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ChessBase

Scachs d'amor: The poem that first portrayed the modern rules of chess

by Sergio Ernesto Negri

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3/16/2020 – A poem written in Valencian by Francesc de Castellví, Bernat Fenollar and Narcís de Vinyoles was the first literary work to describe a game with the modern rules — the queen could move multiple squares in all directions and the scope of the bishops widened importantly. SERGIO NEGRI tells us the story. | Image: A chessboard illustrated in Jacobus de Cessolis' "De ludo scachorum".



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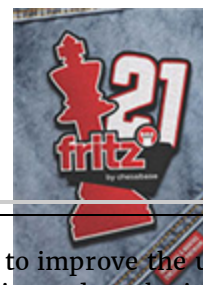
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Part 1: Introduction

This is the first of a three-part series. In Part 2 we will present the game as it was described in the poem, and in Part 3 we will dig deeper into the poem's historical relevance.

In *Hobra intitulada scachs d'amor feta per don Franci de Castellvi e Narcis Vinyoles e Mossen Fenollar*, frequently abbreviated as *Scachs d'amor*, a chess game with the modern rules is portrayed in the Western world for the first time in history.

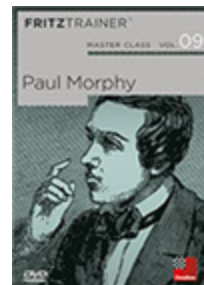
The poem is written in Valencian, and was discovered as a thirteen-page codex at the chapel of the *Palau de Barcelona* in 1905 by Ignacio Casanovas (1872–1936), a Spanish philosopher. The original was later lost, but a photograph of the text has been kept at the *Biblioteca Cataluña* in Barcelona.

It is not completely certain when it was written. Firstly, it was thought to be composed in 1497, although new research points to 1475 as the correct date of its composition — this date was proposed by José Antonio Garzón Roger (b. 1963), a Spanish researcher.

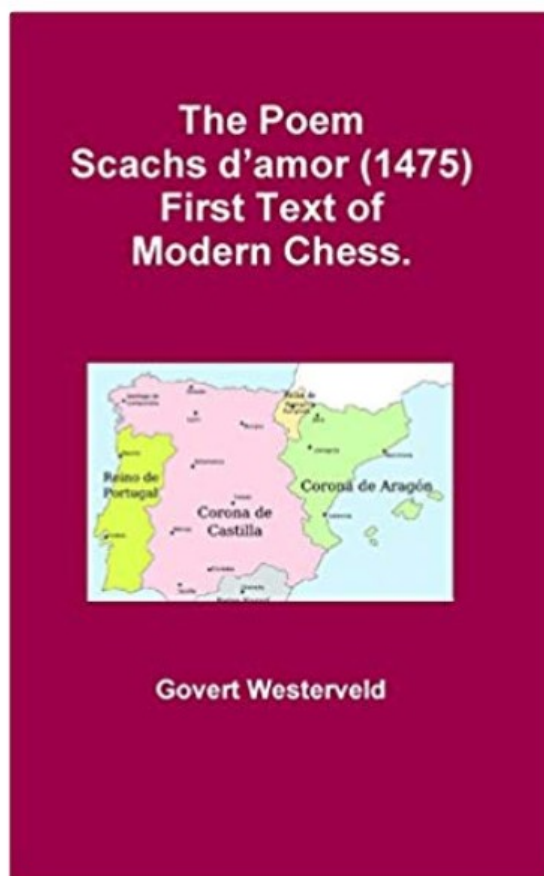
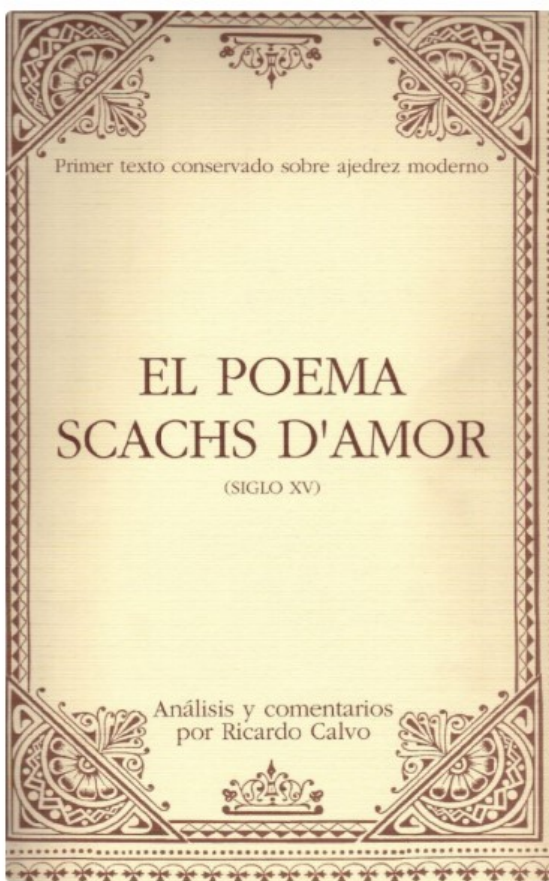
Garzón Roger's colleague and compatriot Ricardo Calvo Minguez (1943–2002) published in 1999 *El poema Scachs d'amor (siglo XV), primer texto conservado sobre ajedrez moderno* (Madrid: Editorial Jaque XXI), which turned out to be a real revelation. More recently, Govert Westerveld (b. 1948), a Dutch independent researcher living in Spain, also published a book on the subject.

Master Class Vol.9: Paul Morphy

Learn about one of the greatest geniuses in the history of chess! Paul Morphy's career (1837-1884) lasted only a few years and yet he managed to defeat the best chess players of his time.



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Scachs d'amor was composed by Francesc (Franci) de Castellví y Vic (c. 1435–1506), Narcís de Vinyoles (c. 1442–1517) and Mossén (Bernat de) Fenollar (1438–1516), three well-known Valencian public figures. Castellví was an advisor in the court of King Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516); Vinyoles was married to Brianda de Santàngel, niece of the banker Luis de Santàngel who financed the voyage of Christopher Columbus; Fenollar was an abbot at the Valencian Cathedral and used to host poetic gatherings with notorious public figures from his community.

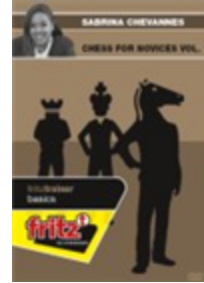
We can interpret that the roles of the noblemen in the game corresponded to a certain extent with their roles in real life. Castellví was a well-known chess player, so it makes sense for him to win the contest; Vinyoles was an influential lawyer and poet, so he was probably the one writing most of the verses in the poem; and Fenollar was an abbot and a *kapellmeister* in the court of king Ferdinand, so he met the requirements to serve as arbiter, one that would do his job rigorously and with utmost fairness.

The late 15th century was very important for chess not only due to this poem, as the royal game was also portrayed in other literary works. In Italy, Luca Pacioli (1447–1517) published *Ludo scacchorum*, which includes illustrations that might have been designed or perhaps even drawn by Leonardo da Vinci; in the Spanish kingdom, meanwhile, two texts that served as cornerstones for the spreading of chess appeared: *Llibre dels jochs partits dels schacs en nombre de 100* by Francesch Vicent (c. 1479–1523), published in Valencia in 1495 and now sadly lost,

and *Repetición de amores y arte de ajedrez* by Luis Ramírez de Lucena (c. 1465–1530), published in Salamanca in 1497. We use cookies and comparable technologies to provide certain functions, to improve the user experience and to offer personalized content. Depending on their intended use, analysis cookies and marketing cookies may be used in addition to technically required cookies. Here you can make detailed settings or revoke your consent (if necessary partially) with effect for the future. Further information can be found in our data protection declaration.

Chess for Novices Vol.1

This DVD is for anyone who knows the rules of chess but would like to be able to improve their game with some specific tactics and strategies. It builds on the basic principles of chess that should have already been learnt.



These three texts and *Scachs d'amor* all portray chess with its modern rules (Pacioli's *Ludo scacchorum* includes games that follow the rules used in the past as well), if we adhere to three criteria:

1. The inclusion of the queen instead of the exotic vizier, which was present in the previous Eastern prototypes.
2. The empowerment of the queen, which went from moving one square diagonally to moving as many squares as it could vertically, horizontally and diagonally.
3. The more dynamic role of the bishop, which used to move two squares diagonally skipping the one in between and now moved diagonally as many squares as it could.

In *Scachs d'amor* castling is not yet a possibility. However, the *en passant* rule and the demand to let the opponent know his or her king is being checked are already included.

The title of the text (Chess of Love) is somewhat suggestive yet ambiguous. If we consider the fact that the game was played between two noblemen, Franci de Castellví and Narcis Vinyoles (Mossen Fonellar was the arbiter), the title might be hinting at some sort of homoerotic tension, which would not have been welcomed at all during the Inquisition era.

Instead, we should relativize the interpretation and consider that maybe the "love" in the title is directed to the act of playing chess, as it arouses devotion from those playing the game, no matter their genre. Or, even better, as the chess players were merely actors representing Mars and Venus — under the supervision of Mercury — the act of love might signify a conflict between the god of



war, sexuality and virility and the goddess of love, fertility and beauty.

(Image: Bernat Fenollar)

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It is also noteworthy that the contenders were identified with the colours red and green, which correspond perfectly with the colours of the celestial bodies they represent — Mars and Venus respectively.

As Mercury is also present, we notice that all the planets closest to the Sun are taking part. The Earth is also depicted, as the place where the game takes place. In fact, the confrontation is set up when Mars, which represents Love in the poem, and Venus, which represents Glory, meet in a temple, a place that is associated with the firmament. Mercury is also present in the meeting.

One of the main reasons for which this poem is considered to have been conceived in 1475 has to do with the fact that on the 30th of May of said year an astral conjunction made the three planets — Mars, Venus and Mercury — visible from the Earth.

Other astronomical events that took place that year could have also influenced the authors. On April 5th, a solar eclipse hid the Sun during 2 minutes and 8 seconds, while a partial solar eclipse was seen on September 30th. Apparently, as the poem reflects in its verses, it was a time to pay special attention to the happenings in the sky.

Translation from Spanish: Carlos Colodro

Links

- Full text (in Spanish)
- More articles on chess history

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Sergio Ernesto Negri
Sergio was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is Master FIDE, who developed studies on the relationship of chess with culture and history.

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News

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Sergio Negri 3/21/2020 09:16

Silvia Méndez, an Argentine expert in the reading of the skies, a certified astrologer since 1989 and a personal friend, analyzed punctually the case of the conjunction of the 3 planets (Mercury, Mars and Venus) determining that, for the year 1475, this situation it was only verified on April 3, 1475, and that this phenomenon could be visualized in the northern hemisphere.

It is very possible that the decoupling of dates, with respect to those given in other sources (which supported this work), is due to the fact that in that century the Julian Calendar still ruled (Julius Caesar adopted it in 46 BC.), which was modified in the 16th century by Pope Gregory XIII (1502-1585), becoming effective from October 4, 1582 (between the two there is an approximate difference of ten days).

As for the astronomical precision required, it should be borne in mind that Scachs d'amor does not have a precise publication date, and that the fact that it was conceived in 1475 is the subject of speculation, being possible that this has happened in another year very close.

In any case, beyond the position of the planets in the sky, we must take the reference made on the subject, preferably in its metaphorical sense.



Sergio Negri 3/19/2020 04:21

Thank you.

Regarding the subject of the relationship of Leonardo da Vinci (and Luca Pacioli!), with chess, I published an article that is only available in Spanish.

You can check it in

<https://ajedrezconmaestros.com/2019/05/16/el-genio-de-da-vinci-se-reflejo-tambien-en-el-espejo-del-ajedrez-parte-1/> y

<https://ajedrezconmaestros.com/2019/05/17/the-genius-of-da-vinci-is-reflected-also-in-the-chess-mirror-part-2/>.

Greetings



melante 3/19/2020 05:42

Very nice piece, thanks Sergio!

About the Queen modern style movement, it is usually mentioned it originated from Spain but I read there was new evidence, found a few years ago, it was one of the many inventions by Leonardo. Is there any actual agreement on this today by chess historians and scholars? Thanks!



adbennet 3/18/2020 10:21

I'm interested in the conjunction of Mars, Venus, and Mercury on 1475.05.30. Is this mentioned in contemporary accounts? Or is it calculated? The following page does not mention any two-planet conjunctions on that date (I suppose a three-planet conjunction would also count as a two-planet conjunction), although I cannot say whether the calculations are accurate. The page shows

Venus and Mars were within four degrees on 1475.07.28.

<http://astroclub.tau.ac.il/ephem/PlanetsConj/index.php?Year=1475>



Sergio Negri 3/18/2020 07:32

Thank you very much for your interest.

The opportunity publication of the articles is a decision of the editors.

They tell me that the following ones corresponding to my research on the origin of chess, will most likely continue appearing at a later date.

If it is of interest to you, the complete work can be consulted in Spanish at

https://es.chessbase.com/portals/all/2018/ESP_2018/Negri/origenes-ajedrez.pdf

BKnight2003 3/17/2020 08:04

Hi, Sergio Negri! Excelent article, as always.

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Sergio Negri 3/17/2020 07:51

Thank you so much for the comments.

In fact, when the god Mars is mentioned, the reference is to Passion and not to the concept of Love, which, in another part of the text, is said to correspond to Venus.

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adbennet 3/17/2020 06:18

" ... Mars, which represents Love in the poem, and Venus, which represents Glory ..."



Surely that is a misinterpretation? Mars was the god of war, Venus was the goddess of love. If "Chess of Love" refers to a victory by Venus (love) over

Mars (war), and glory therefore equated with love rather than war, that would be an interesting morality fable. How did the depicted game in fact end?



Mr Toad 3/17/2020 01:26

So we again come up against the mystery of how and why chess is played with a "queen instead of the exotic vizier".

Consulting WIKI/Queen_(chess) provides some insights into this 'new' form of chess - or "madwoman's chess" as some apparently preferred to call it!! Thus:

"During the 15th century the queen's move took its modern form as a combination of the move of the rook and the current move of the bishop. Starting from Spain, this new version - called "queen's chess" (in Italian, scacchi de la donna), or pejoratively "madwoman's chess" (scacchi alla rabiosa) - spread throughout Europe rapidly, partly due to the advent of the printing press and the popularity of new books on chess. The new rules faced a backlash in some quarters, ranging from anxiety over a powerful female warrior figure to frank abuse against women in general."