

The Classical Era of Modern Chess

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*The Chesse of all games, wherin is no bodily exercise, is moste
to be commended, for therin is ryghte subtile engyne,
whereby the wytte is made more sharp, and remembrance quickened.*

Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke named the Governour*, Londini 1534 (first edition, 1531)
(quoted in Twiss, *Chess II*, London 1789, page 43).

* * *

El juego del axedrez es una de las cosas que mas descubren la ymaginativa.
Juan Huarte de San Juan, *Examen de los ingenios para las ciencias*, s.l. 1575
(in the edition *En la Oficina Plantiniana* [Antwerp] 1593, folio 99b).

Chesse-play is one of the things which best discovereth the imagination.
(translated in *The Triall of Wits* 1616, quoted in Twiss, *Chess II*, page 68).

* * *

*Parrà quasi incredibile, che da trentadue Scacchi,
i quali si ravolgono per sessantaquattro case,
ne divenga un numero di giochi diversi tanto immenso,
che l'intelletto humano non possa farsene capace.*

Pietro Carrera, *Il gioco de gli scacchi*, Militello 1617, I, xi, page 78.

Table of Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiv
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xix
<i>Glossary</i>	xxi

Part I — The History of Early Modern Chess

INTRODUCTION	1
The diffusion of <i>shatranj</i>	3
Medieval chess	14
The birth of modern chess	19
CHAPTER 1. THE FIRST SOURCES	25
A. <i>Scachs d'amor</i>	26
B. <i>Le Jeu des Eschés de la Dame,</i> <i>Moralisé</i>	31
CHAPTER 2. LUCENA	33
Rules	36
Openings	37
The Problem Section	39
The Background of Lucena's Life.	65
Dating Lucena's Book.	67
CHAPTER 3. THE LUCENA MANUSCRIPT	69
Rules	70
Openings.	71
Conclusion	73
CHAPTER 4. THE GÖTTINGEN MANUSCRIPT	74
Date and Origin.	76
Rules	79
Openings.	79
Comparing Three Sources.	82
Conclusion	83

CHAPTER 5. DAMIANO	85
Rules	87
Openings.	88
Subtleties and Problems	89
Reprints.	100
Gruget and Rowbotham	105
White's Damiano	108
Conclusion.	116

CHAPTER 6. THE GERMAN MANUSCRIPT	117
Rules	118
Openings.	118
Subtleties and Problems	120
Conclusion.	122

CHAPTER 7. RUY LÓPEZ	124
Visiting Rome	127
Rules	129
Openings.	133
Italians on Iberian Soil	136
Conclusion.	145
The López-Complex.	146

CHAPTER 8. THE URBINATE MANUSCRIPT	147
Rules	148
Openings.	150
A Spanish and an Italian Author	152
Conclusion.	154

CHAPTER 9. THE "ELEGANCE" MANUSCRIPTS	156
A. <i>The Elegantia</i>	156
B. <i>The Regole</i>	159
C. <i>The Riccardiana</i>	160
D. <i>Comparing the Documents</i>	163
Rules	163

Openings	166	Openings	254
The Elegantia and the Regole	170	The Problem Section	255
The Italian Manuscripts and the Riccardiana	171	Conclusion	257
Conclusion	172		
CHAPTER 10. PRINTED WORKS OF THE LÓPEZ-COMPLEX	175	CHAPTER 17. ANONYMOUS WORKS OF THE POLERIO-COMPLEX	260
A. <i>Tarsia</i>	175	A. <i>The Doazan Manuscript</i>	260
B. <i>French López-Editions</i>	178	Transcriptions	260
C. <i>Selenus</i>	180	Contents	261
CHAPTER 11. ANNIBALE ROMEI	188	Rules	264
Rules	190	Openings	265
Openings	191	The Problem Section	268
Subtleties	192	Contemporaries	269
Conclusion	193	Conclusion	271
CHAPTER 12. POLERIO'S BONCOM- PAGNO MANUSCRIPT NO. 1.	194	B. <i>The Boncompagno Manuscript</i> <i>No. 3</i>	274
Rules	197	Rules	275
Openings	199	Openings	275
Comparing Other Manuscripts	202	An Ending	277
Ascriptions	203	Conclusion	277
Spanish and Neapolitan Features	215	CHAPTER 18. HORATIO GIANUTIO	278
The Problems	217	Rules	280
Conclusion	219	Openings	283
CHAPTER 13. POLERIO'S LEON MANUSCRIPT	222	The Problem Section	284
Rules	222	Conclusion	286
Openings	223	CHAPTER 19. ALESSANDRO SALVIO	288
Contemporaries	226	His Life	288
Conclusion	227	The "Trattato" (1604)	289
CHAPTER 14. POLERIO'S BONCOM- PAGNO MANUSCRIPT NO. 2	228	La Scaccaide (1612)	291
Dedication	230	"Il Puttino," "Apologia" and "Seconda Impressione" (1634)	292
Rules	231	Rules	293
Openings	232	Openings	294
Subtleties and Problems	238	Problems and Endings	295
Conclusion	242	Conclusion	300
CHAPTER 15. ROTILIO GRACCO	244	CHAPTER 20. PIETRO CARRERA	301
Dedication	246	His Life	301
Poetry	246	His Chess Work	302
Rules	247	Rules	307
Openings	248	Openings	307
Conclusion	248	Problems and Endings	308
CHAPTER 16. POLERIO'S ORDINI MANUSCRIPT	250	Vespaio's "Risposta"	314
Dedication	251	Conclusion	316
Rules	253	CHAPTER 21. GIOACCHINO GRECO	318
		His Life	318
		The Manuscripts	321
		Greco's Sources	341
		Presenting Greco's Writings	344

Rules 347
 Openings 348
 Problems and Endings 350
 Conclusion 354

CHAPTER 22. THE PAWN'S LEAP. 355
 Passar Battaglia 358
 Taking En Passant 361
 Conclusion 369

CHAPTER 23. FROM THE KING'S
 LEAP TO CASTLING 371
 The King's Leap 371
 Castling 387
 Conclusion 410

EPILOGUE 416
 Evaluation 416
 Miscellanies 417
 Aftermath of the Classical Era 428

**Part II — Openings and Games
 of the Classical Era
 of Modern Chess 439**

**Part III — Appendices, Bibliography,
 Index 531**

Appendix A. Problem Sections 531
 i. Lucena's problem section 531
 ii. Concordance of Problem
 Sections 540

*Appendix B. Concordance of the Lucena-
 Complex 546*

*Appendix C. Concordance of the López-
 Complex 549*

*Appendix D. Concordance of the Polerio-
 Complex 552*
 i. Openings 552
 ii. Ascriptions 561

Bibliography 567
Index 577

List of Illustrations

Maps

- I. *Shatranj* and chess in the Middle East and Eastern Europe 2
- II. *Shatranj* and chess in the Mediterranean 3
- III. *Shatranj* and chess in other parts of Europe 4

Plates

1. The Venafrò pieces 6
2. Page from the *Einsiedeln Poem* 7
3. The Osnabrück (3a) and Sandomierz (3b) pieces 8
4. Finds on Russian territory (4a-d) 12
5. The Vreta pieces (5a) and the Schleswig king (5b) 14
6. Portrait of Luca Pacioli 27
7. Page from *Scachs d'amor* 30
8. Title page of *Lucena* 34
9. *Lucena*: first *regla* (pawn's move, taking en passant, pawn promotion and king's leap) 35
10. *Lucena*: conclusion of the first *regla* 35
11. *Lucena*: the ninth *regla* 38
12. *Lucena*: problem no. 1 47
13. *Cesena MS*: problem no. 1 48
14. *Lucena*: problem no. 76 52
15. *Göttingen MS*: problem no. 8 53
16. *Lucena*: title paragraph of the chess part 65
17. *Lucena MS*: two pages 70
18. *Lucena MS*: *riegle* 7 73
19. *Göttingen MS*: *regulae* 6 and 7 75

20. *Göttingen MS*: problem no. 1 76
21. *Damiano*: title page and imprint (1512) 86
22. *Damiano*: description of the pawn's move, its promotion to queen and taking en passant 88
23. *Damiano*: description of the king's leap 88
24. *Damiano*: the last subtlety and the first problem 92
25. Title pages of *Gruget* (25a) and of *White's Damiano* (25b) 106
26. *Gruget*: third chapter (game with diagram) 107
27. *White's Damiano*: the first subtleties (27a-b) 110
28. *White's Damiano*: problem no. 106 (28a) and an explication of Moorish and Turk rules (28b) 111
29. *German MS*: subtlety no. 4 120
30. *German MS*: problem no. 47 121
31. *German MS*: first game of the "Lucenes part" 121
32. Title page of *López* (32a) and a Cuban postage stamp (32b) 125
33. Portraits of two chess patrons: King Philip II of Spain and Giacomo Buoncompagno 125
34. *López*: fragment of III, vi (visit to Rome in 1560) 128
35. *López*: II, xiii 134
36. King Philip's letter in *Carrera* 137
37. *Boncompagno MS no. 1*: game 31 and the first part of game 32 141
38. *Leon MS*: game 11 and the first part of game 12 141

39. *Boncompagno MS no. 2*: headings of games 45 and 83 (39a–b) 143
40. *Boncompagno MS no. 1*: game 61 143
41. *Urbinate MS*: fragment of III, xiv . . . 151
42. *Urbinate MS*: fragment of III, vi (visit to Rome *s.a.*) 153
43. *Elegantia MS*: first page 157
44. Frontispiece of the *Riccardiana MS* . . 161
45. *Regole MS*: one of its final pages 161
46. *Riccardiana MS*: game LXIIIb, mentioning the Duke of Sora 162
47. Title page of *Tarsia* 177
48. *French López*: title page of the first edition 179
49. *French López*: title page of the second edition 179
50. *Selenus*: copperplate engraving 184
51. *Selenus*: example of its notation and diagrams in III, ii 186
52. *Romei MS*: last page of the dedication 190
53. *Romei MS*: first game at even odds 190
54. *Romei MS*: subtlety no. 4 192
55. Title page of the *Boncompagno MS no. 1* 195
56. *Boncompagno MS no. 1*: the pasted sheet of paper 195
57. *Boncompagno MS no. 1*: heading of the translation of the first chapter of *López* (II, i) 195
58. *Boncompagno MS no. 1*: games 56–58 . . 204
59. *Boncompagno MS no. 1*: heading of game 3, ascribed to Santa Maria 205
60. *Boncompagno MS no. 1*: heading of game 23, ascribed to d'Avalos 208
61. *Boncompagno MS no. 1*: game 62 214
62. *Leon MS*: game 10 224
63. *Leon MS*: game 38 225
64. *Boncompagno MS no. 2*: headings of games 24 and 56 233
65. *Boncompagno MS no. 2*: part of the dedication, drawings (65a–b); Gracco's dedication (65c) 245
66. Front cover of the *Ordini MS* 251
67. *Ordini MS*: dedication 251
68. *Ordini MS*: title 251
69. *Ordini MS*: problem no. 20 257
70. *Doazan MS*: first page of von der Lasa's transcription (The Hague version) 262
71. *Doazan MS*: pages of von der Lasa's transcription (Cleveland version) 263
72. Title page of *Gianutio* 279
73. *Gianutio*: game 6a 280
74. *Gianutio*: problem no. 8 285
75. Title pages of Salvio's "Trattato," of *La Scaccaide*, and of "Discorso," "Il Puttino" and "Apologia" 290
76. *Salvio*: survey of rules in the "Trattato" 291
77. *Salvio*: survey of rules in the "Discorso" 293
78. *Salvio*: poem in "Il Puttino" 295
79. *Salvio*: chapter xii in the "Apologia" 296
80. *Salvio*: (second) chapter ix in the "Apologia" 299
81. Title page of *Carrera* 302
82. Portrait of Pietro Carrera 303
83. Title pages of Vespaio's *Risposta* 315
84. Title page of Greco's *Libretto* 323
85. Title page of Greco's *Corsini MS* 324
86. Title page of Greco's *Orsini MS* 325
87. Title page of Greco's *Lorraine MS* 325
88. Title pages in Ancel's translation of Greco's *Lorraine MS* 327
89. Title of the *Godolphin MS* 331
90. Title page of Greco's *Mountstephen MS* 332
91. Title page of Greco's *Bodleian MS* 333
92. *Greco*: heading in the *Grenoble MS* 334
93. Title page of Greco's *Colbert MS* 334
94. Title page of Greco's *uncompleted 1625 MS* 335
95. Title page of Greco's *Samuda MS* 335
96. One of the frontispieces of Greco's *Nardei MS* 336
97. Title page of Greco's *Paris MS* 337
98. *Greco*: part of the *Usanza* in the *Paris MS* 338
99. *Greco*: heading and the first moves of game LXXI in the *Paris MS* 338
100. *Beale*: frontispiece and title page . . . 345
101. Inner cover and title page of the French Greco translation of 1669 346
102. *Greco (partiii)*: Lorraine MS no. 8 . . . 351
103. *Greco (partiii)*: Grenoble MS nos. 5–6 353

104. *Saul*: chapter V 360
105. Title pages of *Saul* (105a) and
Barbier (105b) 403
106. The *Cartel* in *Selenus* (appendix to
I, xii) 405
107. Title page of Kochánowski's
Száchy 407
108. Kochánowski's *Száchy*: the king's
"run to the kitchen" 408
109. Mars and Venus at chess, painted
by Varotari 419
110. Title page of Middleton's play *A
Game at Chess* 421
111. Lucas van Leyden's "The Chess
Players" 422
112. "The chess players" by Bordone
(112a) and "Game of chess outdoors"
by Anguisciola (112b) 423
113. Court scene of living chess 424
114. Luther and the masked students ... 425
115. John Frederick of Saxony's death
sentence: a painting and a copperplate
engraving (115a-b) 426
116. John Frederick of Saxony's death
sentence: a painting by Blaettner 427
117. Ivan the Terrible, playing chess in
Eisenstein's film *Ivan Grozny* 428
118. Gnedich' décor (Ivan the Terrible's
death) for Tolstoy's play 428
119. Ivan's death on a poster for
Tolstoy's play 429
120. A game of chess at the Spanish
court, painted by Mussini 430
121. Two chess players (Jonson and
Shakespeare?), painting ascribed to
van Mander 431
122. Woodcut from *Von der Artzney
bayder Glück* 431
123. Title page of the *Kleinodienbuch* ... 432
124. Two chess players, painted by
Carracci 433

Preface

In the course of twenty years the present work has taken the shape of a matryoshka. Shortly before 1990 I carved the smallest “doll,” a history of the King’s Gambit. Having observed that almost one third of the classical repertoire was devoted to this gambit (see Part II: Openings and Games of the Classical Era of Modern Chess), I resolved to record all openings that were written down between 1497 (*Lucena*) and 1597 (*Gianutio*). Hence, the second doll was called the First Century of Modern Chess. Fascination for the Vicent-mystery (see Chapter 2) urged me to cover this doll by a third one, paying attention to problem chess in all of the sources for the sake of consistency. Finally, in view of the strong connection between these and 17th-century works, the first century was extended to a period embracing approximately 150 years of the modern European game. As a result the “mother” doll was dressed in a more suitable overcoat: *The Classical Era of Modern Chess*.

The historiography of this chess era was initiated foremost by Thomas Hyde at the close of the 17th century. His Latin account (*De ludis orientalibus*; Oxford, 1694) was considered “the first really scientific contribution to the history of chess” (Murray). A first evaluation of classical games, as recorded by López, Gianutio, Carrera and Greco, was made by Ponziani (*Il giuoco incomparabile degli scacchi*) in 1769. Although depending on Hyde, whose work was frequently translated, Twiss (*Chess*, 1787–1789) collected interesting peculiarities of his own. After translations by Sarratt (Damiano, López and Salvio in

1813; Gianutio and Selenus in 1817) and Lewis (Greco in 1819; Carrera in 1822) and Massmann’s work on medieval chess (1839), a more coherent historiography of the modern game was presented by von der Lasa and van der Linde in the second half of the 19th century. Both chess historians discovered and disclosed many documents.

Paying much attention to chess history in the famous *Handbuch* (Bilguer) as well, the Prussian diplomat von der Lasa wrote many articles in German periodicals and a major work, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur des Schachspiels*, in 1897. He was a more cautious investigator than the Dutchman van der Linde who wrote his main works in German (*Das Schachspiel des XVI. Jahrhunderts* and *Geschichte und Litteratur des Schachspiels* in 1874; *Quellenstudien zur Geschichte des Schachspiels* in 1881). Although he is to be credited for his outstanding bibliographical research, van der Linde’s conclusions, often inspired by prejudices and conveyed in an acid style, were criticized in chess literature all over Europe. Other German works on chess history were written by Bachmann (1920s), Silbermann and Unzicker (*Geschichte des Schachs*, 1975–1977), Petzold (*Schach. Eine Kulturgeschichte*, 1986), and H. and B. Holländer (*Schachpartie durch Zeiten und Welten*, 2005).

In England the 19th-century writings of Walker, Lewis, Forbes (*The History of Chess*, 1860) and Leon were eclipsed by Murray’s pioneering oeuvre in the early part of the 20th century. His authoritative *A History of Chess* appeared a cen-

tury ago in 1913. It was followed by Eales' *Chess: The History of a Game* in 1985 and Hooper and Whyld's *The Oxford Companion to Chess* in 1987 and 1992.

After Dubois, who disclosed Vespaio's *Risposta* in the 1870–1880s, Chicco became the leading chess historian in Italy. Revealing unknown or forgotten works, he published books (*Il libro completo degli scacchi* and *Dizionario Enciclopedico degli scacchi* with Porreca; *Storia degli scacchi in Italia* with Rosino) and more than a hundred articles between 1938 and 1990, the year of his death. Sanvito, his pupil, collaborator and successor, made valuable discoveries (*inter alia*, the *Gianutio MS* and Greco manuscripts). Other disclosures were accomplished by Baffioni (Polerio's *Boncompagno no. 2* and *Ordini MSS*, *Rotilio Gracco*), Pratesi (the *Riccardiana* and *Cesena MSS*) and D'Elia (Greco's early manuscripts and the *Boncompagno MS no. 3*).

In Spain the first works of the modern game were examined by Calvo (among others, *Lucena: La evasión en ajedrez del converso Calisto*) and Arriaga (*El incunable de Lucena: Primer arte de ajedrez moderno*) in 1997, and by Garzón in 2001 (*En pos del incunable perdido*), 2005 (*El regreso de Francesch Vicent*) and 2007 (*Estudio del tratado ajedrecístico de Luca Pacioli*).

Along with less informative encyclopedic works on the game, a voluminous chess encyclopedia (*Shakhmaty: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar*; the Russian counterpart of the *Oxford Companion*) appeared in 1990. One of its main contributors was Averbakh, who served the chess world as a grandmaster, an authority in the field of endings, an administrator and a historian. Together with Whyld (posthumously), Pratesi, Sanvito and other contributors, he also took part in *Scacchia Ludus*, a collection of historical chess studies (2008).

In the present work the Introduction deals with the spread of Arabic chess over Europe, medieval chess and the birth of the modern game. The classical sources of modern chess are discussed in Part I: The History of Early Modern

Chess, chapters 1 to 21. For thematical reasons they are not all presented in chronological order. After Chapter 1 (*Le Jeu des échés de la dame* and *Scachs d'amor*) two groups are discerned in chapters 2–5: the Lucena-complex (*Lucena* and the *Lucena* and *Göttingen MSS* in 2–4) and the Damiano-complex (*Damiano*, *Gruget*, *Rowbothum* and *White's Damiano* in 5). The *German MS* (Chapter 6) is related to them. Chapters 7–10 are devoted to a third group: the López-complex (*López*, the *Urbinate* and *Elegance MSS* and the printed *Tarsia*, *French López*-editions and *Selenus*). After Chapter 11 (*Romei MS*), the Polerio-complex (*Boncompagno no. 1*, *Leon*, *Boncompagno no. 2* and *Ordini MSS*, *Rotilio Gracco* and the *Doazan* and *Boncompagno no. 3 MSS*) is dealt with in chapters 12 to 17. The works of Gianutio, Salvio, Carrera and Greco are discussed in the remaining chapters 18–21. The last two chapters (22, 23), referring to main sources (and several minor sources as well), are devoted to the medieval roots and further development of the pawn's leap and the king's leap.*

The Epilogue, containing a summary of my conclusions and hypotheses, presents miscellaneous information on chess authors and famous contemporaries in the field of literature, art and general history. With regard to the aftermath of the game's classical era special attention is paid to the application of various notations and changing rules.

Part II is a major presentation of all opening variations and games as recorded by the classical authors. It obeys an old recommendation, put forward by Bledow and von der Lasa, both belonging to the famous Berlin Pleiades, in 1847. Whereas the sequence of openings and variations is often determined by technical classification, the sources are, whenever possible, arranged in a chronological order. Several particularities presented in Part II enabled me to draw conclusions with respect to dating and sequencing the documents and the possible existence of unknown sources. Its often meticulous and even seemingly

*In quotations from the primary sources the vowel *u* is replaced by a *v*, when it represents the consonant. This spelling was already advocated by G.G. Trissino in his "Epistola intorno alle lettere nuovamente aggiunte alla lingua italiana," written to Pope Clemens VII in 1524; even at the end of the 17th century, however, his proposal was not generally adopted (A. Sanvito, private correspondence, December 2003, and in SL, p. 188n).

futile data might prove useful for future research, especially when new material is unearthed.

References to frequently quoted publications throughout the text are given in abbreviated form; full citations are in the bibliography (infrequently mentioned publications are fully cited *ad hoc*). A key to these abbreviations appears on pages xix–xx.

The book concludes with Part III, containing four appendices, a bibliography and an index.

Mainly based on an analysis of Lucena’s problem section in Chapter 2, the concordance of problem sections in Appendix A (ii), referring to many medieval and modern sources, serves as a hypothetical reconstruction of the lost collection of *Vicent* (1495). Concordances of openings and variations are presented in the other appendices, comparing the contents of the documents in the Lucena- (Appendix B), López- (C) and Polerio-complexes (D, with a list of ascriptions).

Peter J. Monté • Voorburg, The Netherlands • 2014