

The
CHESS COLLECTOR
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Editor's Comment

Despite the talk of recession around the world, there has still been quite a lot happening in the chess collecting world with exhibitions, auctions and, of course, e-Bay. (Although good sets seem to have dried up more recently on e-Bay)

In this issue we are announcing a new development in the CCI and this magazine! Read on to find out what's happening.

We received three articles by CCI members, and several advertising requests, so space was limited this time round and I was only able to fit in a minimal amount of smaller items like "News in Brief" or even my own article on Philippine chess sets, Part 2. Maybe in the next issue! But it has given me the chance to write about my own "favorite" chess set on the Members page.

Not much this time in the way of members comments. I can only assume that everyone is happy with the way the magazine is going and it's content!

If you wish to see changes to the style, layout or content of the magazine, or maybe you would like to write an article or submit a picture, then please contact me.

E-mail me at: jimjoannou@btconnect.com

Jim Joannou.
Editor

Front Cover

Wall Mural in the main hall of "Chess City", Elista, Kalmykia. Chess city was built by FIDE president, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov in 1998. It was left unused for several years, but is now being used regularly to host many chess tournaments, including the World championships in 2006.

Members Comments

CCI Member Mike Wiltshire (CCI UK Executive) is pictured below after coming joint second with Ellen Carlsen (sister of Magnus Carlsen) in the amateur tournament of the recent 7th Gibtelcom chess festival in Gibraltar. Well Done Mike!



Are there any other CCI members who have had noted tournament success? Then send in the details and maybe a picture!

YOUR MOVE !



MEMBERS PAGE

My Minature Ivory Regence Set.

Jim Joannou

One of the favourite items in my collection is a miniature ivory regence set.



Sometime in the late 80's, I visited a local antiques fair at Epsom Downs Racecourse, in Surrey, UK (Where the famous Epsom Derby race is held). I had already checked out all the stalls and I was making my way back out, when my eye was caught by the tell-tale "Black & White" chequers on a small box / board that someone had just been looking at, and the stallholder was placing back in a glass cabinet. Was it just a box or did it contain pieces as well, I thought?

I asked to look at the item and on opening it I was stunned when I saw these miniature, chess pieces. Were they Ivory or Bone? They were so small it was difficult to tell. Was this a Regence pattern or a Directoire? I couldn't quite remember the styles, but by then I had already made up my mind that I was going to buy it. The asking price was 95 Pounds but a little haggling got it down to 80 Pounds. Deal done.

Once at home I examined the pieces more carefully. The small box was inlayed with



Dimensions:

Box: 11.5 cm square (4.5 inches)

King: 3.9 cm tall (1.5 inches)

Pawn: 2.3 cm tall (0.9 inches)

ebony and ivory squares, the pieces, definitely ivory and, on checking my one and only chess book at the time, Regence pattern! The set was then displayed in my glass cabinet for several years being one of my pride and joys, until I moved house when everything got packed up into boxes, and there it stayed until early 2008 when I decided to photograph my collection. This took some time to complete, but I thoroughly enjoyed this task and it meant that my miniature regence set was once again out of it's packing box and I could enjoy it. One or two fellow CCI members viewed the pictures of my collection and have commented on this set. It is too small to play a game with but the carving is very good considering it's size.



Updates on Previous Issues

Gianfelice Ferlito

Some further information on the Moro chess sets.

I read with great interest Jim Joannou's article on the Moro chess sets. The only book references on these particular chess sets I had so far found were in Ned Munger ("Cultures,Chess & Art", volume 3, pag.163-65) and in Gareth Williams ("Master Pieces" pag 116-7).

But these authors did not treat in depth the real meaning of the Knight of the Moro chess design. I must confess that I was fascinated by Jim's research and his conclusions with which I fully agree. I may however add to his research some further information which I found on the web and also by a personal contact.

The chess game, in the Moro world, even today is called "saturan" (probably derived from the Indian "chatur"). Historically the chess game in the South of Philippines was introduced by the Islamic sultans and datus about the XIII c.

In the old times, the opposing Kings were on adjacent squares and not placed as today on the same opposite squares at the start of the game. Until the 60s, the old rule was still popular among the Moro population before tournament chess caught up with the advent of Bobby Fisher. The Moro white pieces are made of Banati wood (which is dark brown wood) and the Moro black pieces are carved out of buffalo horns (which are very black).

The players who use the Moro chess pieces have a rotating board so they can just rotate the board when changing colours.

The province of **Lanao del Sur**, in the **Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)**, is one of the poorest provinces in the country, while ARMM is the poorest region in the Philippines. In the little town called **Tugaya** (a population of about 22,000), in the province of

Lanao del Sur, the Muslim clans are carrying on their traditional arts and crafts, so preserving an unique culture. Tugaya is known as the **home of the arts and crafts** of the Maranao people. In 2006 the National Filipino Commission for Culture and Arts nominated Tugaya as a World Heritage Site because of the arts and crafts it produces. The entire community is composed of craftsmen/ artisans of various pursuits utilizing the traditional Maranao art of decoration of the *okir*.

According to my personal contact, Bobby Timonera, a well known Filipino photojournalist born in Iligan city in the province of Lanao del Norte, states that **the Moro chess sets are carved in Tugaya**. He was very kind to call his local friends on the phone in Maranao to verify the Tugayan origin. A few years ago, Bobby Timonera told me, that he had bought in a souvenir shop of Marawi city, capital of Lanao der Sur, some Moro chess set to resell on e-Bay. But at that time he did not bother to investigate from which village or community these chess pieces were coming from.

References:

www.manilatimes.net
www.pbase.com/timonera
bob@timonera.com

Editors Comment

I would like to thank Gianfelice for his comments and additional information. During my research I was not able to pinpoint the exact place for the origin of the Moro sets, but with the additional information above we are a little closer.

Jim Joannou

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE the CHESS PLAYER

Gareth Williams



The above intriguing oil painting of the two illustrious 16th century English bards, Ben Jonson (1572-1637) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616) playing a game of chess has been known in the States since 1875. It first came to the general notice of the world chess community when seen in Jerome Salzmann's 1949 book 'The Chess Reader' as a black and white photo of the painting titled, 'Jonson and Shakespeare at chess'.

In 1878, Colonel Ezra Miller, a wealthy American, acquired it from an art dealer for around \$18,000. His daughter, who lived in Brooklyn, N.Y. inherited the painting. In 1903 the painting was sold to Mr Frank de Heyman also of Brooklyn N.Y. The Heyman family made a serious effort to authenticate the origin of the painting. Professor Alfred Chatain, a Government expert on antique paintings, in 1910 verified that the picture was an original 17th century creation. Art expert Theodore A. Coe while confirming this date also recognised it was a life portrait of Shakespeare. In 1914 Dr. Paul Wislicenus of Darmanstadt, Germany, a renowned Shakespearean scholar, while corroborating previous assessments, went further, stating the picture had been painted from life around 1603 and named the artist as Karl von Mander of Amsterdam. Dr. Maximilian Toch another pre-eminent American Shakespearean scholar studied the painting in 1931 and he agreed with Dr. Wislicenus assessment.

In England there are two contemporary portraits, which show a reliable likeness to the Bard. Illustrated here is the 'Stratford Portrait'. In 1861. Mr Collins a picture restorer, while



Shakespeare – The Stratford Portrait



Ben Jonson, painted by Abraham van Blyenberch, 1618. National Portrait Gallery

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE the CHESS PLAYER.

Continued.

cleaning an ancient painting noticed that a beard and moustache had been added to the original. On removing these additions he uncovered a lost portrait of William Shakespeare.

The National Portrait Gallery obtained another painting, 'The Chandos Portrait', from the Duke of Chandos in 1856. It has the distinction to be the first painting acquired by the Gallery. These two portraits, similar to each other, provide good likenesses of the Bard. They also provide a good likeness to the Shakespeare playing chess. Although the above portrait of Ben Jonson is seen from a different angle in the chess players the resemblance within the two paintings is obviously apparent. The two bards are known to have been close friends despite being rival playwrights. Jonson was a member of 'Henslowe's Company of Players', while Shakespeare belonged to the 'Lord Chamberlain's Company of Players'. In spite of having a disadvantaged upbringing Ben Jonson became a celebrated playwright and one of the most literate men in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, obtaining honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

New Chess c.1475 – 1610.

It appears that Shakespeare was familiar with the game of chess, having included a number chess references in a number of his plays. In 'King John', (1623) for example one sentence states, '*That thou mayest be a Queen, and check the world*' implies Shakespeare was familiar with the 'New Chess', which had started in Spain during the 15th century and had rapidly expanded through Europe reaching London before the early 16th century. With new chess the Queen had been transformed from a Persian 'Vizier', allowed to move only one square diagonally, into a European Queen, able to defend her King like a Joan of Arc, leading an army into battle.

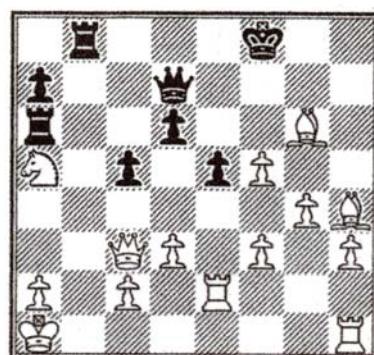
A Symbolic Game and a Shakespeare Grandmaster Ray Keene, is also a connoisseur of both Shakespeare and Jonson's plays. He noticed in Shakespeare's '*The Tempest*', Miranda is playing chess with her lover Ferdinand, he moves his Queen and Miranda exclaims, '*Sweet Lord you play me false*'. Ferdinand answers '*No, my dearest love, I would not for the world*'.

To a modern audience, the meaning of this

sentence is not clear but in the early 17th century an audience at the Globe would have understood it referred to the Queen's recent promotion. Miranda, having been isolated on a remote island for many years was unaware of the new rules.

Checkmate?

Ben Jonson *White*
William Shakespeare *Black*



Black to move

Shakespeare is holding a black knight in his hand and can play the winning move 1 ... ♞xc3 after which for example 2 ♜b3 ♜xa2 is checkmate – all other possible moves for White being

The artist, Karel von Mander has painted an actual game in progress but the position is difficult to interpret due to the unfamiliar design of the 16th century chessmen and some confusing brushwork by the artist. Kings are approximately 7cm tall the Queens are the same design only smaller. The pawns are similar to modern pawns. Knights have a tricorn hat styled finial. Bishops appear as slightly taller pawns. Rooks are similar to the pawns in size except they have square finials. Shakespeare is in the process of making his move and holds a knight in his hand.

In the Dutch book ‘Spel uit kunst in de kunst’ they suggest that Ben Jonson is holding his hand up in surrender, probably uttering the words ‘oh darr ga it mat’, ‘O dear it is mate’

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE the CHESS
PLAYER.**

Continued.

Paul Leith in his article in ‘Chessworld’ tried to discover if a mate was possible, he didn’t succeed because the kings and queens were reversed and a rook mistaken for a bishop. He failed to find the mate, due to the difficulty in correctly identifying the chessmen. Of course Jonson was posing for the painting, so he probably knew there are two checkmates available. One for players of new chess, using Shakespeare’s Queen and Knight, and another mate, combining Rooks and Knight together which would have been acceptable to both systems and understood by chess players who preferred to play the old form of chess. The painting certainly seems to confirm that both bards could play chess and with the artist Karel van Mander, have created an amazing painting for the benefit of posterity. And in this they have succeeded.

Solution A.

New chess. 1.....N x c3. 2. any Qa4. 3 white can delay the mate with a few checks but the mate on a2 with the Q is unavoidable.

Solution B.

Old and New chess. 1.... N x c3 followed after a few delaying ‘check’ moves with white by Rx a5 and Rx p mate.

My thanks to Ray Keene for pointing out that the game could not have been played to the rules of ‘Old Chess’ as the Bishops (*al-fils*) would not be able to reached the squares they occupy playing to the old rules as they were restricted to jumping diagonally over one square. Starting from their original square, c1 and f1, it is impossible for them to land on g6 or h4.

*Note: This is an extended version of an original article published in “Chess” August 2008.
Vol.73 No.5*

Editor

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

This is to announce the launch of a web-based extension to this magazine. A new website, hosted via Microsoft office live, where members can download the latest issues of The Chess Collector Magazine, and CCI-USA newsletters in .pdf format, as well as archived copies. Additional pictures, articles and information along with a Commercial page can also be found on the site.

It is proposed that this site will be updated every 2-3 months and members who register their e-mail address with the site will receive an e-mail informing them when updates are made to the site. Please note that this is NOT a replacement for the magazine you will still get the magazine drop in your mail box.

Web address:

<http://chesscollectorsinternational.club.officelive.com>

Current password for members section is:

staunton

Members can pass on the web address to non CCI members but are urged NOT to forward the password to non CCI members as this would invalidate membership! The password will be changed each year.

Please e-mail the editor with your Comments / Suggestions / Opinions.

jimjoannou@btconnect.com

You can also now use the new magazine e-mail address listed on the “Contact Us” page, or use the contact us form.

Your comments / suggestions / ideas / contributions are always welcome.

Pole Lathe Turned Chessmen

Possible methods to help identify 18 century chess sets

Alan Dewey

As most collectors are well aware, we are rarely if ever offered antique chess sets which can clearly be dated before the beginning of the 19 century and sets are often wrongly described so, particularly on ebay, due to optimism on behalf of the seller shall we say. If there are methods by which we can identify earlier sets, then these will be of inestimable value to those collectors who are lucky enough to get the chance of a genuine early set.

In the case of the set illustrated in Diderot, (shown below) because the encyclopaedia was published in 1770 we can give an 18 century date to such sets with a degree of certainty. Because, as the argument goes, they must have been a well established design to appear therein. (They may of course also have been made for many years after).

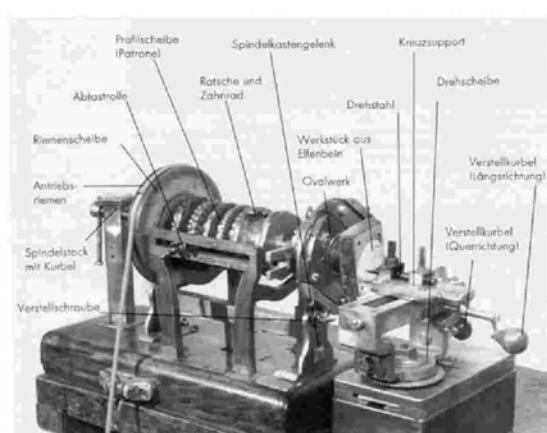


The bottoms of these Diderot pawns tell an interesting story. The 'comma' shape is made by the parting tool being withdrawn, this means the parting off tool was held in a tool post and not in the turner's hand, as would be the norm on a pole lathe. The marks on the body of the pieces are formed by pressing a mechanical tooth against a 'rose' shape, the mandrel is on a return spring to allow it to move the work piece to and fro as it revolves. This type of machine has been known since about 1550 and is an early form of ornamental lathe. (Not the earliest, as the Chinese had some sort of ornamental lathe by 2,000 BC.) For more on these early machines see :-

<http://picasaweb.google.com/chessspy/Chines eRings>



These 'rose engine' lathes were powered by a foot pedal connected to a flywheel, giving continuous forward drive. An example here from Wiedergewonnen, Deutsches Elfenbeinmuseum Erbach.



This set (below) which was owned by Philidor (according to Gareth Williams), can similarly be easily dated, and this general rule of looking at the style and shape of the pieces gives us a first clue to this being an early set. However both these sets are quite different in style to each other, so apart from the obvious damage to the Philidor, are there any tests we can apply.



Pieces from a set once owned by Philidor

Pole Lathe Turned Chessmen

Continued

How does the wood shrink and distort with age for example? What tool marks would be left on the undersides of pieces made on a foot powered lathe? Would these tool marks and distortions be easily replicated in a modern copy? I will deal with these and other questions in the following pages.

In the recent chess sale at Bonhams in Knightsbridge, London, (14 Oct 08) there were a large number of interesting European sets. They came in many and varied materials from metal through ceramic to alabaster, with most being in ivory, bone and various woods. (boxwood and ebony being the most common) and it is the wooden 18 century sets that I wish to look at in this article, (I have dealt with 18th century bone and ivory sets elsewhere. George Washington's set being the most well known of these). See:-

<http://picasaweb.google.com/chessspy/18cSets>

Four sets which took my eye (in the sale) as being worthy of some further investigation were Lot 125, from Nuremberg, circa 1790. £680, (all hammer prices, add 23% for cost to buyer) Lot 129 also Nuremberg, late 18th/early 19th century. (£950)

Lot 159 a part set in boxwood central Europe 18c. (£480 but only half a set remember) and, Lot 169 A turned wood set France or Central Europe 18c. (£580) (all dates and places of origin as given in the catalogue).



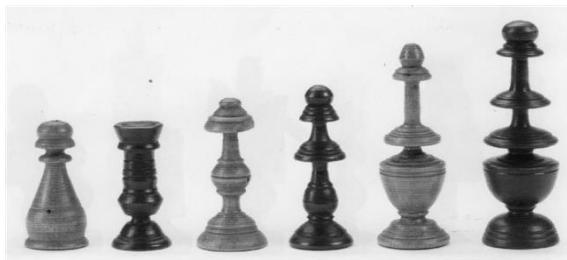
Lot 125



Lot 126



Lot 159



Lot 169

The tool marks left on chess pieces which were made on a pole lathe are also quite easy to identify. This unusual 'head on' view of two of the pawns from lot 169, courtesy of Mr Peter Armit, shows the undulating tool marks which can also be seen on the underside of the bases on sets which have been sanded off on the outer surfaces.



The earliest depiction of a lathe is this low relief stone carving from Egypt. The turner on the left holds the tool whilst the assistant pulls a strap to spin the work back and forth. c.320BC.

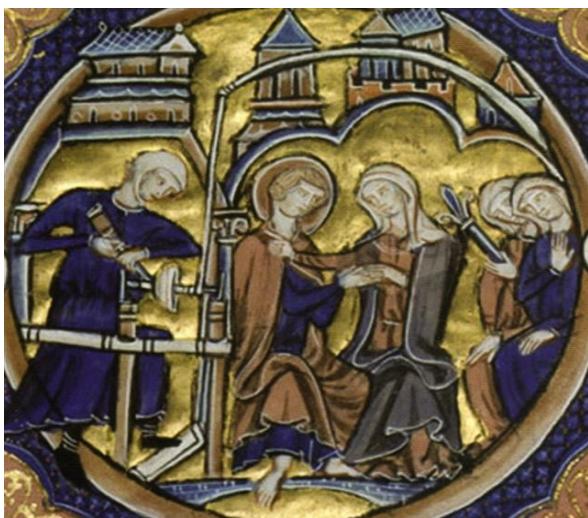
Pole Lathe Turned Chessmen

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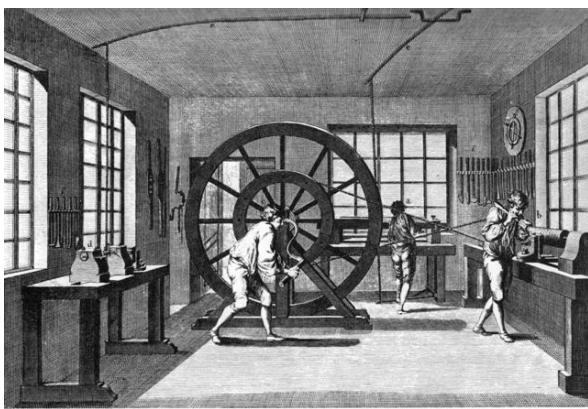
This type of reciprocating drive machine has been in continuous use for at least five thousand years in various different forms and is still in use in some remote areas.

I dealt with the history of lathes here:-

<http://picasaweb.google.com/chessspy/Lathes>



The picture above shows an illustration of a pole lathe from the 13th century which can only cut on the forward or down stroke, this causes a very typical spiral cut which can sometimes be seen on the unfinished parting off on the unseen surfaces. (The undersides of chess pieces for example).



This picture of a 18th century wood turning shop from the Encyclopédie Diderot shows two pole lathes and a 'great wheel' driven lathe which would be used for the high volume small diameter work such as stair spindles and chessmen, although the picture shows the lathe on 'medium' due to the relatively large diameter of the work piece shown. (the pole lathes would be used for bowl turning for the most part)

Let us assume that the outside of the large wheel would be used to power the lathe for chessmen and other repetitive work of small diameter. If the diameter of the large wheel is 2 metres (200 cm) and the diameter of the wheel at the end of the lathe is 10 cm, then the lathe work piece turns 20 times faster than the large wheel. So it is clear that even at a relatively 'easy pace' for the apprentice, of about two turns per second (i.e. 120 rpm) the speed of the lathe work piece would exceed 2000 rpm, similar to today's electric driven machines. (Thanks to Mr. Peter Armit of Glasgow for this clarification to my text.)

The point being that even in the 18th century the (great wheel powered) lathes used would not leave the 'spiral groove 'tell tale marks' of pole lathe turned objects on the surface or underside.



Lewis Jones (1850–1914).

In this picture above, of Lewis Jones, c 1884. (Bertram Jones father and Bill Jones Grandfather.) the overhead belt drive can be seen above and behind him.

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So I am going to assume for the purpose of this article that if a chess set exhibits evidence of being made on a pole lathe, that is good evidence of it's being earlier rather than later, as (water and steam) powered lathes started to come into use from about 1750 onwards.

I wrote about Bertram Jones here:-

<http://picasaweb.google.com/chessspy/BertramJonesChessSetMaker>

It is of course quite probable that there were many isolated country workshops which only had pole lathes right up into the late 19c (and in some special cases into the 20c) however it is unlikely that these shops were producing chessmen at all (or certainly in no appreciable quantities) as the low prices of such wares from the 'townies' (water/steam powered) factories would make it financially ruinous.

This next picture of a wooden bowl which was made on a pole lathe shows rather nicely the diagnostic 'spiral cut marks'.



This picture is from "The Wooden Bowl" by Robin Wood. ISBN 0-85442-130-0. Robin says of this picture, "abrasives were rarely used (on bowls) and the tool marks are clearly visible on this Mary rose Bowl. (1511-1545) Occasionally, as on this bowl, it is possible to see how the grooves are grouped in sets of three. Each group corresponds to one treadle of the pole lathe." So, on the seen surface of a chess piece, the machine marks would (usually) be sanded and polished

Pole Lathe Turned Chessmen

Continued

off, but one would not expect a turner on what amounted to price work to expend any unnecessary effort on the undersides. Similar groups of marks can be seen on the bases of the pieces from lot 159, indicating that this set was made on a foot powered pole lathe, (theoretically it could also have been made on a strap or bow lathe, however this is unlikely.)

Another indication of age on a set is the ovality of the bases, due to the difference in the way the wood shrinks across the grain this is generally in the order of about .5mm, and so is not easily seen by the eye alone, however by holding a piece in one hand and twisting it too and fro, whilst gently allowing the fingers of the other hand to just touch the edge of the base, any irregularity due to age distortion can easily be felt. (This ovality carries on through the piece of course, but is most easily felt on the lowest and largest diameter and it goes without saying that a new piece will be perfectly round.)



Showing the groupings of spiral cuts on the base of one of the chessmen from lot 159.

I dealt with this shrinkage for ivory 18th century sets here:-

[http://picasaweb.google.com/chessspy/
OvalityOf18cChesspieces](http://picasaweb.google.com/chessspy/OvalityOf18cChesspieces)

The marks in the middle are where the 'pip' was chiseled off after the piece came off the lathe. It is not impossible to introduce some small degree of ovality in a turning. There are special chucks available for just that, these are normally used for ornamental work and are unlikely to find their way into a general woodturning shop due to the slow speed at which they have to be operated. It would also be possible to put a modern machine on a very slow speed to part off and by dint of waggling the tool about the 'on off' tool pattern could be replicated. This also is unlikely to be done due to time constraints and the fact that few modern machines run at speeds below 500 rpm.

Most modern reproduction sets in both wood and ivory are made in India and the Far East and the level of attention to detail required is simply not applied. Reproduction sets in an antique style look exactly what they are, brand new, with none of the fading, nibbles and other indications of great age. Repro sets are nice enough if that is what you wish to collect. A few modern ivory sets have managed to creep onto the market and these are easily spotted as there are a sufficient number of eagle eyed and experienced collectors out there for very few to slip past unremarked. As a general rule, if you are looking at antique sets in a sale room, the catalogue will give a good general, accurate and honest assessment of the condition and age of the set. So although it may seem obvious, first read the catalogue, then look at the set.

COURIER CHESS

Rick Knowlton

One of the great chapters in the development of modern European chess is the story of courier chess. A “great chess” variant – with an enlarged 12 x 8 board and three novel pieces – courier chess thrived for some six centuries, making it possibly the world’s longest-lived enlarged chess variant. Even the modern chess we play today has been around just a little over five centuries, after being modified from the Persian/Arabic game which had already existed for about a thousand years. While most chess variants proved to be passing fads, courier chess held its own, passed down through some twenty generations of players.



One of the few remaining relics of courier chess: a *schleich* (jester) from Ströbeck, Germany.

But when we seek out the record of courier chess, reports and details are scant, mostly scattered through centuries as brief mentions in longer travel logs and larger treatises on the more common chess forms. Courier chess is first mentioned in the great Arthurian romance, *Wigalois*, (Wirnt von Gravenberg, 1202). It appears again in the great chess poem of

Shachbuch (Heinrich von Beringen, 1300); again in a travel account (Kunrat von Ammenhausen, 1337); in greater detail in *Das Schack- oder König-Spiel* (Gustav Selenus, 1616); and finally in a later travel account (H.G. Albers, 1821). It is thanks to Selenus’s detailed description that we have the rules and a block print of some elaborate figurative pieces. But it is a 16th century painting that captivates our imaginations.

LUCAS VAN LEYDEN



Lucas Van Leyden's famous painting, *The Chess Players*, Leiden, Holland, 1508

No historic image has riveted our attention to chess more than the famous painting, *The Chess Players*, painted by the great Dutch renaissance painter and engraver Lucas van Leyden in 1508. It is remarkable enough that van Leyden created this great work at the tender age of 14, and noteworthy that this southern German variant, courier chess, was being so precisely depicted in the far-off lowlands of coastal Holland. But what a drama! We have a lady of substantial refinement, in calm, calculating focus, an anxious advisor at her side, held in check by another gentleman at his shoulder. Her opponent, possibly of Mongolian descent, somewhat

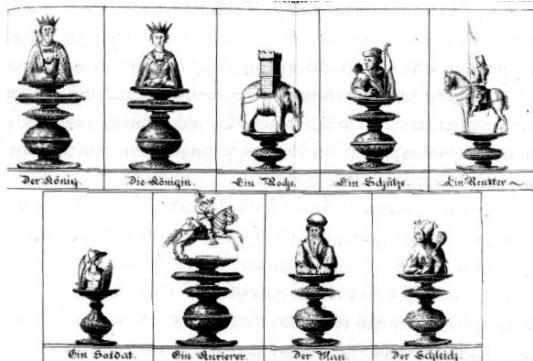
COURIER CHESS

Continued

disturbed, is also contending with layers of kibitzers ... the whole room is alive in hushed, dramatic tones. One is tempted to ascribe to these characters the names of the chess pieces – a queen, a king, an advisor, bishop, a fool – and is that a knight in the corner?... But we, centuries later, can only speculate on the convoluted drama – the possible loss of wagers and esteem hanging on the movement of those delicate pieces.

This picture has been reproduced so often – no comprehensive chess history is complete without it! It now resides in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, drawing generation after generations of chess enthusiasts into the deep recesses of chess gone by. But the painting is of importance well beyond its mystery and intrigue. A careful analysis of the pieces on the board draw us into the game itself.

BRIDGE TO MODERN CHESS



Courier chessmen from Gustav Selenus's *Das Schach-Oder König-Spiel*.
Depicted are the **König** (king), **Königin** (queen), **Roche** (rook), **Schiütze** (archer/bishop), **Reutter** (knight), **Soldat** (soldier/pawn), **Kurierer** (courier), **Man** (sage) and **Schleich** (jester).

To understand the advent of courier chess, we must put ourselves back into the mindset of the medieval chess player.

European chess players had learned the game, beginning around the year 1000, from contact with the Arabian Empire. The original pieces were a king, his advisor, two elephants, two horses, two chariots and eight foot soldiers. The abstract Arabic pieces were not entirely familiar to the European eye, so the advisor was immediately replaced by a queen; the elephants were replaced by various figures (a fool, a sneak, a sage, an archer, finally a bishop); and the rook, after a few identity changes, became a castle turret. The board, which had been a plain 8 x 8 grid for centuries, became checkered in Europe, making the diagonals more apparent. But still, the rules of the Arabic game persisted: Unlike modern chess, the bishop figure moved only two spaces diagonally – a very limiting move which accesses only eight squares on the entire board, and the queen moved only one square diagonally. The game developed more slowly than our modern chess, calling for a longer opening period of positioning and strategizing, without the sudden invasions of modern queens and bishops.

When courier chess came on the scene, around 1200, it introduced a board of 12 x 8 squares, adding four pawns to each side, and three novel pieces: the sage, moving just like the king (but able to be captured), the jester, moving one square forward, back or sideways (a complement of the queen's one-step-diagonal move), two couriers, moving any number of unencumbered squares diagonally. Among these three novel pieces, it was the courier who stood out. He was taller than most pieces, was said to be the most powerful piece (though modern theorists would disagree), and of course, the game itself, *Kurierspiel*, was named after him. One can only imagine the power this new piece offered to the little old game of chess, cruising

COURIER CHESS

Continued

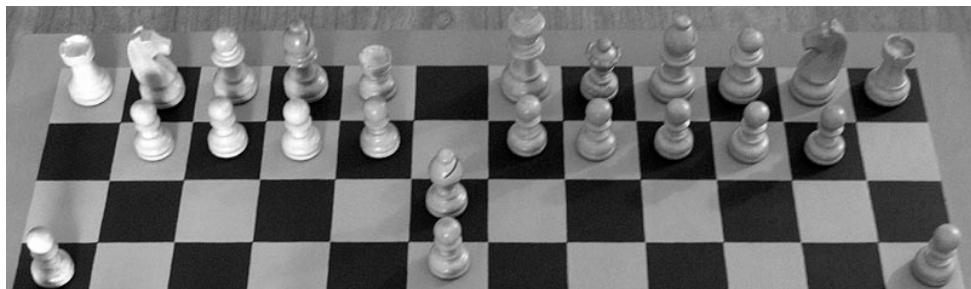
easily through pawn walls, waiting in the wings to attack far across the board, and zigzagging easily to all parts of the playing field (on one color of square, of course). Although actual accounts are limited, chess historians often postulate that familiarity with courier chess paved the way for modern chess, with its powerful queen and bishop both commanding long diagonals. When modern chess first appeared, at the end of the 15th century, it spread like wildfire through Europe, eclipsing the medieval style of chess play almost entirely within two generations. Even then, courier chess lingered for three more centuries, being played in pockets of southern Germany, as an alternative to the modern chess.

MODERN VERSIONS

There are two ways courier chess has been modernized, to make it more accessible to modern players. The simplest approach is to keep the game exactly as it was played long ago, but to use modern pieces, some of them cleverly altered, to indicate the ancient pieces' moves to the modern eye. A fine example is shown here: The king, rook, knight and pawns are all shown in their modern form, since the modern piece moves the same as the medieval equivalent. The courier is represented by a modern bishop (since it has the modern

bishop's move). The queen is represented by a *truncated* modern bishop (since it moves only *one space* diagonally); the sage is shown as a *truncated* modern queen (since it moves only *one space* like a modern queen); and the jester is a *truncated* rook (and moves *one space* like a rook). The medieval bishop, which moves only two spaces diagonally, is given an alternate round-headed form – the only unfamiliar piece which can't use the system of truncation. You can see, looking with modern eyes, that it would be easy to begin playing the game keeping these small alterations in mind.

Another approach to updating courier chess has been to begin with all of the modern pieces (as the old courier chess began with all of the medieval pieces) and add new pieces to fill out the 12-piece line-up. In one example, credited to the chess variant expert Paul Byway, the entirely modern king, queen, bishop, knight, rook and pawns are all present. The added pieces are two "ferses" (moving one space diagonally like the ancient queen), and two new "couriers" which move exactly two spaces either diagonally, forward, backward, left or right (an entirely new sort of piece). This new variant, known as *modern courier chess* (MCC), has recently been generating interest among chess variant enthusiasts.

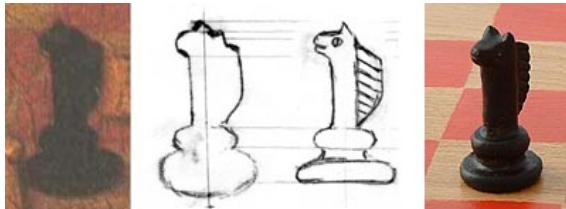


Modern pieces adapted to playing the old courier game, arranged here in the prescribed opening. Note that truncated bishop, rook and queen help suggest the moves of the old pieces (queen, jester and sage, respectively). Photo from the collection of Alexander Trotter.

COURIER CHESS

Continued

A RECREATION



**Pulling a piece out of the shadows of van Leyden's painting:
the piece as it appears in the painting,
the outline of the form, the piece redefined
and a new three-dimensional
model of the piece**

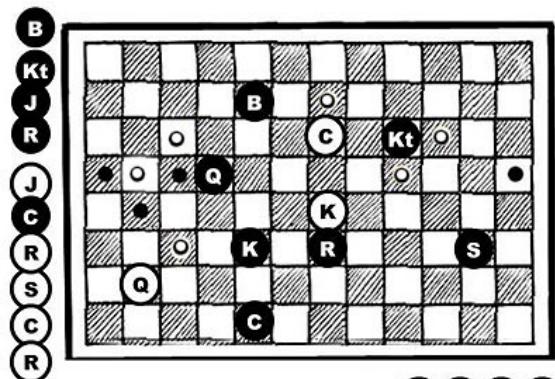
Now here's a question. How close can we get to the original courier chess set, shown in van Leyden's famous painting? Portraits of chess games are notoriously inaccurate. A survey of several paintings over the centuries shows participants playing improbable, absurd or completely impossible chess postions. Alas, the game itself is a mere backdrop for the painter's visual composition. Is van Leyden's chess game also just a meaningless arrangement to set off his dramatic faces and compositional prowess?



Close-up of van Leyden's painting, focusing on the game being played

Not at all! Combining the written evidence of the original courier game with some knowledge of conventional chess pieces of

the 15th and 16th centuries, we can determine with near certainty the identities of the pieces in van Leyden's painting, as well as the drama on the chessboard. It happens that the woman is giving check with a round-headed rook, protected by a courier, and is taking full advantage of her seemingly drunken and distraught opponent. The diagram here shows the position, as seen from the side of black (played by the woman in the painting). It is clear that the poor fellow playing white has very little play remaining, before he faces an inevitable checkmate.



Not shown in painting:

The position shown in van Leyden's painting, seen from the side of Black.

K = King, Q = Queen, S = Sage, J = Jester, C = Courier, B = Bishop, Kt = Knight, R = Rook, and the round dots are Pawns. Black is giving check with the rook. Note that the medieval King is a three-tiered pedestal, whereas the queen's figure is a royal crown.



Courier chess pieces and board, newly created based on van Leyden's painting: Sage, King, Queen, Jester, Courier, Bishop, Knight, Rook, Pawn

COURIER CHESS

Continued

Once we have identified all of the pieces, it is quite possible to make a recreation of the set itself – and that is just what we have done. By examining each piece and visualizing it in three-dimensional form, the entire set has been defined and made anew, to be as similar to van Leyden's long lost subject as possible. (See picture above) So here, after a 500 year absence, we have the conventional playing pieces of courier chess.

CONCLUSION

Most of us were first introduced to chess in its modern western form: the all-powerful queen, the complementary moves of rook and bishop, the double step of the pawn, the great literature of openings and strategies. In the minds of most players in the western world, that remains the sum of what "chess" is. But if we merely scratch the surface of history and travel a wee bit Eastward, the face of chess changes with every century and on every continent. The great game of courier chess, deeply imbedded in the evolution of the chess we know and love, deserves at least a pause of respect – and quite possibly a spell of utter fascination.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

For general information on courier chess, visit www.CourierChess.com

Download a free courier chess rule booklet at <http://ancientchess.com/page/free-downloads.htm>

For in-depth reading in Courier chess, see H.J.R Murray, *A History of Chess* (1913), Oxford Press, pp. 483-85

R.C. Bell, *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations* (1979), Dover, pp. 62-65

Jean-Louis Cadeaux, *Guide des Échecs Exotiques & Isolites* (2000), Chiron, Paris, pp. 38-40

News in Brief

Regional CCI Meetings

German CCI Meeting.

19th—21st June 2009
Naumberg, Germany.

6th Western Hemisphere CCI Meeting

22nd—24th May 2009
Princeton, New Jersey. USA

See separate inserts for full information

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Two Fischer letters to Bob Wade

Both have envelopes and are hand written. There are also supporting letters from Ed Edmonson and a telegram from him to Bob.

For full details see the new magazine website or contact the editor direct.

32 Pieces - The Art of Chess Exhibition

Reykjavik Art Museum, Iceland.

Exhibition closes 11th April 2009

For details see:

[http://www.artmuseum.is/DesktopDefault.aspx/tid-2182/3369_read-1368/date-1301/](http://www.artmuseum.is/desktopdefault.aspx/tid-2182/3369_read-1368/date-1301/)

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Schachspielende Affen
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Stonesculpture of chess playing monkeys in
the eastern gallery of the **St. Peter and Paul**
Cathedral (also known as *Naumburger Dom*)
in the German town of Naumburg.

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The Art of Chess Exhibition

22nd Jan—11th April 2009

Reykjavik Art Museum, Iceland.

<http://www.artmuseum.is/desktopdefault.aspx>

Dutch Chess Collectors Meeting

(Includes an auction with a few chess sets)

3rd April 2009

Amersfoort, Netherlands.

Details at: <http://www.euwe.nl>

Master Pieces: Chess sets from the Dr. George & Vivian Dean Collection.

The Detroit Institute of Arts.

26th Dec 2008—17th May 2009

http://www.dia.org/calendar/programs_and_events/item.asp?webitemid=1537

Bonhams London Chess Auction

29th April 2009

Knightsbridge, London

Contact: Luke Honey

luke.honey@bonhams.com

The 6th Western hemisphere CCI Meeting

22nd—24th May 2009

Princeton, New Jersey. USA

For details see inserts or contact Floyd Sarisohn

German CCI Meeting

17th—19th June 2009

Naumburg, Germany

For Details see inserts or contact Thomas
Thomsen

The 14th CCI Biennial Convention.

23rd—27th June 2010

Cambridge, UK

Details to be announced

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