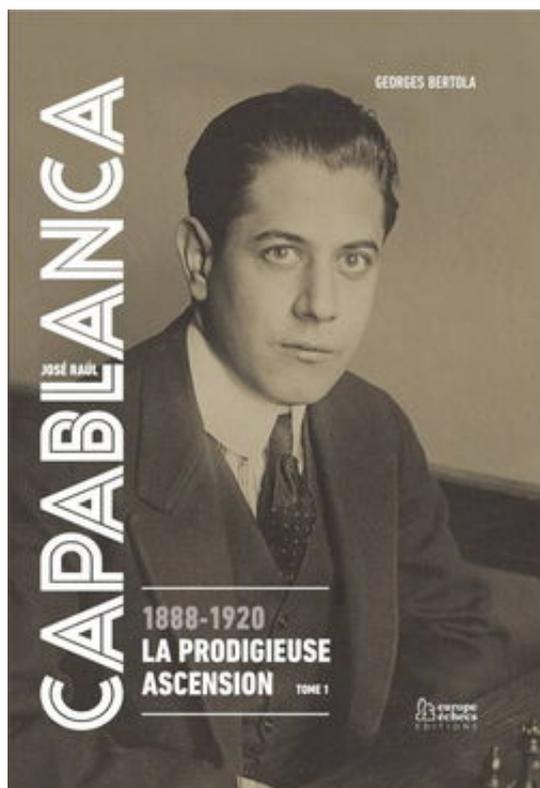


2024-11-20

Capablanca, the prodigious ascent (1888-1920) - by Georges Bertola



Georges Bertola - Capablanca - frontcover

Georges Bertola, editor-in-chief of the magazine Europe Echecs and chess historian, has just published in French a book on Capablanca, with a preface by the Ukrainian champion Vasyl Ivanchuk.

Coincidentally, 19 November (today) also happens to be his birthday!

This fascinating, richly illustrated book takes you back through the career of this chess prodigy.

The first volume covers his rise from birth in 1888 to the year before he won the World Championship against Lasker in 1921.

An excellent gift for the festive season.

You can buy the book on the [Europe Echecs magazine website](#)

Price **39,90 €**

Here's what the back cover says:



— José Raúl Capablanca 1931

This first volume reveals the rise of the young chess prodigy José Raúl Capablanca, who learnt the game at the age of 4 and a half by watching his father play. He did not belong to any school and did not study chess other than by practising intensely. He was quickly regarded as a phenomenon, and his illustrious predecessor, Emanuel Lasker, the 2nd world champion in history, had to admit: 'I have known many chess players, but only one genius: Capablanca'.

Through 111 games that illustrate his style, which has often been described as limpid and based on excellent technique, I have tried to bring him back to his time by emphasising his human qualities. I have covered the key moments in his biography up until Capablanca became the undisputed contender for the world title, which he won in 1921.

Replaying his games can make the game seem a relatively straightforward exercise. He is remembered as the greatest endgame player of the early 20th century, but his treatment of openings is outdated.

There is nothing more deceptive than the obvious. While this may be true for a super Grandmaster, for amateurs and club players alike, the logic of his analysis, his pragmatic vision and his positional assessments have retained much of their freshness.

His style, his efficiency and his domination over the players of his time bear some resemblance to the 'giants' of our time, such as Anatoly Karpov and Magnus Carlsen.



Georges Bertola

Georges Bertola kindly answered some of my questions during a recent interview about his book.

Jean-Olivier Leconte: Could you briefly introduce yourself?

Georges Bertola: I've always been passionate about the game and the players who have shaped its history. I played as an amateur (I've been working full-time for an insurance company since 1980) and there weren't many winners at the time. At the end of the 80s, my Elo was close to 2200, and I also played correspondence chess, before the era of powerful computers, with an Elo of over 2400. I then went on to collect chess books, magazines and so on, building up one of the biggest collections in Switzerland.

JOL: Why did you choose Capablanca over another chess player? Do you have a particular interest in him?

GB: I suggested to Europe Echecs that we publish a collection dedicated to 'World Champions'. Capablanca was one of the players who, through the clarity of his essentially strategic vision, seemed to me to be the one whose teaching was most relevant to club players. The apparent simplicity of his game, the application of his principles and the logic of their realisation are still relevant today to help most amateurs. Above all, it's useful for understanding the game, before memorising the complexities of what we call theory...

JOL: When we last met in Budapest, you told me that you had been to Cuba and visited Capablanca's grave. Can you tell us about the circumstances of your visit?

GB : In 2016, I went to Cuba. The popularity that chess enjoyed and the memories that Sylvain Zinser and GM Florin Georghiu had brought back to me from the 1966 Olympics, the resurrection of the 'Capablanca Memorial' by the mythical Che Guevara, had all aroused my curiosity. I have to say that the only contacts that allowed me to understand the reality of what the Cubans were going through were a few chess players, I'll mention GM Silvino Garcia and IM José Luis Vilela. Visiting Capablanca's tomb made me realise just how important he still is to Cubans today. It's probably the most imposing tomb of a chess player that exists.

JOL: How long did it take you to write this first volume?

GB : It took me more than a year to write it, but since I've been publishing historical and other articles (since 1975 in the press in French-speaking Switzerland), a lot of the material had already been put on the back burner, so to speak. First of all, it's a matter of compiling and summarising everything I've been able to gather on Capablanca. The computer's contribution to the search for truth is minimal. The idea is essentially to understand and delve into the thoughts of the great players who wrote about him. At the same time, I like to introduce elements of the context of history, which often have a link, however tenuous, with the existential problems of the great champions. The one I find most interesting, Alekhine, is next on my list of projects.

JOL: This is volume 1 for the moment. Do you have 2 or 3 volumes planned?

GB: 5. I'm currently working on volume 2, which covers the period from the conquest of the title in 1921 until his death. So it will probably be the 2nd and final volume devoted to Capablanca. Given the material, particularly the 1927 match and his complicated relationship with Alekhine, it will be just as voluminous, if not more so...

JOL: When do you think this second volume will be available?

GB: It will certainly take me another year to complete this project. I have to admit that the caricatured image I had of the champion Capablanca, who didn't study chess, has been seriously dented. It was GM Vasyl Ivanchuk who, during an interview a few years ago, told me that it seemed impossible to him that Capablanca didn't prepare his games. He was referring in particular to his match against Max Euwe. An opinion I now share.

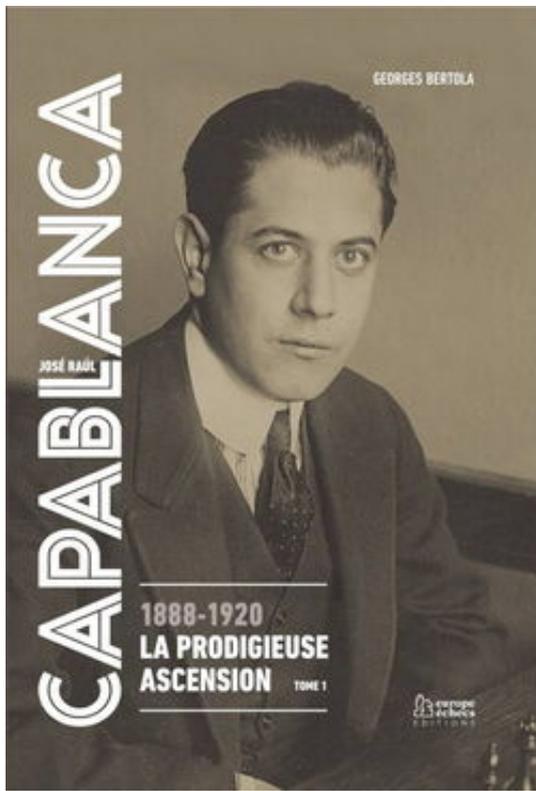
Thank you Georges.

- [Georges Bertola - Capablanca - extract \(936.0 KiB\)](#)

Georges Bertola

[Capablanca](#)

La Prodigieuse Ascension Tome 1



Georges Bertola - Capablanca - frontcover

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