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Queen of spades, ace of diamonds and other playing cards on stamps

(computer aided translation)

Playing cards are for playing, and this can be done for fun and money. Cards are also collected in the same way as postage stamps. It is possible that you only examine stamps with a playing card theme and look for symbols and other interesting things.

Classes, hearts and love

The four suits of playing cards are spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs. In Finnish they are *pata*, *hertta*, *ruutu* and *risti*. Card games have a long history and it tells you where the suits have come from and what they mean.

In the old class society, citizens were divided into three or four groups, each with their own rights and responsibilities. The spades represent nobility, the hearts priests, the diamonds burgesses and the clubs peasantry. *Pata* (caldron) has nothing to do with what to make food and grow flowers in. It is a twist of the Swedish word *spader*. *Hertta* comes from the word *hjärta*, the heart, and *risti* (cross) is in fact a clover.



Reebus is a puzzle in which words are represented by images, and letters are added if needed. The Danish environmental protection stamps (1994) call for saving water. In Danish the word *spar* is not only a suit, but also an imperative of *spare*, in turn *and* is a duck and *vand* is water. The other value of the series is about saving carbon dioxide, today a hotter theme than 25 years ago.

From playing cards we come to the Finnish Parliament and its origins. The Finnish parliamentary system can be considered to have been born in 1863, with the first assembly of the representatives of the estates in Helsinki. Postage stamps have been published when it was 75 years from the assembly in 1938 and a hundred years in 1963. The former are stamps of the Red Cross. The four-stamp series depicts the chairmen of the classes, so that the first and at the same time lowest value is Aukusti Mäkipeska of peasantry. In the final value is Johan Mauritz Nordenstam, the father of the stepmother of marshal Mannerheim.

Heart-shaped hearts bring to mind love rather than priests. The connection has been used for many playing card themed stamps. Sometimes king and queen are connected to the same card so that the former is on the top and the latter is down. Or vice versa, depending on how you are holding the stamp. I wonder if there is any card game where such asymmetrical couple-cards would be used.



In the Japanese stamp 1987, the queen has a bird on her shoulder, while the king smokes a cigarette. In the Dutch women's year stamp (1975) both have a dove of peace. The Western German skat stamp (1986) has suits of different card decks. In this and the Belarus (2004) and Polish (1997) stamps, the cards are hearts.

Sin and shame

Playing cards are suitable for collecting as much as postcards, phone cards, and other cards are. In the standard card deck there are 52 cards, pretty much the same amount as weeks in a year. The collector's target can be the deck as a whole, from each deck only one card, or something else in between.

Kari Rahiala writes about collecting playing cards in his book *Happy Collector* (1995) under the title "Collecting is permitted though playing is not". In his childhood home, the use of playing cards was strictly forbidden, and cards were something that always involved sin. Apparently they were attached to gambling.

I was gambling for money for the first time at the age of 30, safely with my father and a family friend, also a stamp collector. The game was simple and, at the same time, nice in that we could simultaneously discuss. We used five penny coins, and admittedly it seemed to go a little at the border of vice and decency, especially when we played a couple of times on Easter holidays. According to notes, my biggest loss in ten years was about EUR 1.50 in current money.

Which suit and rank to collect?

In his book, Rahiala writes that he collects only queens of spades, rather than the entire deck of cards. You are saving space. Even if you have accumulated 2000 cards, it is not necessary to have a long box, as he formulates it. The book reader will soon ask about what will happen to the remaining cards of the deck.

The collector of playing cards could very well specialize in the ace of diamonds in the place of queens of spades. This card had a special position at the time when the state collected a playing card tax in Finland.

The state has always sought tax revenue from where the tax base is inelastic and the taxpayer cannot escape. Addiction-causing alcohol, tobacco and gambling are particularly attractive. Until 1983, a tax was levied on playing cards, and the indication of its payment was printed on the ace of diamonds. Such cards may not belong to a revenue stamp collection. US playing card revenue stamps are all the better. The use of them was ended in 1965.

Conclusion

Playing cards and playing card stamps can be collected separately, and in the open class of stamp exhibitions all can be merged into a single exhibit. There is undoubtedly an advantage in making a collection if you are familiar with card playing and can play in practice. Bridge, poker and solitaire are among the most popular, but there are many others.

It would be interesting to know how many of the cards selected on stamps make up in some way special card hands. You will probably also find hidden symbolism in the stamps.



In the Dutch bridge stamp (1980), the artist has used creativity in choosing the ranks of the playing cards. – Likewise, in the bridge themed stamp of the Netherlands Antilles (1977), the postal value is both in a correct position and inside out in the same way as the rank and the suit are in real playing cards. – The Belgian youth philatelic stamp (1998) has the same idea. It also has a two-part emblem of youth philately, one of which is suitably heart-shaped like the hearts of playing cards. Cartoon characters have been drawn by Tibet.



A straight flush means a hand with five consecutive ranks from the same suit. The probability of getting such a hand randomly pulled from a deck is about 1:70000. The stamp of Swaziland (1981) has a straight flush of hearts. Monaco's magician stamp dates back to 1989.

Playing card themed stamps

Bridge: Barbados 1978, Italy 2006, Lebanon 1962, Mali 1978, Monaco 1976

Jass: Switzerland 2018

Skat: Germany 2013

Historical playing cards: Belgium 1973, Spain 1994

Card tricks: Armenia 2002, Georgia 2008, Monaco 2000 and others, France 1986 (film *Le Roman d'un Tricheur* of Sacha Guitry), Hungary 2011 (Rodolfo)

Others: Netherlands 2013 (blood donor day), Netherlands Antilles 1991, Belgium 2003, DDR 1967, United Kingdom 2005 (green ace of hearts) and 2008 (James Bond film *Casino Royale*), Latvia 1999, Luxembourg 2016 (Kulturhuefin Game Card Museum), Makao 1987 (king of diamonds and "Curse of Scotland"), Isle of Man 2014, Poland (1978), France 1984 (pre-cancellation), Somalia 2002, Venezuela 1992 (king of clubs), United States 2009 (love)

Sources: Playing Cards on the Philately <http://playingcards.altervista.org> and Michel Online Catalogue <https://www.briefmarken.de/michelshop/de/michel-online>

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