

A Short History of Poker [B1]

Questo gioco, tradizionalmente associato ai cowboy e ai gangster, ha sempre avuto un non so che di misterioso, oltre a far sperare nel gran colpo di fortuna. Dall'Europa medievale ai casinò di Las Vegas, vediamo come si è evoluto.



Synonymous with savage capitalism and the dream of easy money, poker is probably the most famous card game in the world. Although it is an archetypally American game, its origins actually lie in the Old Continent.

ORIGINS

The basic principle of poker was present in several ancient European games. One, called 'Pochspiel', is recorded to have been played in 15th century Strasbourg, in the historic region of Alsace. Another is mentioned in writing in 1526: in this game, each player had three cards, which could be combined as three of a kind, a pair, and a 'flux' (that is, a hand that contained cards all of the same suit, like in the modern five-card 'flush'). Some cards acquired special value later on, and by the 18th century the betting and bluffing

elements of the game had generated local versions in England and in Germany.

FRENCH AMERICA

In France, a card game called 'poque' was played, that likely took its name from the German word 'pochen', meaning 'to brag as a bluff', literally 'to knock'. By the early 19th century, this game was being played by French settlers in America. English-speaking settlers anglicised the name to 'poker' and established the foundations of the modern card game.

JACKPOT!

By 1834, poker was being played with the modern fifty-two card deck. Over the following decades, the betting aspect of the game was invigorated with the introduction of the 'straight', the 'draw', the 'stud poker', and especially the 'jackpot'. During the American Civil War (1861-1865) poker was played by soldiers on both sides, and it was extremely popular in the saloons of the Wild West.

A QUEEN'S GAME

In 1871, poker arrived at the British court. Queen Victoria expressed interest in the American game, so the US minister to Great Britain, Colonel Jacob Schenck, wrote and printed a set of rules for her that became the first text entirely devoted to poker. The game became known in British aristocratic circles, but was only popularised during World War One, when American soldiers took their card decks to Europe.

DEMOCRATISATION

Poker, traditionally seen as a gambling game for men, was democratised in the 1920s. In the US, women and men from all backgrounds played the game, while in Britain it was only rivalled by bridge, another card game. In

the 1970s, the World Series of Poker made 'Texas Hold'em' the most popular variant of poker.

A NEW ERA

In the 21st century, poker's popularity has soared. The broadcasting of poker tournaments and the accessibility of online poker has made the game more addictive than ever. The next step in the evolution of poker comes with the emergence of artificial intelligence, which is already being used by players to practise their mathematical skills – if not, their poker faces.

Glossary

- **likely** = probabilmente
- **to knock** = bussare
- **draw** = progetto (lett. estrazione)
- **soared** = aumentare
- **suit** = seme
- **flush** = colore
- **bluffing** = ingannare
- **deck** = mazzo
- **jackpot** = montepremi
- **broadcasting** = trasmettere
- **betting** = scommettere
- **settlers** = coloni
- **lie** = trovarsi
- **three of a kind** = tris
- **to brag** = vantarsi
- **straight** = scala
- **stud poker** = poker a carte scoperte