Tarock tradition that has thrived across the lands of the former Habsburg Empire from the 19th century to the present day. Dreierles could conceivably even supply the missing link between the Swiss Tarot games of Tappen and La Tape and the Austrian tradition. We intend to explore these possibilities further in a future article in this journal.

⁴ The 1821 game appears as game 15.3 in Dummett/McLeod, op cit, pp 540–543. The original text can be found online on Hans-Joachim Alscher’s Tarock website at www.tarock.info/Tapptarock_1821.htm