

INTRODUCTION

The most important and sublime event in the History of chess, its most beautiful and lasting page, was without any doubt the birth and introduction of the Queen, a portentous innovation that took place in the last third of the 15th century. It can be argued that all the History of chess that followed—five hundred years of stable, artistic and creative practice—stems from that great revolution that forever changed the face of the board.

Nevertheless, the much-needed study of this great reformation, could never be accomplished because of several reasons that we now proceed to outline. The pioneers of chess historical research—among which **Von der Lasa**, **Van der Linde** and **Murray** deserve special mention—invested much effort and determination in trying to clarify the time and place in which the great reform was conceived. They were certainly aware of the transcendence of the invention.

But the proofs, as necessary as they are unappealable, would take too long to appear. They refused to surface. Thus, it was not possible for those aforementioned great personalities to come to the necessary consensus. Still, countries such as Italy, Spain and, to a lesser extent, France have been advanced as the candidates to hosting the golden and evergreen naissance of the powerful queen.

The fact that such revered authorities could not put the question to rest surely was a bad omen. The field was pregnant with pervading conjectures, and even worse, impure national interests. And in truth it happened.

Oblivious to it the wonderful and slender tree of modern chess rose splendid and promising after five centuries of intense cultivation. But its ontological weakness, like an original sin, made it more vulnerable day by day. Especially if we take into consideration that *modern chess* is strictly speaking a new game, a new art. For although it shares with the old Arabic-medieval game the setting—the board—and the number of actors—the pieces—it is a very different creative reality. We are thus inclined to think that Arabic chess is more of a precursor, a forerunner, than the same reality with a tendency towards evolution. All this demanded from us to carry out greater efforts, if possible, in order to establish the true origin of modern chess.

Throughout this process a capital role is played by the first chess treatise printed in the world—the work of Francesch Vicent from Segorbe—, which first saw the light of day on the 15th of May 1495 in Valencia, the key city in the birth and expansion of modern chess.

But the History of chess began to be established with its back turned to the first true testimony of modern chess and its practice. Truly no one is to blame for the tragedy seemingly intrinsic to Vicent's book, but sometimes we have the feeling that its apparent second disappearance has been the cause of such disarray.

The History of chess would have been very different if the great historians of the past had known the Valencian work—we have no doubts about it. The debt that later treatises and authors owe it could then have been established— especially Lucena, the Göttingen MS and Damiano.

The French origin of modern chess—which according to some can be inferred from the Göttingen MS, would not have been established if the Paris manuscript associated with Lucena— nowadays forming part of the rich library of David DeLucia , from New York— had not been known so belatedly, already in the middle of the 20th century. This propitiated, for instance, the mistake of considering that a technical move such as the *king's leap*—genuinely Spanish and linked to the origin of modern chess, as described in precise detail in *Scachs d'amor* (circa 1475)—had been used in France. One mistake brought another, for the king's leap has only been in force in Spain and Portugal.

The poem *Scachs d'amor*—whose discovery took place exactly a century ago—is a beautiful Valencian poem composed by Fenollar, Castellví and Vinyoles. Precisely because of the late appearance of the manuscript the establishment of the logic chain of advent and later expansion of modern chess in Valencia was prevented.

It is clear that nowadays all these documents, hidden or lost hitherto, force us to clarify once and for all the origin of modern chess, and to establish the debts that some works owe to others.

The History of chess has suffered a desired revival during the last 30 years, in terms of both its cultivation and study. In fact this research owes a debt to the efforts of noteworthy researchers from that period. I cannot but remember some of those whose works have shed light on the birth of modern chess. Some to a greater extent than others have contributed to give Francesch Vicent's production the place it deserves for its unequalled importance in the History of chess—its pioneering and popularising creative work in modern chess.

The Russian **Yuri Averbakh** and the ill-fated **Ricardo Calvo** deserve special mention for having begun a path that we now can traverse with a proud, steady step. We also want to highlight the work—so esteemed and valued by us—of the great Dutch historians **Govert Westerveld** and **P. J. Monté**, the Germans **Egbert Meisenburg** and **Manfred Eder**, **Richard Eales** and **Ken Whyld** from England, **Marilyn Yalom** (USA), our friend and able colleague **Dagoberto Markl** from Portugal, without forgetting the fecund and erudite modern Italian school initiated by Professor **Adriano Chicco**, with worthy epigones such as **Franco Pratesi** and **Alessandro Sanvito**. We owe a separate mention to Sanvito, for this research could hardly have been carried out without his suggestions, camaraderie and help.

I cannot but record the merit of the Catalan historical school from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where a spirit of vindication and search of our precious treasures such as Vicent's book already was present in a very passionate way. They are unique men such as **José Brunet y Bellet**, **Dr Tolosa y Carreras**, **José Paluzie y Lucena**, the writer **Pin i Soler** and the bibliophile **José Salvio Fábregas**. They professed a love for chess, for its cultivation, for its study, for its books, deserving our gratitude and praise. Fortunately nowadays this spirit is still alive in two of his fellow countrymen, highly regarded bibliophiles and scholars to whom I owe so much, **Josep Alió** and **Miquel Artigas**.

As we stated in our first book *En pos del incunable perdido* [*In Search of the Lost Incunabulum*], we have already taken care of the safeguard of the works of some of the aforementioned researchers, leaving the way clear for a beautiful day to arrive, so longed-for. This is accordingly a sum of efforts, of wills. What is important is not to arrive to an idea or discovery before the others, but to

propitiate the arrival of a time—with consensus and research as guarantors—in which there is no longer any possible going back. The book you are holding in your hands proclaims this day has arrived.

Without any further delay, we briefly make a somewhat guiding survey of this research, in which we have always tried to study the original documents. This has been an occasionally complex and long task, but a necessary one when confronted with the transcendence of the outlined objectives.

In **Chapter One** we proceed to a thorough study of the manuscripts associated with the entourage of the Spaniard Lucena. Our proposal starts thus to eradicate with conclusive evidence their purported originality—and therefore also the greater antiquity of some of them, such as the important manuscript kept at the Library of the University of Göttingen. The latter, according to many experts, is a work from the 15th century, preceding even the Spanish printed treatises by Vicent and Lucena. This idea was defended by two renowned figures like Von der Lasa and Van der Linde.

The subject is paramount for the History of chess, because if we place the first stone wrongly, all the edifice will crumble one day, or be forever unstable. In our study we thoroughly compare the Göttingen manuscript with the later works with which it is related: Paris/DeLucia MS and MS f.allem. 107 of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. It has a clear connexion and shared material with them, referring them all back to Lucena's book, and thence, to the genuine source which the Salamancan treatise used: Francesch Vicent's 1495 book.

Special attention deserves, in our opinion, the studies carried out on the Göttingen MS by **Dr F.C. Görschen**. At a time when it did not seem possible to do such a research, he proposed 1471-75 as the date of its inception, at the Court of Alfonso V of Portugal. We would like to see in the recent monographs on Lucena the necessary critique to Görschen's amply argued postulates.

In order to end the question once and for all, we contribute numerous lines of reasoning (17) clearly showing that the manuscript in Latin is more recent than the printed Spanish books, on which he ineluctably depends. We suggest—indeed as a hypothesis—that the author is someone from the Lucena family who dedicates his work to an actual prince, the prospective King of France Francis I. The most likely date for the manuscript according to our investigation—especially given the technical points made in it—is around 1505-1515.

In this chapter we study other manuscripts, hardly known, with material derived from the first ever printed works on chess—hence their significance. The important treatise Murray labelled as WD, from the Cleveland Public Library, contains some intriguing mysteries. To its connection with Damiano's book—not as absolute as it may seem a priori—we add its strange agreement with some compositions appearing in the Cesena MS. Its most surprising excerpt is the one devoted to the old game—a hint that does not correspond with the time of its inception (late 16th century), supporting our hypothesis, already advanced by J. G. White, that it may be a copy of Paolo Boi's lost work.

Lastly, it is with great pleasure that we can offer for the first time to researchers and chess players, a detailed study of three manuscripts related to Lucena's work. We are referring to the Italian MS 955 of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, a work attributed to Polerio, and to the interesting Portuguese manuscripts from the middle of the 17th century, both originating from convents, where Lucena and Ruy López's works are studied and translated. They are the manuscript recently discovered by Dagoberto Markl in the Biblioteca Pública of Évora, and the manuscript of Antonio das Neves (1646-47) from the National Library of Portugal. Our ideal of justice leads us to conclude this first chapter devoted to the manuscript treatises with a renovating study of the importance and originality of Ruy López's work, inexplicably tainted since the middle of the 19th century by the Spanish researchers' indifference or lack of knowledge.

Chapter Two is the culmination of our many years of efforts—a whole lifetime. As the reader will see, the surprises and discoveries are astounding. These are pages where the History of chess is unveiled, is written anew, in our view. Here I want to highlight the role played by Italian historian Alessandro Sanvito in this part of my investigation. He often put me on the right track of the Perugia and Cesena MSS. In a visionary way, he already had linked—at least as a hypothesis—both works with Lucrezia Borgia's chess mentor, *the Spanish master Francesco*, who according to Sanvito—one has to recognize his merit—must have been Francesch Vicent.

It is difficult to summarize here the importance of these two revolutionary treatises—doubtlessly made by the same person, a Spaniard. The readers will be able to enjoy themselves in their legacy by the study of this industrious chapter.

The mystery of the codex of the Biblioteca Augusta of Perugia resisted once and again the researchers, who had hardly revealed the

meaning of some of its compositions. The question was very complex, for to the enigmatic diagrams and captions one had to add the absence of the text of the solution. The complexity of some positions and their modernity made Von der Lasa think that it was a work from the late 16th century. And yet, as our investigation certifies, it must have been made around 1502-1503 (a date also endorsed by Sanvito), at a surprisingly early time with respect to the establishment of the new chess, especially for Italy.

The discovery of a manuscript kept at the Biblioteca Malatestiana of Cesena by Professor Franco Pratesi (1995) has given us the needed light to carry out at long last a thorough and comparative study of the two revolutionary treatises.

For the first time we offer an attempt at the solution of the 72 positions of Perugia (65 diagrams), all of them present in the related manuscript from Cesena. In our opinion—the exquisite reasons are shown in detail—there is no doubt about the author being Francesch Vicent. They must have been made at the Court of Ferrara by himself, Lucrezia Borgia's mentor. This group of positions both codices share constitutes—as our study substantiates—the second and sublime treatise of Francesch Vicent, his new creations, some of which are of a markedly didactic or educational character.

Despite everything, the Perugia MS incorporated clues to have provided a study about its origin and more intimate nature centuries ago: it includes the initial position of draughts (*juego de damas / ludus dominarum*) at an age in which the game was practiced only in Valencia; there are positions deriving from and relating to the ones printed in Spain in 1495 and 1497; in the only problem with the text of the solution we find terms in Spanish like *lance* (move); and, finally—a decisive fact that has been overlooked—it contains the last problem of the printed books (Vicent 100, Lucena 150): Perugia 58.

In both the Perugia MS and the Cesena MS extraordinary positions are preserved, worthy of excited eulogies throughout the centuries, and of evidently apocryphal authorship. They are so many that we leave the reader to relish them in our study. But above all there are unequivocal remains of the great chess reform (the initial position with two queens, the *dama caballota*—a queen that also had the movement of the knight—, a proposal for other modes of play, the advantage of the transposed king and of development over material, etc.). **It is the work of a true master, someone who has many years of practice in the new chess, and who has personally achieved the great revolution of chess.**

The Cesena MS becomes, in our opinion, the most important treatise in the History of chess. At long last the complete book of Francesch Vicent—his 100 problems—appears in it, and in an unquestionable way as will be demonstrated in our study. But—and this is the relevant thing—we find his second treatise, an unexpected fact, a work by a mature artist, who is forcibly an iconoclast, since his ideas blossom in a field that had previously been a wilderness.

Vicent, all by himself, seems to promote the great revolution of modern chess, first in Spain and then in France. The MS of the Biblioteca Malatestiana of Cesena is a veritable monument to modern chess. Besides the sublime 46 positions from Perugia, there are also Vicent's 79 problems of modern chess, Damiano's 16 subtleties, and 15 new compositions.

In the Cesena MS the most important sequence—the one on problems—is revealed, in which the compiler wants to prioritize the order of a printed book. In our study we provide the proofs that the latter must be Vicent's book. This enables us to reconstruct its content which, curiously enough, hardly surprises us since it was the expected one according to Averbakh's, Monté's or our own works. Thorough and rigorous investigations—vexed by some—have now the technical document that vindicates them. Time proves them right.

It is surprising that the copyist has an absolute disregard for the 50 medieval compositions added in the Salamanca edition, which he keeps but with deliberate neglect.

This time fate behaved itself and miraculously 4 consecutive pages from Vicent's book do appear (problems 13, 14, 15 and 16): the curious drafting of the manuscript, where Spanish and Italian terms—together with abbreviations in both languages—are mixed up, is replaced in these 4 pages by the use of the Valencian tongue, with expressions current in the Valencia of the late 15th century. **We thus have the DNA of Vicent's book**, for when we compare the text of these problems with the same ones in Lucena's work, we verify—startling fact—that the latter was just a literal translation of Vicent's work, with identical diagrams too. The expressions, some of them very personal and some others typical of the Valencian tongue of the late 15th century, can be located in many problems of the Salamanca edition—we duly point this out. The Cesena manuscript also suggests that Vicent himself, or the printer Hutz, were the architects of the Spanish translation.

Our research—happily fecund in surprises—left us yet another one equally transcendental. In the Cesena MS there appear

Damiano's 16 subtleties as well as the 72 problems by the Portuguese. Also—something more relevant, but which took us much time to notice—this material appears marked by tiny and sometimes barely visible numbers, where the author—we think it is the same person—establishes the tally of two sources. Without discarding other options, the most plausible one, and the most founded on the Cesena MS, is that he is putting together the draft for Damiano's future book—vital considerations which we took into account when studying his work.

In **Chapter Three** we provide the proofs of the Spanish origin—Valencian to be more precise—of modern chess. On this occasion, as the reader will see, we exhaust all the avenues, with a study in detail of all the technical documents of the key period (1450-1530).

Our analysis starts with the Valencian poem *Scachs d'amor*, which in our book in collaboration with Govert Westerveld we had dated circa 1475. **The importance of Fenollar, Castellví and Vinyoles' pioneering text leaves no doubt: in it the movement of the Queen is described for the very first time in the History of chess, the first set of rules is given, and the first game, the most ancient one, played with the new form.**

In recent years the poem has finally aroused the interest of chess historians. Thanks to new discoveries we have carried out new enquiries that confirm our dating with two surprising and specific proofs. As an homage, now that it is 100 years since the discovery of the manuscript, we have preceded this study with a survey of the occurrences and comments that throughout the century the esteemed chess-poetic work has been bestowed with in several fields.

The two aforementioned proofs had not been taken into consideration till now. The first one is the reference, in the historical description of Paluziè, to a watermark present in the manuscript. The other one was suggested to me by Dr Monté and involves the fact that the planetary conjunction the poets say motivated the poem, had actually happened. Both investigations bore fruit, and **they seem ultimately to confirm the date of the writing of the poem around 1475.** This is also the date of origin of modern chess for one can perceive in the text that the new form of playing is very novel indeed: it is being set in those precise moments. We are astonished that due to his erudition and intuition Von der Lasa thought of this precise date, as well as of a Spanish origin. Intuition and proofs, in the right hands, fit together.

By 1495—we carry on with our study—the new way of playing, already entrenched and consolidated, needed the accolade of its

publication, and hence, of its expansion. A very special ally, such as the incipient print, was fortunately at hand.

That was the double merit Vicent and his revolutionary treatise hoarded. In our investigation we present several documents that bear witness and certify, not only the chronological primacy of the Valencian incunabulum, but also its true content, even if the Cesena MS had not appeared, with its blinding truth. **The trading of 30 copies of Vicent's book in January 1496 deserves particular mention**, together with the description of the copy at Montserrat that Vega i Sentmenat and Vargas Ponce provide. The latter, a learned man, even had the book in his hands. From the description he makes of the book, he necessarily comes across the Valencian incunabulum's diagrams. The caption of the problems—with the legend “de la dama”, literally “of the queen”, i.e. of modern chess—catches his eye. Not for nothing probably 79 problems were thus headed.

A very special subject for us—which we have referred to in other occasions, and to which we come back here with all kinds of details—is the certainty we have of the selling of a copy of Vicent's book, an event that took place probably in 1913. As we say within the pages of this book, the miracle of truth has happened—the discovery of the Cesena manuscript. Now we only long for the miracle of hope: the physical discovery of Vicent's book.

As we have evidenced in detail in our work in collaboration with Govert Westerveld (*La reina Isabel la Católica: su reflejo en la dama poderosa de Valencia, cuna del ajedrez moderno y origen del juego de las damas*), the proofs of the Valencian/Spanish origin of modern chess are strengthened by its connection to another emerging game—*marro de punta* or *juego de damas* (draughts). The first 4 books ever published in the world about draughts have Valencia as their epicentre. Obviously this is not a coincidence. Westerveld, a world authority in the matter, has maintained for many years the interweaving that exists between the two games, presided by the powerful queen, whose peerless model is no other than the great queen of Spanish political life: Isabella I of Castile, the Catholic Queen. The very fact that the initial position of draughts appears in the Perugia and Cesena MSS, around 1502, is proof that it originates in Valencia. The author confers this game a special value: both in Perugia and Cesena it always accompanies a chess position—a significant fact. The message seems clear.

We end this crucial chapter with a detailed study of the technical documents from the period of the birth of modern chess and its later expansion—a task that oddly enough had not been completed yet.

Our analysis is especially thorough when it deals with works on modern chess. We have verified that the question is much less controversial than experts often propose. The landscape of the origin of modern chess is not so confusing at all nowadays. We have carried out a careful study of the MS of the Biblioteca Nazionale of Florence (XIX.7.51) known as It. in the field of chess. Some recent works dated it as being from the same period as *Scachs d'amor* but our conclusion, supported with overwhelming technical proofs, is that this compilation is necessarily from a later period than the Perugia MS, from which it takes some compositions and on which it depends.

This examination has nevertheless come at the cost of a great deal of preoccupation. **The insult Francesch Vicent—bastion of modern chess—has suffered touches us.** Most of the pieces on modern chess from the initial period stem from his iconoclastic work.

To conclude, in **Chapter Four**, avoiding all kinds of pitfalls we present the biographic information referring to Francesch Vicent himself, which has been surfacing through the years, and particularly so in this investigation. Until recently we only knew the facts stated in the frontispiece of his book.

Through the itinerary that the documents offer us we can follow our man through Valencia and Segorbe, his hometown. Finally, with likelihood close to absolute certainty his life takes on a crucial turn as he goes to Italy, almost definitely because of his condition as a Jew. A document dated 1506, found in Modena by Alessandro Sanvito bears witness that he must have been chess mentor to Lucrezia Borgia in those years. In our investigation we advance the possibility that he may also have had a personal connection with Cesare Borgia, during the period 1501-1503, since precisely at that time the son of Alexander VI establishes the city of Cesena as capital of Romagna. That would explain a second copy of the very same material.

A real enigma—today closer than ever to its resolution—is Vicent's connection with the Lucena family, and hence, with the treatise printed by Hutz in 1497. The evidence leaves little room for doubts: the Salamanca treatise in its first printing project was simply a translation into Spanish of Vicent's book. The personal vicissitudes of printer Hutz suggest that he was already actively involved in the edition of 1495. The German printer and Vicent himself are probably behind this first Salamanca translation-project, something which the Cesena MS seems to corroborate. **In our view Vicent's translation was conceived in Valencia.** What happened later, the reason that motivated a change in the project

and a great regression with the inclusion by another hand of 50 problems of old chess, continues to be a field rich in conjectures.

We finish our study with an approach to Damiano's work. His book, a genuine manual of modern chess, written in a terse and didactic style, had the merit of the occasion. It is tantamount to the death certificate of old chess, something that only a decade before nobody would have imagined. Nowadays we know that Damiano's book is hardly original, since its content basically had already entered the press in Valencia in 1495. Nevertheless, the key to the success of a work that had 11 Italian editions in but a century was the complete eradication of medieval chess from its pages. Judging from the remaining documents on chess contemporary to Damiano's stay in Italy—some of which were wholly devoted to medieval chess—it seems to us too progressive a work for the place it was published in. But the explanation is very simple: the advanced ideas reside in its maker—that is enough.

Nowadays, however, the circumstances and the very authorship of the 1512 treatise have at long last begun to be questioned. The step that nobody dared to take was taken precisely by a Portuguese, Dagoberto Markl, who has arrived to the conclusion, as we have, that "Damiano" is just a pseudonym pointing, according to him, to the medical profession of the true author. What is relevant is that 500 years after the publication of the ancient book with most editions in the History of chess, we actually do not know the name of the author. Or maybe we do.

These arguments directed my research to the study in depth of the various editions of the book, considering that, at that same time, our analysis of the Cesena MS indicated that the bilingual edition printed in Rome had been prepared in the entourage of its author.

We think that the enigma about the identity of the author is set up and resolved in the two first editions of Damiano's book. A ciphered message, extraordinarily hidden in the first edition of 1512, was shown with absolute clarity in the edition of 1518, when in an unusual way 3 different title pages were made. Our hypothesis is that the chromatic play established in the aforementioned title pages—in the spurious word QVESTO, to be more precise—reveals the name of the true author or promoter of the treatise: Francesch Vicent.

We see that Francesch Vicent's book has been all the time much closer to us than we would have imagined. In fact, the day a copy is found—which undoubtedly will come—we will have few surprises regarding the content of the book. **Today the truth about**

Vicent cannot be tainted anymore, and the seemingly impossible discovery of the book has already occurred, in the Cesena MS. Our longing for the book itself is today more bibliographical than technical, in the chess sense of the word.

Because of this, the question about the birth of modern chess and its expansion can no longer be put forward while distrusting its pioneer work. In fact the real front, which we have analyzed with all detail and dedication in this work, is being put forward in the possible existence of documents of modern chess older than the Valencian MS *Scachs d'amor*, something impossible according to us since in the beautiful poem it is precisely stated that it is them, Castellví, Fenollar and Vinyoles, who herald the new form of playing, who support the reform, who create the new Queen of the board.

Despite everything, our work—which the studious reader holds in their hands—has confronted and, as we understand it, overcome the thorough analysis of all the documents researched, for we were prepared in advance to accept any proof that would destroy ours and other researchers' ideas, the fruit of many years of study. Truth is always to be preferred to uncertainty. And the uncertainty would have ruled for long around the origin of modern chess.

In Spain—the only country where we do not find any regression at all to the old chess—modern chess, *el ajedrez de la dama*, has bloomed, and the first treatises and works spreading the new chess have flourished. The first occurrences of modern chess in Italy and France have the unmistakable seal of the first Spanish creators. Among them stands out Francesch Vicent from Segorbe, brought up in the city of Valencia, the place of origin and propagation of the biggest event in the whole History of chess.

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<http://www.OriginValencianAjedrez.com>