

2025-09-20

A memorable meeting in a historic location – CH&LS annual meeting in Valencia



Herbert Bastian

Opening by Prof. Dr. Frank Hoffmeister, a representative of the City of Valencia, Dr. Thomas Thomsen and José A. Garzón.

by Herbert Bastian

It was a special occasion that drew organised European chess historians to this year's meeting of the Chess History & Literature Society (CH&LS) in Valencia, Spain's third-largest city in the province of the same name at the mouth of the Turia River where it flows into the Mediterranean Sea, and they came in large numbers. While the city had been deeply concerned last year due to severe weather that claimed many lives, this time the weather was at its best, with temperatures around 30 degrees and plenty of sunshine.

The poem *Scachs d'amor*, which was rediscovered in 1905, originates from Valencia and is the oldest evidence of reformed chess, in which the queen and bishop were given long moves. A few years ago, with the help of a planetary conjunction mentioned in the text, it was possible to date its probable year of origin to 1475, which is now around 550 years ago. [Scachs d'amor – Wikipedia](#) The city of Valencia is aware of its tradition and showcases it in the Petxina sports and cultural complex with an impressive exhibition, which could be visited during the conference. A short video gives an impression of it.

Visita a la exposición "550 aniversario del nacimiento del ajedrez moderno"

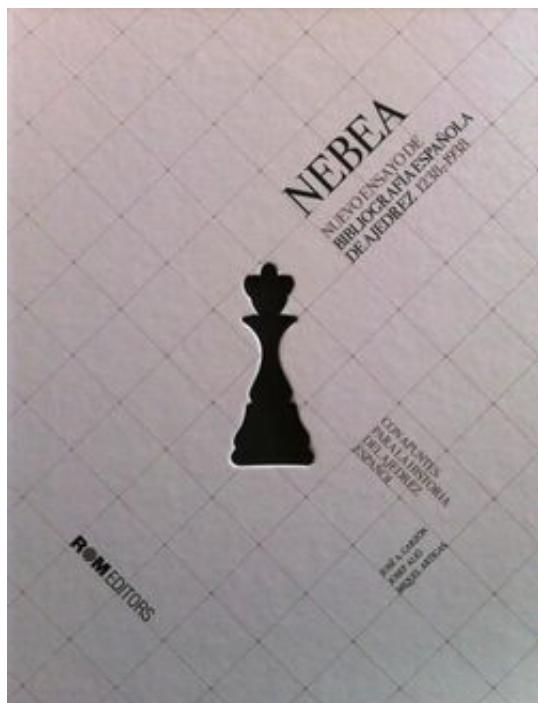
FRANCESCH VICENT

Primer Autor y Maestro del
Ajedrez Moderno



Guión: José A. Gorgón
Dibujo: Dani Salvador

In addition, 15 May was declared Chess Day by the Valencian Parliament, as this was the date in 1495 when the first book containing exercises on the new rules was published. Its author was Francesc Vicent (* approx. 1450; † after 1512), who came from Segorbe, about 56 km north of Valencia. [Francesc Vicent – Wikipedia](#) The city invited former world champion Viswanathan Anand as its guest of honour in May. [Valencia: 550ster Jahrestag der Geburt des modernen Schachs | ChessBase](#) (Valencia: 550th anniversary of the birth of modern chess | ChessBase). Unfortunately, Vicent's original work has been lost, but the problems it is believed to have contained were reconstructed in 1992 by Yuri Averbakh (born 1922; † 2022) through clever analysis, which was essentially confirmed by Peter J. Monté and Garzón after him. Garzón and Dani Salvador have depicted the story of Vicent in a humorous comic strip, which can be seen enlarged on the walls of the exhibition room and which all participants received as a souvenir gift.



José A. Garzón is the tireless local driving force behind the whole project. His daughter, who appears in the video, assisted as an interpreter, but she revealed to me that she herself does not share her father's passion for chess. Over 20 years ago, José proved that the chess manuscripts in Perugia (ca. 1502) and Cesena (ca. 1502–1512) can be traced back to Vicent, whose work from 1495 formed the basis two years later for the chess section of Lucena's book, printed in Salamanca in 1497, some 600 km further west, of which around 20 copies still exist today. This was the starting point for Awerbach's reconstruction.

Incidentally, it is known that both works were produced by German printers who were in contact with each other. [Chessays - LUCENA - Ein Rätsel nach 500 Jahren - von M.C. Romeo](#) (Chessays - LUCENA - A mystery after 500 years - by M.C. Romeo).

Vicent then went to Italy, where he left the aforementioned manuscripts and, as chess teacher to Lucrezia Borgia (* 1480; † 1519), the illegitimate daughter of Roderic Llançol i de Borja (* 1431; † 1503), later Pope Alexander VI.

For those interested in learning more about the beginnings of modern chess in Spain, we highly recommend the seminal work NEBEA by authors Garzón, Josep Alió and Miquel Artigas.



The conference programme included a lengthy overview by Garzón of his findings on Vicent and his work, as well as closely followed presentations on chess history with reference to the Spanish tradition.

Depending on availability, the presentations are to be published by Jean Olivier Leconte on the websites of [News - kwabc.org \(en\)](#) and [Le Café de la Régence](#). The following topics were discussed in detail:

- Spain as the cradle of modern chess: Scachs d'amor (1475) and the first works on modern chess by Vicent/Lucena/Damiano (José A. Garzón)
- Ruy Lopez and his reception in Europe (Herbert Bastian)
- NEBEA, Spanish Chess Bibliography: Genesis, contributions and curiosities (José A. Garzón)
- St. Sebastian 1911 – l'entrée triomphale de Capablanca en Europe (Georges Bertola)
- 1943 – Alekhine escapes to Spain (Denis Teyssou)
- Madrid 1973 – Karpov on the way to the throne (Jesus Seoane)
- Sevilla 1987 – Kasparov v. Karpov Round 3 (Frank Hoffmeister)

My presentation dealt with the classification of the work *Libro de la invencion liberal y arte del juego del axedrez* (1561) by Ruy López from Zafra, after whom the Spanish Game is named. It should be noted that the opening is already contained in the Göttingen manuscript, which originates from Paris and is currently dated to the period 1500–1510. A current version of López's life story, whose new findings have not yet been fully reflected on the usual Wikipedia pages, was published in 2022 and probably originates from the recently deceased Spanish chess historian Joaquín Pérez de Arriaga (* 1932; † 2025). [Ruy López de Segura - Historia Hispánica](#) According to this, López travelled to Peru in 1572 to visit his brother Alonso, after which all traces of him are lost. This means that his famous meeting at the Spanish royal court with the Italian masters, as dated and described by Salvio (1634) in 1575, cannot have taken place. This also proves that Luigi Mussini's painting from 1871 is fiction.



[News & Eventi](#)

Luigi Mussini La partita di scacchi (nach 1871).

Georges Bertola, editor-in-chief of the French chess magazine *Europe Échecs*, reported on his newly published, richly illustrated biography of Capablanca, which is one of the highlights of the recent numerous high-quality publications on chess history. More information can be found on the CH&LS website under [Capablanca, the prodigious ascent \(1888-1920\) - by Georges Bertola - kwabc.org \(en\)](#).



Denis Teyssou reported on the latest findings of his research into Alekhine's fate, which he had already published in the book marking the 100th anniversary of the *Fédération Française des Échecs (FFE)* (2021). In this context, reference should also be made to the important work of Dr Christian Rohrer, which is freely available on the internet. [Schachweltmeister und Günstling von Hans Frank? : über die Nähe Alexander Aljechins zum NS-Regime.](#)

Dr. Jésus Seoane, a professor of nonlinear dynamics, chaos theory and complex systems from Madrid, captivated the audience with his lecture on the 1973 Grandmaster Tournament in Madrid, which marked the beginning of Karpov's rise to prominence after Fischer's conquest of the World Championship. It is worth replaying the exciting games from the tournament, from which Seoane highlighted critical positions. Seoane revealed himself to be a fan of Wolfgang Uhlmann, who was defeated in Madrid in a famous game against Karpov, playing white. My not entirely serious question as to whether chess is a non-linear system was met with laughter by the expert, who replied that it is more likely to be a chaotic system.



Jean Olivier Leconte

Prof. Dr. Jesus Seoane thrilled the audience with scenes from the 1973 Madrid Grandmaster Tournament, where Karpov's rise began.

The chess history tour was rounded off by a report by Frank Hoffmeister on the third World Championship match between Karpov and Kasparov, which took place in Seville in 1987 and ended 12:12, meaning that Kasparov retained his title. Hoffmeister explained how the venue had been chosen and discussed the circumstances of the match, in which Karpov accepted a pawn sacrifice four times in the Grünfeld Defence with the double-edged bishop move to f7, resulting in a 2:2 draw.



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Annual report

As every year, a report on the activities of CH&LS is presented at the conference, including the cash balance and the projects supported. The report, which focused on the essentials, was pleasantly short and reflected the confident work of the Presidium.



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The Presidential Board presents its annual report. From left to right: Frank Hoffmeister, Jean Olivier Leconte, Henri Serruys, Claes Løfgren.

Lasker Prize awarded to Viktor Moskalenko



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The annual meeting included a collaboration with the Berlin-based Emanuel Lasker Society (ELG), whose extremely active chairman, FM Thomas Weischede, attended the entire conference. The ELG regularly honours deserving personalities from the chess scene, thereby emphasising that chess is a cultural asset and that cultivating it means more than just winning first prizes in tournaments. Especially in the current difficult international situation, it can and must contribute to peaceful understanding between peoples. This time, GM Viktor Moskalenko, who lives in Valencia, was awarded the Lasker Prize for his outstanding work in chess education. In her heartfelt laudatory speech, Rebekka Schuster, who had travelled from Berlin for the occasion, particularly highlighted Moskalenko's opening books. Rebecca is the daughter of the well-known chess historian Konrad Reiß and plays for SG 1871 Löberitz in the 2nd Women's Bundesliga East. The likeable Moskalenko was visibly moved and, after the award ceremony, took the time to have dinner with his daughter and the conference participants.

[Update 2025-09-28] Reports on the award ceremony were published in the New in Chess Blog, [Viktor, Viktor and... Viktor!](#), and on the website of the Emanuel Lasker Society (Emanuel Lasker Gesellschaft), [Schach in Spanien – Besuch der Tagung der CHLS in Valencia und Verleihung des Einzel-Viktors an Viktor Moskalenko](#). [/Update]

Guests of honour Another guest of honour was Dr Thomas Thomsen (91), long-standing chairman of *Chess Collectors International (CCI)* and founder of the Königstein initiative group, who shows no signs of his advanced age. Dr Thomsen grew up in Spain and is multilingual, which has made him a sought-after interpreter in various contexts. He is still indispensable as the organizer of the popular annual meetings of chess collectors. The next one is scheduled for 31 October to 2 November in Nuremberg and is sure to offer many highlights again.

FIDE was represented by Willi Icklicky, the internationally well-connected chairman of the Historical Committee. In the anniversary year 2024 (100 years of FIDE), Willi has compiled a significant amount of paraphernalia and film material from the history of FIDE, which will be presented on various occasions and some of which has already been published. I was impressed by the film footage shown to a small group, which shows Bobby Fischer on various occasions and will hopefully be made available to the general public.

Fostering community

A shared dinner, where old friendships are nurtured and new ones formed, is part of the tradition of these gatherings. This time, I had the opportunity to get to know mathematician Dr James Ward from Ireland, pictured front left, and was surprised to learn that he had studied in Freiburg (Breisgau) for two years. One could tell stories about every participant, as they have all made special contributions to chess culture. Anyone who is interested in learning more is welcome to become a member of the CH&LS for a modest annual fee!



Herbert Bastian
Lively conversations over dinner together

Chess-loving popes

When meeting in a place as steeped in history as Valencia, a tour of the city is a must. This took us to historical sites, of which I would like to highlight the palace of the Borgias, who produced two popes. Alexander VI (1492–1503), the second of these, is particularly important in chess history because Vicent's move from Valencia to Italy took place during his reign and is probably related to it. This explanation seems more convincing to me than the common claim that Vicent fled the Spanish Inquisition and found refuge with Lucrezia Borgia, the pope's illegitimate daughter.

Another pope was well disposed towards the spread of modern chess. In his article *Damiano, O Português E A Sua Obra* (2009), Portuguese author Mário Silva Araújo made the interesting assumption, based on the timing, that the change of course in the Catholic Church under Pope Leo X (1513–1521, not a Borgia), which permitted the practice of chess, was directly related to Damiano's chess book, which had been printed a year earlier. Leo X himself is said to have enjoyed playing chess. ["Es war nicht Damiano" - Interview mit Mario Silva Araújo | ChessBase](#) One can speculate whether Leonardo da Vinci also contributed to the refinement of the game of chess. The famous universal genius had been employed by the Vatican since 1512 and, a few years earlier, had illustrated with diagrams Luca Pacioli's chess manuscript, rediscovered in 2006, which was written shortly after 1500 and already contained problems based on the new rules.



Herbert Bastian
The Palace of the Borgias in Valencia.

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Two true chess fans visit Valencia: Dr. Jurgen Stigter (Amsterdam) and Toni Preziuso (Switzerland).



Plans for the future

This year's meeting benefited greatly from the presence of representatives from the three most important chess cultural organizations: the host **CH&LS, CCI** (Michael Wiltshire, Thomas Thomsen) and **ELG** (Thomas Weischede, Rebecca Schuster). Chess is not only a modern sport, but above all a cultural asset that has left its mark on European languages and still shapes political thinking. That is why I believe cooperation between culturally oriented organizations is the right way forward. Plans for the next meeting were already made in Valencia, which, after Marostica (2022), Belfort (2023), Budapest (2024) and Valencia (2025), will now take us north, probably to Copenhagen. Valencia, where it all began, will always remain a magical place in my personal memory.

Finally, here are the participants (in alphabetical order)

Bastian, Herbert; Bertola, Georges; Garzón, José; Hoffmeister, Frank; Icklicki, Willy; Johansson, Mattias; Leconte, Jean Olivier; Løfgren, Claes; Moskalenko, Victor; Plecas, Darko; Plecas, Draga; Sanz Menendez, Juan Carlos; Schuster, Rebekka; Seoane, Jesús; Serruys, Henri; Teyssou, Denis; Thimognier, Dominique; van Habberney, Guy; Ward, James; Weischede, Thomas; Wiltshire, Michael; Zutter, François.

