

The History of Doppelkopf Unveiled

by Paul Eaton

Introduction

In the middle of the last century the game of Doppelkopf rose from relative obscurity to become one of the Germany's most popular card games.¹ Long thought to be predominantly a northern game, as a result of the Second World War there was "a strong offensive to the south" which resulted in the game "quickly acquiring countless friends".² Today its centre of gravity appears to have shifted south too, its biggest strongholds being in the *Ruhrgebiet*, Lower Rhine, the Rhine-Main area and southern Lower Saxony with very little representation in the far north and east of Germany.³

Easy to learn, but exciting and challenging to play, "Doko", as it is also affectionately known, is played in universities, in clubs, bars and in the home and by old and young, men and women alike. Part of its appeal is a combination of relatively simple rules with a range of contracts and bonuses that lead to an endless variety of interesting and often unexpected gaming situations. In this respect it resembles its Bavarian cousin, Schafkopf, from which it is often said to have evolved.



A "Doppelkopf", a trick worth at least 40 points, earns a bonus for its taker.

When I encountered some fifty card players at the community centre in Treia in 2020, about half were absorbed in playing Doppelkopf.⁴ At the time I was hunting out scarcer games and ended up playing a unique version of Zwicker with six Jokers. I paid little attention to the Doppelkopfers; I assumed the game was so popular, it needed no second glance; surely its history and development must be well known. I was wrong.

The Mystery of its History

In fact, the history of Doppelkopf is something of a mystery. Two modern theories about its origin abound. Klaus Feustel (1984) and Peter Lincoln (2005) suggest it is an offshoot of Bavarian Schafkopf, with which it shares a number of family likenesses.⁵ Online sources agree. One says that "what is certain is that the game evolved from [Bavarian] Schafkopf, the rules of which were first published in 1895 [so] it must have been invented after that."⁶ Another tells us that while "there are no sources... it may have originated in universities... in the late 19th century... gradually being developed from [Bavarian] Schafkopf".⁷ According to yet another source the earliest records of Doppelkopf date to 1890 and it was first played in Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony.⁸

Another popular theory is that the game began as a twin-pack version of Wendish Schafkopf. Card game authors first began likening the two games in the 1960s,⁹ but in 1987 Kopp stated that Doppelkopf could be traced back to the 1880s when someone came up with the idea of playing Wendish Schafkopf with a double pack. "Thus", he

¹ Danyliuk, Rita (2017). *1x1 der Kartenspiele*. 19th edn. Hanover: Humboldt. p. 137.

² Trumpf, Peter (1981). *Spielkarten und Kartenspiele*. 11th edn. Munich: Heyne. p. 61.

³ Based on an analysis of the locations of 62 Doppelkopf clubs listed on the website of the German Doppelkopf Association.

⁴ Treia is a small village near the port of Husum in Schleswig-Holstein. So the game is no stranger to the far north of Germany, but perhaps it is played more on a social, rather than club, basis.

⁵ Feustel, Klaus (1984). *Schafkopf + Doppelkopf*. Munich: Humboldt. p. 7; Lincoln, Peter (2005). *Doppelkopf: Regeln und Strategien leicht erklärt*. Stuttgart: Urania. p. 6.

⁶ Doppelkopf-spiel.de. *Die Doppelkopf Geschichte: der Ursprung!* Accessed 21 November 2023. <https://www.doppelkopf-spiel.de/doppelkopf-geschichte/> Until recently the first rules of Bavarian Schafkopf were thought to have been published in Amberg in 1895, but research now shows the earliest description dates to 1876 and another to 1884.

⁷ Doppelkopf-palast.de. *Doppelkopf-Geschichte*. Accessed 21 November 2023. <https://www.doppelkopf-palast.de/doppelkopf-geschichte/>

⁸ Heftfilme.com. *Doppelkopf: Anleitung, Spielregeln, Apps und Geschichte*. Accessed 21 November 2023. <https://www.heftfilme.com/doppelkopf/>

⁹ See, for example, Braun, Franz (1966). *Spielkarten und Kartenspiele*. Hanover: Fackelträger, p. 142, and Gööck, Roland (1967). *Freude am Kartenspiel*, Bertelsmann, Gütersloh, p. 81.

adds, “the game was initially called Doppelschafkopf...”¹⁰ This speculative theory became accepted as fact by several later authors.¹¹

Some sources also link the spread of Doppelkopf to one or other of the two world wars. This is a theme I shall return to. Suffice to say at this point that, early in my research, the German Doppelkopf Association (*Deutsche Doppelkopf Verein*) or DDV very helpfully sent me a reprint of what they believed were the earliest set of rules for the game, a fascinating description written by a German doctor during the Second World War.

In summary, those modern sources that say anything about the game’s origins, suggest that Doppelkopf dates to the late 19th century, that it was a development of either Bavarian or Wendish Schafkopf and that it was originally a north German game that spread to the south and west. Actually, none of that is true. To discern the early history of Doppelkopf we need to cast our net wider and begin with a low-born ancestor of that noble family of games that includes Skat, Bavarian Schafkopf and Doppelkopf.

Schafkopf and Schöps

A game called Schafkopf is first attested in the late 18th century and much of the evidence suggests that it originated in Leipzig in the Duchy of Saxony.¹² Certainly most early references to it were published in that city and we know, for example, that it was being played at the university there in 1796 by students who liked to repair to disreputable bars to play Solo or Schafkopf “for a couple of Dreiers”.¹³ As early as 1780 it was well known enough to be mentioned without explanation in a comedy by Hartmann called *The Thankful Daughter* where Platz tells his brother that “I thought we’d play a Schaafkopf” and they go off to look for a pack of cards.¹⁴ In a 1782 Saxon ordinance on drinking and gaming on Sundays and workdays, it was given the green light because it was not seen as a gambling game.¹⁵ So there is no doubt that Schafkopf was embedded in Saxon culture by the late 18th century, but recently I came across evidence that points to an earlier origin further east.

In a 1789 journal article by Siegmund, Freiherr von Bibra, about the town of Schweidnitz in Silesia, there is an account of its brewery industry which states that “in 1666, Nimptscher, Brieger and Strigauer beer were already being served in Schweidnitz”. He then adds in a footnote that “in the city’s yearbooks, the foreign beers all bear the name Schöps. You can still find a card game here called Schafkopf, perhaps it was played with this beer.”¹⁶ Now *Schöps* is old German for a castrated ram, but it was also a pejorative term with the same meaning as *Schafkopf* i.e. “twit” or “foolish man”.¹⁷ The two terms are frequently found together and it is clear that, not only does von Bibra equate the two, but suggests that the game of Schafkopf may have been named after the beer. This is intriguing because, as far as I know, the appellation Schöps for beer is only found in Silesia and is very old, going back to at least 1575, when a book on the art of brewing praises the beer called Schöps from Breslau.¹⁸ Could it be that Schafkopf (perhaps also known as Schöps) goes back to 16th century Silesia?

Whether Schafkopf travelled from Silesia to Saxony or vice versa remains unclear but what is certain is that the game was well established by the early 19th century as a German card game for it is included in Paul Hammer’s milestone work in 1811, in which he describes no less than nine versions, labelled “A” to “I”, of what he calls Schaafkopf.¹⁹ Three were 32-card, point-trick partnership games for four players who bid for the right to choose

¹⁰ Kopp, Dr. Bernhard (1987). *Die schönsten Kartenspiele*. Cologne: Buch + Zeit. p. 190.

¹¹ See, for example: Pieper, Sven and Bärbel Schmidt (1994). *Kartenspiele*, Reclams, Vol. 4216, Stuttgart, p. 112; Kastner, Hugo and Gerald Kador Folkvord (2005). *Die große Humboldt-Enzyklopädie der Kartenspiele*. Baden-Baden: Humboldt, p. 204, and Mala, Matthias (2005). *Doppelkopf*. Munich: Books on Demand, p. 9.

¹² Alternatively spelt in various ways including Schaafkopf or Schafkopf.

¹³ Anselmus Rabiosus the Younger [von Rebmann, Andreas Georg Friedrich] (1796). *Wanderungen und Kreuzzüge durch einen Theil Deutschlands*, Part 2: Leipzig. 2nd greatly improved and revised edn. Altona: Verlagsgesellschaft. pp. 73–74

¹⁴ Hartmann, Andreas-Gottlieb (1780, 1784). *Die dankbare Tochter oder die Einquartirung; ein ländliches Lustspiel mit Gesang in einem Aufzuge*. 1st/2nd edn. Leipzig & Budißin: Jacob Deinzer. p. 24.

¹⁵ _ (1782). *Rhapsodia quaestionum in Foro Quotidie Obvenientium*. Bayreuth: Joh. Andr. Lubecchi Heredes. p. 115.

¹⁶ Freiherr von Bibra, Siegmund (1789). „Topographie der vesten Stadt Schweidnitz im Herzogthum Schlesien“ in *Journal von und für Deutschland*. Part 6. Frankfurt: Hermann. p. 506.

¹⁷ For example, Jagemann, Christian (1790). *Dizionario Italiano-Tedesco E Tedesco Italiano: N - Z*, Volume 1, Issue 2. p. 717, states: “Pecoraccia, f. f. ein starkes Schaf. fig. ein Schöps, Schafkopf, dummer Mensch.”

¹⁸ Cited in _ (1855). “Die Geschichte des Bieres” in *Die Gartenlaube. Illustriertes Familienblatt.*, No. 45, ed. by Ferdinand Stolle. Leipzig, p. 605.

¹⁹ Hammer, Paul (1811). *Die deutschen Kartenspiele*. Leipzig. I have only seen Hammer’s 1817 edition (pp. 215–250), but Oskar Stein (1887; *Geschichte des Skatspiels*. Berlin: Baensch), p.11, confirms that the 1st edition describes nine different types of Schafkopf. These are, almost certainly, the same nine as in the 1817 edition.

trumps; the main difference being that the number of Wenzels (matadors, i.e. Obers and Unters acting as top trumps) varied from four to eight. Five others were point-trick games in which Bells were always trumps, the number of Wenzels and cards varying with the number of players who were divided into two teams. The odd-man out was a four-hand, plain-trick game with four Wenzels and Bells as trumps, in which players played for themselves and had to make two tricks to avoid a penalty. Its rules of play were as in Whist.²⁰

Ur-Doppelkopf

But what is of most interest here is that the last three of Hammer's variants are all point-trick games played with *two packs* of cards. The first of these was type G, an extension of Hammer's type E, which was a four-hand, point-trick, partnership game played with a single pack in which Bells were permanent trumps and there were 6 *Wenzels*. In type G, a double pack was introduced and the play and scoring adjusted accordingly. Its rules are summarised here:

Overview

This was a four-player, Ace-Ten, partnership game using two 24-card packs of German-suited cards. The aim was to score the most points in tricks, there being 240 in the double pack.

Cards

There were 22 trumps: twelve so-called *Wenzels* – the Obers of Acorns and Leaves and all the Unters – and the ten remaining Bells headed by the Deuce (D).²¹ Thus the trumps ranked as follows, there being two of each card:



In the side suits, cards ranked in the usual Ace-Ten order: D 10 K (O) 9, the Aces being called, more correctly, Deuces. The card values were: Deuce 11, Ten 10, King 4, Ober 3, Unter 2 and the remainder 0 points.

Deal

Players drew cards and those with the two highest played as a fixed partnership against those with the two lowest cards. The player with the highest card dealt first, giving each player 12 cards in packets of four.²²

Play

Forehand led to the first trick and Whist rules applied. If two identical cards were played, the first took precedence. If a player was forced in this way to concede a Deuce or high Wenzel it was calling "growling" (*brummen*).

Scoring and Winning

The team scoring 121 points or more won the hand singly and chalked up a tally mark (*Strich*) on the slate. The game could also be won double, but we are not told how; presumably by scoring 180. Perhaps taking all tricks won treble. Game was 4 marks, known as a "head" (*Kopf*). Sometimes the score was kept using the out-of-play Sixes. Hammer says that, because Schaafkopf was rarely played for money, usually those who lost two heads out of three bought a bottle or mug of beer which was drunk by everyone.

Six- and Eight Hand Variants

Hammer goes on to describe two more variants of Schaafkopf played with a double pack. Type H was for six players in two teams, the partners being decided in advance by drawing cards. The cards were the same as in the four-hand game; only the tactics differed because, now, it was almost certain that at least one player would be void in each side suit. Another difference was that a match (*Tour*) was five heads, not three, and the first team to win three heads won the match and was paid the agreed amount by the losers.

²⁰ Whist rules of play: players may lead any card to a trick. Once a card is led, players must follow suit if they can; if they are void in the led suit, however, they may play any card. The trick is won by the highest trump or by the highest card of the led suit if no trumps were played. The trick winner leads to the next trick.

²¹ The Aces had been dropped from German-suited cards by the 1470s. Later, under the influence of foreign card games, the Deuce was promoted in its stead. Today such cards are often referred to as Aces and indexed with an "A". However, I use the language of the source in this article, whether Ace or Deuce.

²² In Hammer's first and oldest variant, players are dealt 8 cards in two packets of 4.

Hammer's last variant, type I, was an eight-hand game played with two full German packs with a total of 64 cards. This time there were 16 Wenzels so the ranking of trumps was amended thus:



Hammer felt this was the most difficult of all his nine variants. It was "only played extremely rarely because it requires a great deal of attention; for here, in addition to the 16 Wenzels, there are 8 suit trumps making the considerable total of 24 trumps to remember. The players were again divided into two teams based on a draw.

Conclusion

Hammer's type G bears a clear resemblance to modern Doppelkopf; even the tactics he describes still largely apply. Of course there were clear differences too. There were fewer trumps – the Obers of Hearts and Bells as well as the Tens of Hearts being ordinary suit cards. Partnerships were fixed and not determined by the owners of the Obers of Acorns (= Queens of Clubs). There was no bidding round and no soloist games. Scoring was basic and there were no special bonuses. All that was to evolve later. Of course this double-pack version of Schafkopf had not been honoured with a separate name at that time – that was to come – but just as Hammer's *Schaafkopf* has been retrospectively called *German Schafkopf*, we can, reasonably, christen his twin-pack variants (types G to I) *Ur-Doppelkopf*. It is certainly the oldest known form of any game of the Schafkopf family played with two packs of cards. The fact that Hammer records three variants suggests the double game had been around for some time and almost certainly dates to the late 18th century.

19th Century Developments

In the early to mid-19th century, Schafkopf was regarded as a comparatively unfashionable, simple "farmer's game" when compared with the rising stars of German Solo or Skat, which may account for its omission from early 19th century games compendia, Hammer excepted. By 1843, it had spread to northern Bavaria, where at some point it transitioned into its Bavarian form; a game played at two levels: Frage, a partnership contract in which the declarer called an Ace whose holder became his secret partner; and Solo, in which the declarer played alone against three defenders. The first mention of Schafkopf with a called Ace appears in 1849 in a poem called *Zur Erinnerung* ("Recollection"), which describes a lively pub in the Franconian village of Gräfenberg where four players gather to play Schafkopf. However, the bids of Frage and Solo and the feature of calling an Ace were not new inventions, but simply a cunning adaptation of those that already existed in German Solo as far back as Hammer (1811).

By the 1850s, Schafkopf had migrated from its Saxon homeland to many areas, but was especially common in northern Germany and among the lower classes. In 1853, Ludwig von Alvensleben reprinted Hammer almost verbatim, but added another variant which he called Wendish Schafkopf.²³ Since this game is often cited as an ancestor of Doppelkopf, it is worth summarising its key features.

Wendish Schafkopf

Von Alvensleben calls it a "combination of Solo and Schafkopf that has been much played in many areas in recent times, but like Scat and Solo, more for money than its more innocent brother". It was another Ace-Ten, point-trick game played by four players with a single pack of cards, each player receiving 8 from the deal. The trumps ranked as in Hammer's type E – except that there were now four Obers instead of two preceding the four Unters and six Bells. A crucial difference was that the partnerships were no longer fixed; instead the holders of the two top trumps – called the Old Man (*der Alte*) and Basta (*die Baste*) – formed a team, but were not allowed to reveal this except by the play of the cards. Moreover, a player was dealt both matadors could either play alone or declare a Solo and call an Ace of any side suit. Oddly, a Solo was not played alone; instead the holder of the called Ace became the declarer's partner, but was not allowed to reveal this. Each hand was paid up at the end either



The *Alte* and *Baste* from a facsimile 1832 *Schwerdterkarte* pack.

Cards © ASS Altenburger.

²³ Von Alvensleben, L. (1853). *Encyclopädie der Spiele*. Leipzig: Otto Wigand. pp. 479–481.

singly, doubly (for Schneider) or fourfold (for Schwarz). There was also a three-hand version that we need not concern ourselves with here.

It now ought to be clear that any claim Wendish Schafkopf has to be the ancestor of Doppelkopf is quite tenuous. For a start it is not attested until several decades after Hammer's nine versions of Schafkopf had been published, including his three variants with a double pack. Moreover, Wendish Schafkopf only contains two Doppelkopf features not already found in Hammer: variable partnerships determined either by the distribution of the two matadors or by the calling of an Ace; and the option for a player with both matadors to play alone. But we have seen that both these features existed in German Solo when Hammer published its first rules alongside those of Ur-Doppelkopf.

A fly in the ointment is the claim in 1882 by Georgens & Georgens that "the original form of Schafkopf is Wendish Schafkopf" which is followed by a brief description of Hammer's type A.²⁴ He appears to have misread, and in some cases inaccurately, borrowed from Anton's slightly strange account – of which more in a moment.

However, the myth that Wendish Schafkopf is the progenitor of Doppelkopf may stem from remarks by post-war authors such as Braun (1966) that Doppelkopf "is similar in many ways to Wendish Schafkopf" and Gööck (1967) that it is "similar in structure to Wendish Schafkopf..."²⁵ In 1987, Kopp goes even further and suggests that "a good 100 years ago" to the 1880s (perhaps influenced by Georgens & Georgens). Doppelkopf, he reckons, was probably created by "a resourceful person [who] had the idea of playing Wendish Schafkopf with two packs of cards shuffled together."²⁶ What began as speculation is increasingly assumed by later authors to be fact. For example, Pieper and Schmidt (1994) state that Doppelkopf "emerged in 1900 when a keen card player had the idea of playing Wendish Schafkopf with two packs"; Kastner and Folkvord (2005) call Doppelkopf an "elaboration of Wendish Schafkopf" and Mala (2005) tells us that "Doppelkopf developed from a variant of Schafkopf, Wendish Schafkopf..."²⁷ Needless to say, no evidence or argument is produced to back up these claims, which remain baseless. The idea of playing the game with a double pack occurred to a "resourceful person", not in 1900, but in the 18th century and that game was classic German Schafkopf, not the Johnny-come-lately of Wendish Schafkopf. But we are getting ahead of ourselves...

Merino

In 1861, Dr. Heinrich Hirzel published a new account of Schafkopf in *Das Hauslexikon* in which the name "Marino" is given as an alternative name.²⁸ Several 19th century authors disparage the name "Schafkopf" (literally "sheep's head" but also "sheephead" in the sense of a fool) and Merino, as it is more correctly spelt in another source, appears to have been a short-lived attempt to give *das edle Schafkopf* a more "noble" name.²⁹ Hirzel's account is not entirely clear, but he confirms that Schafkopf is very popular "in many areas, especially northern Germany" and that it was "often" played with two packs shuffled together. Thus it appears that, while the single-pack version had migrated south into Bavaria where it was considerably up-gunned, its twin-pack sibling headed north. So Doppelkopf did not emerge from Bavarian Schafkopf either – they are cousins, once removed.

Hirzel's description of four-hand Schafkopf with two packs is cursory – it appears to be the same as Hammer's version, but with confirmation that winning Schneider scores double and Schwarz three- or four-fold.³⁰ He briefly refers to the six-hand game with a double pack in which players of the two teams sit alternately around the table, probably Hammer's type H, but for the first time there is mention of a three-hand game with the double pack "often played with a straw man", the latter being a dummy hand played overt by one of the players. After 2 rounds (8 hands), the privilege of playing with the dummy is passed on.

Doppelschaf(s)kopf

²⁴ Georgens, Dr. Jan Daniel and Jeanne Marie Gayette-Georgens (1882). *Spiel und Sport*. Leipzig & Berlin: Spamer, p. 574.

²⁵ Braun, *ibid.*; Gööck, *ibid.*

²⁶ Kopp, *ibid.*

²⁷ Pieper & Schmidt, *ibid.*; Kastner & Folkvord, *ibid.*; Mala, *ibid.*

²⁸ Hirzel, Dr. Heinrich (1861). *Das Hauslexikon*. Vol. 5. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel. pp. 808–810.

²⁹ _ (1870). *Illustrierte Zeitung*, No. 54 (Jan/Jun), Leipzig. p. 334: „It is strikingly clear how the common man recently viewed the world from the acquiescence of several playing card manufacturers who have designed the highest trump in German Solo, Obsern and Merino – the Ober of Acorns – with a face resembling that of Napoleon III."

³⁰ Hirzel states that 30 points is Schneider and 60 is a tie, but he surely means that if a team scores 60 or fewer, they lose Schneider i.e. double, and that scoring 120 apiece is a tie. He does not specify what winning Schwarz is, but it is almost certainly taking all tricks.

The first known record of a new name for the twin-pack version of German Schafkopf appears in an 1873 Leipzig newspaper which mentions a Doppelschafskopf Club (*Doppelschafskopf-Gesellschaft*) as an article or feature in an annual illustrated calendar.³¹ Just six years later Friedrich Anton published a comprehensive set of rules for “Doppelschafkopf”.³²

Anton begins his account of Schafkopf with a simple restructuring of Hammer’s first six variants that bring no new information. His account of “the usual Doppelschafkopf”, however, is considerably more elaborate than Hammer’s double-pack variants. Unfortunately for our purposes, it turns out to be the three-hand version with a dummy which Anton says is more common than its four-player sibling. He then devotes over 3 pages to it, before reverting to a description of Hammer’s remaining variants for six and eight players. This three-player-plus-a-dummy offshoot of Doppelschafkopf appears to have lingered for a couple of decades before fizzling out and becoming an historical curiosity.

Apart from some new terminology and more detailed description of the old scoring system, there are no new features that indicate it is an intermediate step between German Schafkopf and modern Doppelkopf – apart, that is, from the name.

Doppelkopf at last!

The word *Doppelkopf* was in use long before it attached itself to this rather challenging card game. It typically means a double-headed creature, real or imaginary, such as the head of the Greek god Janus or an animal born with two heads. But the 1895 *Brockhaus Konversations-Lexikon* introduces another meaning, possibly for the first time: “Schafkopf can be played with one or two packs of 32 cards; in the latter case it is called Doppelkopf.” No elaboration is given.

The Early Form of Modern Doppelkopf

Despite their various names – Doppelkopf with two packs, Merino, Doppelschaf(s)kopf and finally Doppelkopf – throughout the 19th century the rules of the game remained substantially unchanged from the original twin-pack variants described by Hammer in 1811. All that was due to change.

During my research into Doppelkopf history, I was drawn to a rather unlikely source: a booklet by Walter Sirch on traditional Bavarian card games published in 2008.³³ Quite why Doppelkopf was included is a mystery; it has never been popular in Bavaria, where they have had their own quite special brand of Schafkopf since the mid-19th century that is still hugely popular today. At first glance, I thought it was little more than an account of modern Doppelkopf with the unusual addition of variations for five, six, seven and eight players. But then I noticed something much more interesting in the introduction: these rules were “taken from a book that appeared before 1914 published by Verlag Siegbert Schnurpfeil of Leipzig”. This was significant. To that point, the earliest rules for modern Doppelkopf I had uncovered were in Hülsemann’s 1927 compendium. Maddeningly there was no mention of an author or title, but a search of the international online library catalogue, WorldCat, struck gold! Sometime before 1900, Erich Walther wrote a book called *Das Schafkopfspiel: Schafkopf, Wendisch, Doppelkopf* which was published in Leipzig.³⁴ And there was one copy left: at the *Frisian Historical and Literary Centre of Tresoar* in the Netherlands. Within a week, I had a scan of it which I read with mounting excitement.

Although undated, the treatise must have been written around 1899 judging by the publication dates of other books listed on the back cover. It also appears to be written by someone who knew these games; as a result, he reveals a number of surprises. First, there is an account of German Schafkopf which, although largely reflecting Hammer’s type A, describes a new variant that I have not seen elsewhere, in which Hearts is a preference suit i.e. a player announcing “couleur” wins the bidding regardless of the number of trumps he may have. There are three other variants: two look like Hammer’s type C and D, and the third like type E but with four Obers and four Unters as *Wenzels*.

³¹ _ (1873). “ ” in *Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel und die mit ihm verwandten Geschäftszweige*. No. 132. 11 June 1837. Leipzig. p. 2095. The Fugen-„s” is optional as is common in German.

³² Anton, Friedrich (1879). *Encyclopädie der Spiele*, 3rd edn. Leipzig: Otto Wigand. pp. 475–479.

³³ Sirch, Walter (2008). *Vom Alten zum Zwanzger: Bayrische Kartenspiele für Kinder und Erwachsene – neu entdeckt*. Traunstein: Bayerischer Trachtenverband, pp. 15–20.

³⁴ Walther, Erich (c. 1899). *Das Schafkopfspiel: Schafkopf, Wendisch, Doppelkopf*. Leipzig: Siegmund Schnurpfeil.

The second surprise is that, in his account of both Wendish Schafkopf and Doppelkopf, the Tens rank high for the first time; in all earlier descriptions of these two games they rank low.

The third surprise is that there are significant changes to the way Doppelkopf is played compared with all earlier rule sets. First, the Obers of Hearts and Bells are added to the permanent trumps, raising the total from 22 to 24. Second, partnerships are no longer fixed, but determined by the owners of the two Obers of Acorns who form a team whose composition may only be disclosed by the play of the cards. This results in a third change: a player dealt both Obers of Acorns has the choice of calling a partner by naming a Deuce or playing a silent trump Solo. Finally, *any* player can play a solo in any suit by announcing it before play.

With these changes and the approach of the first of two world wars, the scene is set for the explosion of a rather mundane game into one with a kaleidoscope of features that makes Doppelkopf what it is today. In Walther's treatise, we have the earliest set of rules for modern Doppelkopf. Were they influenced by Wendish Schafkopf which introduced these features in the mid-19th century? I think it is more likely that they were imported from German Solo. Before the First World War, Solo was the pre-eminent card game in north Germany and highly popular elsewhere too. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it had influenced Skat and combined with other games to create Obsern, the peculiarly Bavarian form of Schafkopf and, of course, Wendish Schafkopf itself. But whichever way it came, it was Solo that was behind the transition from the Hammer's Ur-Doppelkopf to the early form of modern Doppelkopf of Erich Walther. In Walther's account, the game may be played by four to eight players. The four-hand game is described here.

Doppelkopf – Walther (1899)

Two packs of 24 cards are used each comprising the Deuce, Ten, King, Ober, Unter and Nine in each of four suits: Acorns, Leaves (Green), Hearts (Red) and Bells. The cards have the same Ace-Ten values as in Ur-Doppelkopf. There are 24 permanent trumps, each represented twice and ranking as in Hammer's type I:



Before the game begins, players draw cards and the one with the highest deals first; thereafter the deal rotates clockwise. Each player receives 12 cards dealt in three rounds of 4 cards, forehand receiving cards first.³⁵

The two players with the Obers of Acorns – the Old Men (*die Alten*) – form a team and play against the other two. They must not identify themselves; instead the composition of teams may only be disclosed through the play of the cards. A player dealt both Old Men may either play a silent Solo in Bells against the other three or, before play starts, may name a Deuce to “take with him” (*mitnehmen*), whereupon the first player to play the named Deuce becomes his partner.³⁶ The latter will normally lead this Deuce as soon as possible to clarify the teams. In addition, any player, regardless of whether an Ober of Acorns is held, may announce a Solo in any suit before play begins and then play alone against the others. If two players want to play a Solo, the first in bidding order has priority.

Forehand leads and play is clockwise. As in all other forms of Doppelkopf, Whist rules are followed and, as usual, if two identical cards are played to the same trick, the first outranks the second.

The game is won singly with 121 points in tricks; double or *Schneider*, with 180 points; and *Schwarz* if all tricks are taken.

Before the game, players ante an agreed amount into a pot – usually 1 Mark 5 pfennigs we are told. In a partnership game, each winner draws 5 pfennigs from the pot if the game was won singly, 10 pfennigs if won with *Schneider* and 15 pfennigs if won with *Schwarz*. If the team with the Old Men lose, the winners draw an extra 5 pfennigs on top of



Das Schafkopfspiel, Erich Walther (1899).

³⁵ Walther does not use the term “forehand” but Hammer did and so do modern authors. I employ it for brevity.

³⁶ This is the Wedding (*Hochzeit*) of modern Doppelkopf.

the winnings for the single game or *Schneider*. Solos are paid directly from the players' own pockets. If the soloist wins singly, he receives 5 pfennigs from each player, 10 pfennigs for *Schneider* and 15 for *Schwarz*. If the soloist loses, he pays the same to each defender.

Walther's 1899 account can lay claim to being the first published rules of modern Doppelkopf. After decades of stability, the game had changed from a relatively pedestrian affair into one brimming with uncertainty and new possibilities. Although greatly added to since then, all four of Walther's innovations above remain a fundamental part of modern Doppelkopf; the only ephemeral elements being the loss of the *brummen* rule and the method of choosing a partner by calling an Ace.

The Evolution of Modern Doppelkopf

In Walther, the foundations of modern Doppelkopf were laid. Its evolution now proceeded rapidly, fuelled by the two world wars; the first driving its popularity and encouraging its spread southwards and westwards towards the great conurbations of the Rhine, Ruhr and Main; the second increasing its reach and consolidating its rules.

Doppelkopf - Hülsemann (1927)

The next iteration of this new form of Doppelkopf was published by Robert Hülsemann in 1927.³⁷ Alongside Skat, the game had risen to great prominence among soldiers during the First World War and this may account for its meteoric rise because, as Hülsemann emphatically states, "among games played by four players in Germany today, Doppelkopf is indisputably first and foremost"; meanwhile "Schafkopf... has almost completely died out [having been] replaced by Doppelkopf." With an insight that others failed to notice, he goes on to confirm that Doppelkopf is "extension of the old German card game, Schafkopf..." Moreover, he tells us that in parts of north Germany it also went under the name of *Juristenspiel* because it was popular in legal circles.³⁸

Hülsemann's account follows Walther's but adds the following new features:

- French suits. French-suited cards are described for the first time; Queens and Jacks replace Obers and Unters and Diamonds replace Bells as the trump suit.³⁹
- Fox. Capturing the Fox (♦ A) from the opposition earns a bonus.
- If the players with the two Queens of Clubs played them to the same trick, they incurred a penalty unless the second one was unguarded and had to be played.
- Calling a Partner. The player with both Old Ones may call an Ace as before, e.g. "The Ace of Hearts is with me!" (*Herz-As geht mit!*) or alternatively say "the winner of the 1st, 2nd, etc., trick is with me!"
- Doubling. Doubling is now common, the defenders being free to call "contra" until the 6th trick.
- *Armut*. A player with up to 3 trumps could offer them unseen to each player in turn and before play. A player who accepted them, returned 3 cards in exchange, formed a team and played for double stakes.⁴⁰
- Complex Scoring. A five-tier scoring system appears for the first time, heralding that of the modern game. The team that scored 121 points won singly, with 151 double, 181 triple, 221 quadruple and 240 (i.e. *Schwarz*) fivefold. If the team with the Old Ones lost, the payments were incremented by one (e.g. a double win became a triple win). Ditto for a lost Fox or buzzed Old One. The basic tariff was typically 5 or 10 pfennigs. If the teams tied on 120, the Old Ones lost.
- Joker. As a variant, a Joker or one of the ♦ 9s is made the highest card.⁴¹



The Foxes earn a bonus if captured.

Cards © ASS Altenburger.

Hülsemann mentions three variants which need not concern us here: the first is a three-hand game with a dummy, heralded by Anton, which is only played "if the fourth man is missing"; the second is an eight-player version with 64 cards, the equivalent of Hammer's type I; and the third is a three-hand Doppelkopf with 40 cards,

³⁷ Hülsemann, Robert (1927). *Das Buch der Spiele: für Familie und Gesellschaft*. 1st edn. Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, pp. 164–168.

³⁸ A *Jurist* being a lawyer.

³⁹ This is unsurprising if it was mainly played in the north, where French packs had been common for over a century.

⁴⁰ *Armut* is the modern term; Hülsemann does name this bid.

⁴¹ This is clearly the forerunner of the ♥ 10 – the *Dulle* – becoming the highest card in the modern game. In Hülsemann, if a Joker is used, a ♦ 9 is removed; alternatively one of the latter is marked by e.g. crossing it through with a blue pencil.

12 being dealt to each player and a skat of 4 to the table, available to the first player in turn order who picks it up to exchange with and play solo against the other two.

Doppelkopf – Thoenen (1931)

One temporary effect of variable partnerships decided by the distribution of the two top matadors was that players had to choose between ‘honourable’ or ‘strict’ rules and ‘wild’ rules. Under the former, a player with an Old One had to lead trumps in order to flush out the partnerships, typically leading a trump Ace or Ten knowing his partner would take it with her Queen of Clubs or, alternatively, leading the Old One in the hope that his partner would smear it. Under wild rules, no such compulsion existed and players initially played blind, much as they do today.

This concept appears in Thoenen (1931) along with more innovations:

- *Tolle*. For the first time we learn that “in many areas” the two red (♥) 10s, known as the *Tollen*, are the commanding cards.⁴²
- Short Doppelkopf. Often the 9s were dropped, leaving a pack of 40 cards.

The acceptance of the *Tolle* as the top trump during the interwar years sealed the fate of Doppelkopf played with strict rules, since the possession of the Old Ones no longer guaranteed two easy tricks for their holders and the ability to lead a ‘fat’ card (Ace or Ten) without risk to determine partnerships. Wild rules were here to stay!

Thoenen’s scoring reverts to original three-tier system. Each player anted 1 Mark to a common pot at the outset. If the Old Ones won singly they drew 5 pfennigs, *Schneider* 10 pfennigs and *Schwarz* 15 pfennigs each. If they lost, the defenders drew double those amounts from the pot. A trump Solo was worth 20 pfennigs paid directly to or from each defender.⁴³ Like Hülsemann, Thoenen describes three-hand Doppelkopf played with a dummy.



The *Tollers* became top trumps in the inter-war years. Cards © ASS Altenburger.

Doppelkopf – Meister (1933)

In 1933, Piatnik sponsored a little booklet called *Rommé-Doppelkopf*, written by Friedrich Meister which may, incidentally, be the first German description of the German version of Rummy, which is known in that country as Rommé.⁴⁴ On reading the introduction which describes Doppelkopf as being “mostly played with German cards”, we could be forgiven for expecting this to be a regurgitation of 19th century rules, but it may just reflect a Saxon viewpoint, as the booklet was published in Leipzig where German-suited cards still prevailed then.

Meister’s basic rules are little different to those of Thoenen, although suit Solos are not standard and must be pre-agreed. *Armut* is available to a player with one or two trumps only, not three as in Hülsemann and a silent Solo is called a ‘secret’ Solo (*Heimliches Solo*). Much more interesting are his optional features:

- Unter Solo. Forerunner of the modern Jack Solo, this is a contract in which only Unters are trumps.
- Compulsory Solo (*Zwangs-Solo*). Sometimes there is a rule that each player must play at least one Solo during a game. If not done by the time the pot is empty, the player must play a Solo regardless of his cards.
- *Tolle*. The top card is usually the ♥10 as in Thoenen, however, since this often results in the ♥A being captured, the 9 of Bells is frequently used instead, whereupon it is called the *Joker* and not the *Tolle*.
- *Karlchen Müller*. Making his debut is Charlie Miller – the feat of taking the last trick with the Unter of Acorns.
- Sheep Racing (*Hammelrennen*). As soon as there only 2 points or 10 pfennigs left in the pot, players may agree to play for individually for the remaining stake. The one who takes nearest to 60 points in tricks wins.
- Complex Scoring. Many players adopt a five-tier system, similar to that of Hülsemann.
- Penalties. In addition to the 5 pfennig tariff for losing the Fox, if both Old Ones fall together in the last trick their owners each pay 5 pfennigs.

⁴² *Tolle* is the singular and pronounced “toller”; *Tollen* is plural. The term is reminiscent of Karnöffel, in which the 8 of Leaves was the *Tolle*, or Brusbart in which it was the *Toller Hund*. The word probably means “mad” or “wild” in this context and may refer to the apparently crazy elevation of a low card to matador status.

⁴³ Since this is four times the basic tariff, presumably a Solo won *Schneider* earned 40 pfennigs and a *Schwarz* 80 pfennigs.

⁴⁴ Meister, Friedrich (1933). *Rommé-Doppelkopf*. Leipzig: Hachmeister & Thal.

The introduction of variable partnerships and solo games into Doppelkopf, first described by Walther, was the catalyst for the experimentation and rapid evolution of that followed, a process that was no doubt boosted by the events of the Great War. But it was the Second World War that was to see the plethora of new features codified for the first time.

Doppelkopf – Klinke (1941)

When I first cast my net to find out what was known about this fascinating game, I came across an interesting article in a Westphalian newspaper which lamented that “even the German Doppelkopf Association in Brunswick and the German Playing Card Museum in Leinfelden-Echterdingen regret that next to nothing is known about the history of Doppelkopf.”⁴⁵ It went on to describe how German military surgeon Karl Klinke, who served on the Eastern Front and at the English Channel during the war, became so frustrated by the arguments and whingeing over the rules of the game that he wrote its rules down and had them published, accompanied by amusing pictures drawn by medical corporal Zürnich, in a small booklet for the benefit of the troops. Entitled *Doppelkopf das Spiel der Soldaten und aller Kartenfreunde* (“Doppelkopf: the Game of the Soldiers and all Card Playing Friends”),⁴⁶ it “didn’t help the Greater German Empire to victory, but did meet a general need.”⁴⁷

This priceless booklet has been since reprinted by the DDV who, when they heard I was researching the game, kindly sent me a free copy. Penned by someone who knew the game intimately and wrote well, it is a clear exposition that may well have helped to stabilise the game after several decades of experimentation. Although the evolution of Doppelkopf did not stop with Klinke’s treatise, it represents a major milestone and probably the first attempt to codify the rules. Many core features of the modern game are there, in addition to some interesting lesser known variations. Little is left to chance. Since readers can avail themselves of a copy from the DDV for no more than €5, I will restrict myself to listing its key features and terms:

- Cards. Both French- and German-suited cards are acceptable, but the description is based on the former.
- Contracts. Klinke recognises two main forms: the basic game and the Solo.
- *Dulle*. The ♥10s are permanent top trumps and called *Dullen* instead of *Tolle*.⁴⁸
- Foxes (*Füchsen*). Also called Wild Piglets (*Läufel*).
- Calling a Partner. Both methods – calling an Ace or naming a trick – are used.
- Modern Scoring. In a refinement of the five-tier scoring introduced by Hülsemann, the players with the Old Ones need 121 to win singly, 151 to win double, 181 triple, 211 fourfold and 240 fivefold. However the defenders only need 120, 150, 180, 210 and 240 respectively.
- Contra and Re. The defenders may double with “Contra” up to the 5th trick and the declarers with “Re” up to the 9th trick. Players could double further by calling “Stag” (*Herr Hirsch*), but a limit of eightfold the basic win was set regardless of the point score.⁴⁹
- Tariff. 5 or 10 pfennigs.
- Queen and Jack Solos. In addition to the usual Suit Solo in any suit, players could bid a Queen Solo (*Damensolo*), in which only the Queens were trumps; or a Jack Solo (*Bubensolo*) in which Jacks were trumps.
- Compulsory Solo. To “spice up the game”, players had to play at least 3 compulsory Solos – a Queen Solo, a Jack Solo and a Suit Solo – during the session.
- Double Solos. Players could agree to play one or more Solos at double tariff as compulsory Solos.
- Bidding. Before play began, the dealer asked “All fine?” (*Alles gesund?*) whereupon players answered “Fine” (*Gesund*) in turn unless they wanted to bid a Solo in which case they bid “Wait” (*Halt*) and the relevant Solo announcement. If anyone bid, the bidding could go around again. The higher ranking game took precedence. If all announced “Fine”, a normal game was played.
- Sheep Race. As in Meister (1933), a sheep race could be announced with 2 points (10 or 20 pfennigs) left to play for. As well as winning by scoring the nearest to 60, a player could also win by taking 120 points or more.

Doppelkopf Today

⁴⁵ Westfälische Nachrichten (2011). *Wer genschert, ist ein Schwein* by Hans Lüttmann. Accessed 23 November 2023. <https://www.wn.de/muensterland/kreis-steinfurt/greven/wer-genschert-ist-ein-schwein-2336780?npg=>

⁴⁶Klinke, Karl (1941). *Doppelkopf das Spiel der Soldaten und aller Kartenfreunde*. Reprint by Horst Klein, Duisburg.

⁴⁷ Westfälische Nachrichten, *ibid*.

⁴⁸ *Dulle* is simply the Low German form of *Tolle*.

⁴⁹ This is the forerunner of the elaborate doubling process used today.

Having more or less reached maturity by the mid-20th century, Doppelkopf has naturally evolved more slowly in the last 70 years. One or two new optional rules have been added, such as the second *Tolle* ‘eating’ the first and scoring a point for ‘Doppelkopf’, the feat of taking 40 or more points in one trick. Of course a major stabilising factor has been the oversight of the DDV, founded on 27 March 1982, who have introduced a comprehensive set of standard rules which I recently translated with the help of John McLeod and hope may be made available by the DDV soon. However, like Bavarian Schafkopf, there is a multitude of optional contracts, bonuses and other features that spice up and add considerable variety to the game as played locally. The standard rules are designed for tournament use and are necessarily very detailed, including such things as infringements, complaints and unsporting behaviour as well as the method of scorekeeping. They are readily available from the DDV, so I will only give an overview of the key elements here.

Standard Doppelkopf

The standard game is played by 4 players using a double pack comprising 48 cards with the usual Ace-Ten ranking and scoring as before. Permanent trumps are, in order:

♥ 10, ♠ Q, ♠ Q, ♥ Q, ♦ Q, ♣ J, ♠ J, ♥ J, ♦ J, ♦ A, ♦ 10, ♦ K, ♦ 9.

There are two kinds of contract – the Normal Game and the Solo – and four types of Solo: Suit Solo, Queen Solo, Jack Solo and Ace Solo. The Ace Solo is the only one not recognised by Klinke (1941); there are no trumps and cards rank in their natural suits in Ace-Ten order.

A match consists of eight rounds of 4 hands each making a total of 24 hands. During each match, players must play one Compulsory Solo – which may be any of the four types. A Compulsory Solo left to the end becomes a Forced Solo which must be played, regardless of the cards a player is dealt, and cannot be overcalled.

The team with the two Old Ones is the “Re Team” and their opponents are the “Contra Team”. In a Solo, the soloist is the Re Team and his three opponents are the Contra Team. Announcing “Re” as the Re Team or “Contra” as the Contra Team within the specified window of play, raises the game value. Subsequent announcements such as “no 90” (meaning in this case that the Contra Team will not score 90 points) raise the game value further. There is a single round of bidding much as in Klinke (1941). Players may announce “Wait” to bid a Compulsory Solo, a Voluntary Solo or a Wedding (*Hochzeit*).⁵⁰ A Wedding may be silent, in which case it is effectively a secret Diamond Solo, or announced. If announced, the player who, within the first 3 tricks, takes the first trick not won by the bidder, becomes the Re partner. If the bidder takes the first 3 tricks himself, the game proceeds as a Diamond Solo. There is no option to call an Ace to determine one’s partner.



The team with the Queens of Clubs form the Re Team in modern Doppelkopf. Cards © ASS Altenburger.

Forehand leads and rules of play are as in Whist. As before, if two identical cards are played to one trick, the first outranks the second.

The Re Team normally win if they take 121 or more points unless “Contra” was announced in which case they only need 120 points. The Contra Team normally win if they take at least 120 card points, except if they announced “Contra” in which case they need 121. If either team announced “no 90”, “no 60”, “no 30” or “Schwarz”, they must make 151, 181, 211 or all tricks respectively to win. If a team makes the number of points their opponents said they would not make, they win regardless e.g. if “no 60” was announced by their opponents and they score 60 or more, they have won. If both teams fail to reach their respective targets neither has won and only bonus points are awarded.

Each player wins or loses game points based the scale of the win and any bonuses. A brief summary follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Win | 1 point |
| • Re or Contra | + 2 |
| • Under 90, 60, 30 scored | + 1 for each level achieved |
| • Schwarz | + 1 |

⁵⁰ A Wedding is simply the option introduced by Hülsemann (1927) whereby a player with both Old Ones may state that the player taking the first trick becomes his partner.

- Successful announcements of “no 90”, “no 60”, “no 30”, “Schwarz” + 1 for each level achieved
- Winning “against the Queens of Clubs” (= Contra Team win) + 1
- Doppelkopf (making a trick with ≥40 points) + 1
- Capturing an opponent’s ♦ A (Fox) + 1
- Winning the last trick with ♣J (Charlie) + 1

If an announcement fails, the points go to the opposition. Points won by one team are deducted from the other so that the result is always zero.

The rules mention variations for five, six or seven players. If five play, the dealer sits out and a match lasts for 30 hands.

Variations

It can be seen that many of the variations that emerged during the period of great experimentation have been incorporated into the standard rules. Nevertheless social Doppelkopf has continued to grow and evolve, albeit perhaps at a slower pace. Among the variations adopted in club and social circles are additional contracts such as:

- Queen-Jack Solo. Only Queens and Jacks are trumps
- Köhler. All Kings, Queens and Jacks are trumps
- Plain Suit Solo. There is one trump suit and no matadors; Queens and Jacks rank in their natural suits.

There are also numerous optional features that players may agree, such as:

- Sharp Doppelkopf. Played with 40 cards, the 9s being removed.
- Reddeal (*Schmeißen*). A player with e.g. five 9s may insist the cards are thrown up and redealt.
- Armut. As in the earlier rules, a player with up to 3 trumps may offer them for exchange and partner with the player who accepts them.
- Piggies (*Schweine*). If a player has both ♦ A, they become the top trumps.
- Goose. If the Goose (♦ K) is captured by the opposition with the Fox (♦ A), this earns a bonus point.
- Sheep Racing (Hammelrennen). As in Meister (1933) and Klinke (1941).

Doppelkopf has certainly come a long way from its humble origins.

Conclusion

The history of Doppelkopf turns out to be at least a century older than we had previously thought, emerging as a twin-pack variant of Schafkopf in late 18th century Saxony and being described in detail in three versions as early as 1811. Played mainly for beer, this early version, which we may call Ur-Doppelkopf, had fixed partnerships, 22 trumps, a simple scoring system and no special bonuses. During the 19th century this relatively sedate game spread northwards from its native Saxony and became more popular in the north of Germany than its single-pack parent, becoming known eventually as Doppelschafkopf, but with no real change to its mode of play. Towards the end of the century, probably influenced by the success of other games that had borrowed aspects of German Solo, it switched over to variable partnerships, decided by location of its two highest trumps, or, in the event that they both fell to one player, by the calling of a Deuce. Moreover, any player could now bid a Suit Solo and play alone against the others. The new game was now sufficiently distinct to deserve a new name. Modern Doppelkopf was born and Walther (1899) was the first to describe it.

The intervention of the First World War saw a huge rise in the popularity of the game, alongside Skat, and this resulted in it spreading south and west. Encouraged by the freedom of changing partnerships and solo games, it is likely that it also underwent experimentation during the war years and this continued apace during the 1920s and 1930s with the addition of many new features such as the promotion of the ♥ 10s – the *Tollen* – to become the highest trumps, additional contracts such the Unter Solo and *Armut*, as well as bonuses for such feats as capturing the Fox (♦ A) or making a Charlie Miller by winning the last trick with the ♣J. Many of these new features were consolidated into a very comprehensive and clear set of rules by wartime surgeon, Karl Klinke (1941), who also introduced modern bidding and scoring systems. This, and the creation of the German Doppelkopf Association in 1982, brought stability to the game, enabling the establishment of standard rules that are essential for tournaments, but also form a common baseline for the game in pubs, clubs and in the home without stifling local creativity. Like its southern cousin, Bavarian Schafkopf, social Doppelkopf has a gamut of additional contracts and features that can be tailored to players’ tastes and circumstances. Like that game, too, it must rank among the best and most popular of European card games.