

Rodrigo LÓPEZ DE SEGURA and his reception in Europe



Herbert BASTIAN

5 September 2025 in Valencia (Spain)

Content of the lecture

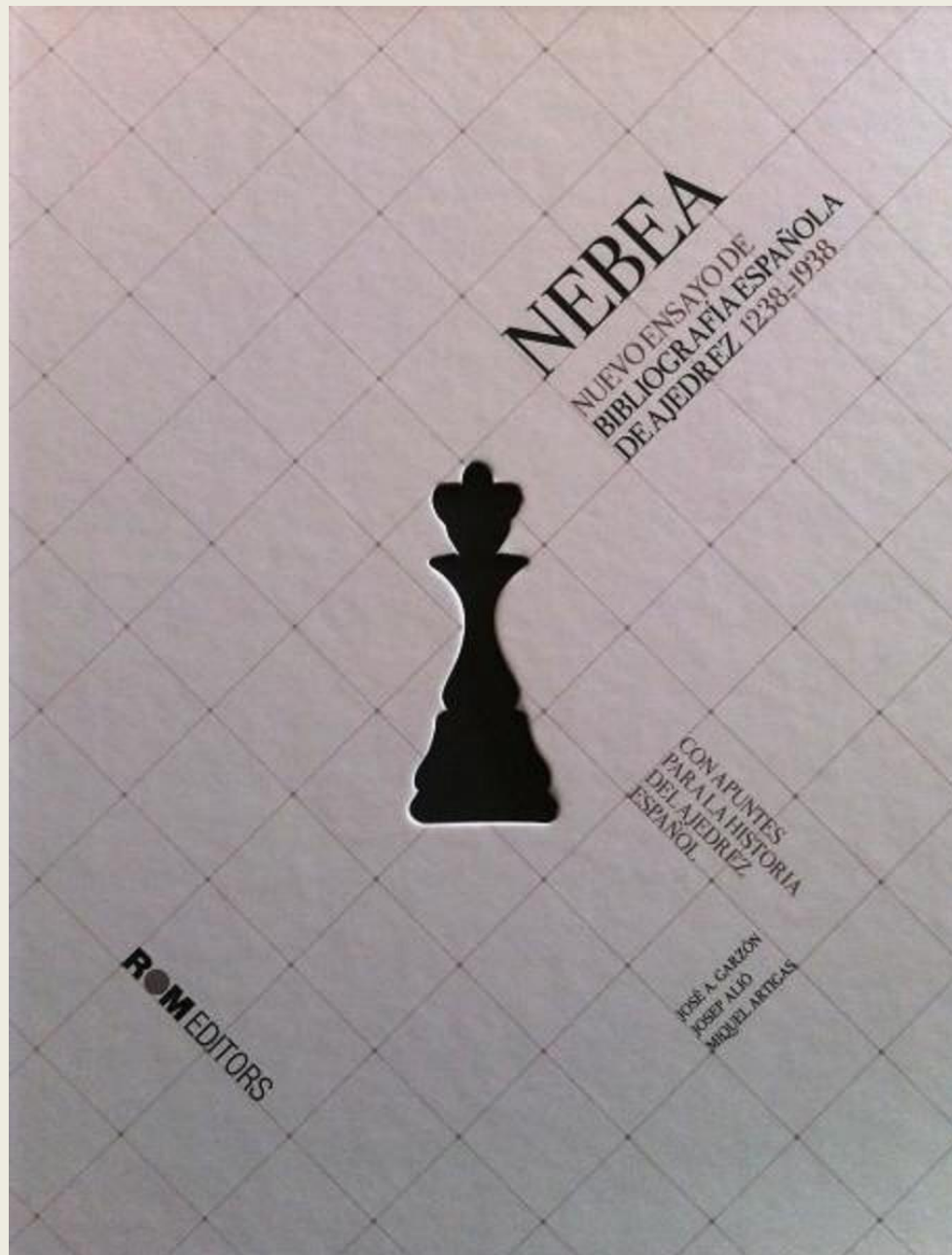
Introduction

1. About the person Rodrigo (Ruy) LÓPEZ DE SEGURA
2. On the content of LÓPEZ's book
3. On the distribution of LÓPEZ's book in Europe

Introduction

Today we know of several works before LÓPEZ on the **new chess**, whose birth is fixed at **1475** according to GARZÓN's astronomical dating.

1475	Spain	CASTELVI & VINYOLÉS & FENOLAR. <i>MS Scachs d'amor</i>. Poem, Valencia.
1495	Spain	VICENT. <i>Libre dels jochs partits dels schacs en nombre de 100</i> , [...]. Valencia.
1497	Spain	LUCENA, ?. <i>Arte de Axedres</i> , Salamanca, 1497.
1500–1505	Spain	<i>MS El Escorial</i> Anonym.
ca. 1502	Italy	<i>MS Perugia, MS 755 (L. 27)</i> . Biblioteca comunale Augusta de Perugia.
1502–1512	Italy	<i>MS Cesena. Ludi Varii. MS 166.74</i> Biblioteca Malatestiana de Cesena.
>1500	Italy	PACIOLI, Luca & DA VINCI, Leonardo (?). <i>De Ludo Scachorum</i> . Mantua.
1505–1515	France	<i>MS Göttingen (Göttinger Handschrift)</i>
1512	Italy	DAMIANO da Odemira. <i>Qvesto libro e da imparare giocare a scachi et de le partite</i> . Rom.
ca. 1530	France	<i>MS Paris/de Lucia</i> . Privately owned by David DELUCIA (New York) since 1989.
1542–1547*	France	<i>MS Allemand</i> . Sign. F. allem. 107, Bibliotheque nationale de France, Paris.
1550–1575	Spain	<i>MS Add. 28710</i> . British Library. Contains the numerical notation 1-64.
1565–1568	Italy	<i>MS Annibale Romei</i> . Dedicated to Eleonora d'Este.
1561	Spain	LÓPEZ DE SEGURA, Ruy. <i>Libro de la invencion liberal y arte del juego del Axedrez</i>



At this point I would like to draw attention to the important work NEBEA from 2012, in which the early Spanish works on chess are discussed comprehensively and competently.

The authors are

- José A. GARZÓN,
- Josep ALIÓ
- Miquel ARTIGAS.

1. About the person Rodrigo (Ruy) LÓPEZ DE SEGURA

Joaquín PÉREZ DE ARRIAGA (*1932; † 2025) on

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruy_López_de_Segura#cite_note-1

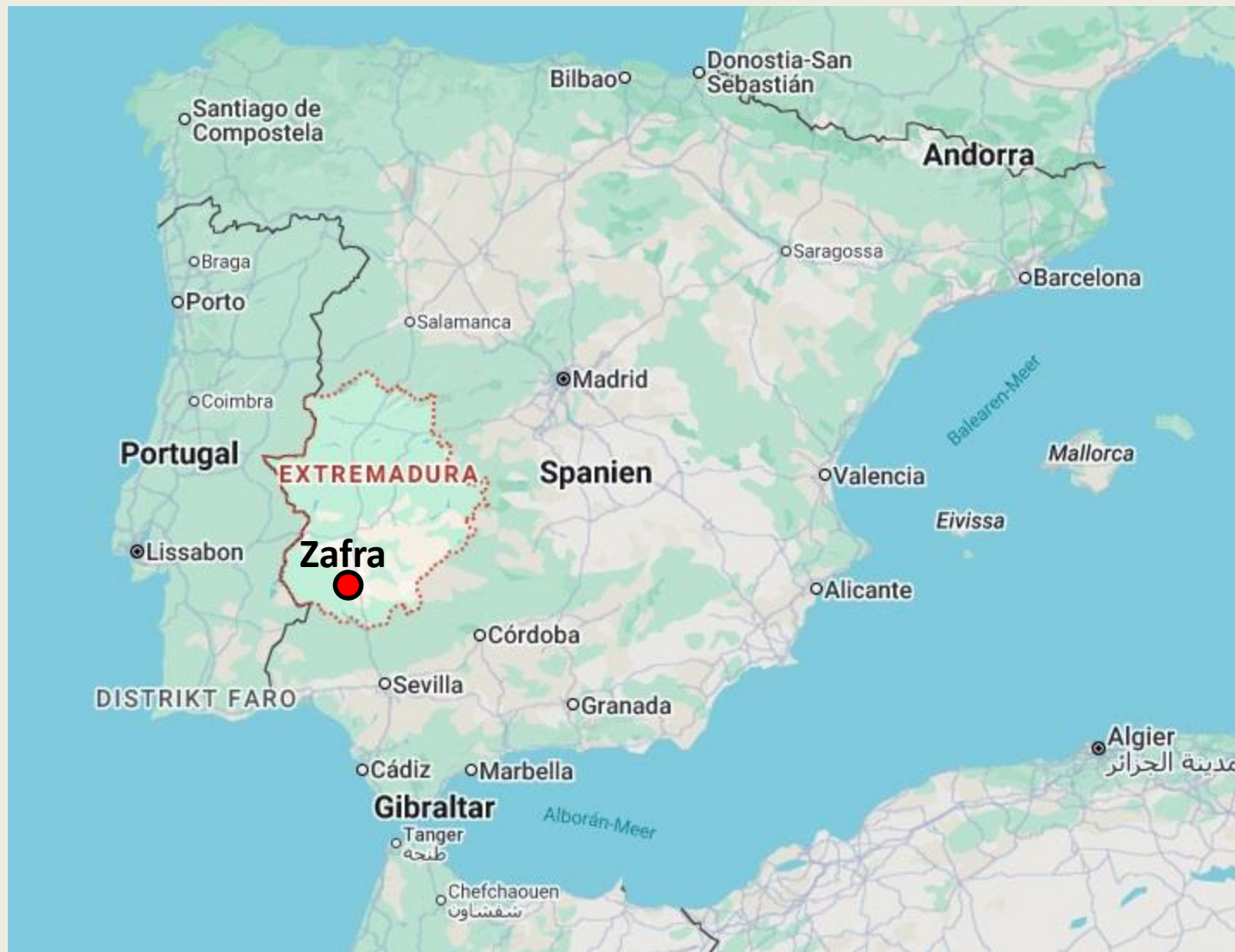
(dated 2022)

ç A F R A , en tierra de Cuenca ay vn lugar puesto en vn alto, deste nòbre: çafra tienese por cosa cierta ser Arabigo, en la qual lengua vale cosa amari-lla, y por alusion vale colera, por tener esta color, y por que la colera sube a lo mas alto, que es la cabeça, deuio tomar aquel lugar este nombre, o por coger-se en el açafran. Ay papeles antiguos, y tradicion en aquella tierra del Moro de çafra, que dizen fue valentissimo, y de estatura de Gigante. Otra çafra ay en Estremadura, donde huuo vn muchacho, que siendo de muy poca edad era tan grã jugador de axedrez, que todos le reconocian la ventaja, y quedò el nòbre del niño, de çafra. Luã Lopez de Velasco, çafra vale en lengua Arabiga, em barcadero.

"The only news we have of Ruy's childhood is provided by Sebastián DE COVARRUBIAS in his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana, o española* (1611), who in the voice "Çafra" says [p. 261]:

"There is another Çafra in Extremadura, where there was a boy, who being of very little age, was such a great chess player, that everyone recognised his advantage, and the name of the boy of Çafra remained".

As COVARRUBIAS calls him a "boy", that is, a young man between seven and fourteen years of age, but of "very little age", it seems appropriate to suppose that he was about ten years old."



Some facts from the life of LÓPEZ

- LÓPEZ was born around 1528 as the second of six children.
- At the age of around 10, he already had a reputation as an exceptional chess talent
- In 1559, he was summoned to Rome on ecclesiastical matters (election of Pope PIUS IV) .
- During his stay in Rome, LÓPEZ played chess successfully with the locals.
- One of his opponents was the young [Giovanni Leonardo DI BONA](#) (* 1533; † 1578) = *Il Puttino*
- LÓPEZ learnt the term gambit (*dare il gambetta* - to put a foot wrong) from the Italian players.
- In Italy, López came across DAMIANO's *Questo libro e da imparare giocare a scachi et de li partiti*.
- LÓPEZ decided to write his own book, which was published in 1561.
- For almost twenty years, LÓPEZ was considered the strongest player in Spain; his rivals were [Alfonso CERON](#) from Granada and [MEDRANO](#).
- LÓPEZ and CERON played in front of King PHILIP II and impressed him so much that LÓPEZ received a benefice and a golden chain with a tower.
- LÓPEZ was also recognised for his skills in blindfold chess.
- SALVIO (1634) writes that LÓPEZ travelled to Rome again in 1572. However, it is more likely that LÓPEZ only visited Rome once (1559) and that SALVIO's chronology is incorrect.

On the last years of LÓPEZ

It is unclear whether there was a meeting with the Italian masters at the court of PHILIP II in 1574/1575, as SALVIO claimed. If we consider the aforementioned biography of PÉREZ DE ARRIAGA, a new picture emerges.

- LÓPEZ appears in the registration lists in Seville in 1570 to undertake a journey to the New World (NEBEA, p. 164f.).

“N.º 89. El Bachiller Rui LÓPEZ DE SEGURA, clérigo, natural de la villa de Zafra, hijo de Hernán LÓPEZ DE SEGURA y de María LÓPEZ DE SEGURA, su mujer, se despachó a las provincias de Perú por cédula de su [...] en —12 de octubre”.

"Bachiller Rui LÓPEZ DE SEGURA, cleric, born in the town of Zafra, son of Hernán LÓPEZ DE SEGURA and María LÓPEZ DE SEGURA, his wife, was dispatched to the provinces of Peru by order of his [...] on 12th October".

- Preparations for this are already documented for 1568 (NEBEA, p. 165).

PÉREZ DE ARRIAGA (2022)

- “His brother Alonso is registered as a merchant to travel to Peru on 13 March 1564, so it may have been his reputation that encouraged Ruy to make the journey.”

"As in October 1570, when he registered, the Armada had already left for the New World, he had to wait until the following year, but in 1571 the Armada could not be formed for the voyage as all the ships had been requisitioned for the Christian fleet of the Holy League against the Turk, whom they defeated in the battle of Lepanto. So he had to wait until the Armada of 1572 to begin his voyage to the New World. This suggests that he was not settled in Peru until the beginning of 1573".

“In the almost two years he spent in Seville before starting his journey, he was visited by the Italian players Giovanni Leonardo DA CUTRO *il Puttino*, Giulio Cesare POLERIO *l'Abruzzese* and Paolo BOI *il Siracusano*, who no doubt tried to prove his superiority over the legendary cleric. Thanks to the notes made by POLERIO, who was travelling with *Puttino*, in his chess notebooks, four of the games played there have arrived. Three of them against *Puttino*, resulting in a win and two draws for LÓPEZ, one against *Syracusano*, with a win for LÓPEZ.”

- “His brother Alonso returned to Zafra around 1590, donated the convalescent hospital to his town, which testifies to the good progress of his business in Peru, and died in Zafra. As he did not leave a single word about his brother and did not mention him by name in his will, it must be assumed that Ruy died in Peru before 1590.”



Luigi MUSSINI (1871) - [Leonardo da Cutro and Ruy López play chess at the court of Spain](#) (77 cm x 133 cm).

2. On the content of LÓPEZ's book

- Firstly, I would like to make a few comments on the ideas LÓPEZ discussed about **chess history**.
- Then I will briefly discuss what he said about the **endgames**, which will give an impression of the state of his understanding of chess.
- This is followed by chapters on the openings, which are the main subject of LÓPEZ's book, but no longer meet today's requirements.
- At that time, it was customary to equalise differences in playing strength by means of handicaps, so that López goes into quite a lot of detail about handicap games. I am leaving this part out completely because it is no longer up to date.

Chess history

Chapters 3-5 of Book I of LÓPEZ'S book contain historical remarks on the **invention of chess**. They correspond to the theories of the time and are by no means accurate from today's perspective. LÓPEZ discusses the following theories in detail, without committing himself:

- The Moors invented the game of chess. They play a lot, even from memory.
- The game was invented by the Greek brothers LYDO and TYRRHENO during a famine.
- PALAMEDES invented the game before Troy.
- The game of chess is the same as the *latrunculi* of the Romans.
- CESSOLIS claims that the philosopher XERXES invented the game of chess.

Surprisingly, despite their centuries-long presence in southern Spain, the Moors receive little recognition as chess players. LÓPEZ presents the various legends and avoids stating a personal preference.

Digression into chess history

The first known report on the **Indo-Persian origin of chess** was written by the Portuguese world traveller **Pedro TEIXEIRA*** in 1610.

I have not found any mention of TEIXEIRA'S work among the important chess historians VON DER LASA, VAN DER LINDE, MURRAY and EALES.

Even Maxcellend COULON did not mention it in his doctoral thesis (1999) *Jeu d'échecs et société en France au XVIIIe siècle* when discussing SARRASIN'S work, although SARRASIN devotes himself to the author in detail (SARRASIN writes TIXEIRA).

The last mention of TEIXEIRA'S report I found was in **Dr Albert MENNUNG'S biography of SARRASIN** from 1910, after which TEIXEIRA seems to have been forgotten.

MENNUNG'S readable, chess-historical chapter on SARRASIN'S famous essay from 1647, published by Gilles MÉNAGE in 1656, has apparently escaped the attention of chess historians.

TEIXEIRA, Pedro (ca. 1570 (?) in Lissabon; † ca. 1650 in Antwerpen)

RELACIONES

DE

PEDRO TEIXEIRA

D'EL ORIGEN

DESCENDENCIA

Y SVCCESION

dè los Reyes de Persia, y de Harmuz,

Y DE VN VIAGE HECHO

POR EL MISMO AVTOR

dende la India Oriental hasta Italia
por tierra.



EN AMBERES

En casa de Hieronymo Verdussen.

M. D. C. X.

Con Privilegio.

Wb/66/542

DE LOS REYES DE PERSIA. 189

Y por concluir con los Chingalas, digo que ^{Chingalas belicosos.} son naturalmente inclinados à las armas, en las quales han hecho, y hazen toda via hazañas increíbles, de que yo vide algunas: labran sutilissimamente marfil y cristal de que la Isla tiene alguno, y muchas y muy curiosas escopetas. Y dellos y de la Isla, lo dicho bastara: por boluer à la Persia con Anuxiron) que señoreo las tierras de Maurenahar, Karafon, Darband, Hhezrran, Hyama, Tabaristam, Gerion, Parte de la India: Kermou, Parsy, que es Persia, Aderbaion, Hyerakhen, Iazirat, Homan, hasta Hyaman en Arabia, y muchas tierras hazia Magareb en Rumeistam ^{Reynos que señoreo Anuxiron.} que es en la Grecia, o provin-

cias del Imperio de Constantinopla. En tiempo deste Rey se traxeron dende la India à la Persia dos libros de Philosophia muy celebres, llamados Kelilah el vno, y el otro Wademaná, y el iuego del Axadres, que los Indios embiaron à los Parsios figurando le en el la inconstancia y mutabilidad de las cosas de la vida y continua guerra della: y como conuenia, biuiendo todo en contienda, gobernarfe cada qual con prudencia y saber: à que dize Mirkond que los Parsios respondieron, embiandoles el iuego de las tablas, diciendo que aunque para la vida fuesse menester saber y prudencia, con todo conuenia ser ayudado de vn poco de ventura como podrian ver en aquel iuego. (Vnos y otros, Parsios digo y Indios, vzan el Axadres y tablas, y es entre ellos muy comu)

« En tiẽpo deste Rey se traxeron dende la India'a la Persia dos libros de Philosophia muy celebres, llamados *Kelilah* el vno, y el otro *Wademaná*, y el iuego del *Axadres*, que los Indios embiaron a los Parsios figurando le en el la inconstancia y mutabilidad de las cosas de la vida y continua guerra della: y como conuenia, biuiendo todo en contienda, gouernarse cada qual con prudencia y saber: a que dize Mirkond que los Parsios respondieron, embiandoles el iuego de las tablas, *diziendo que aunque para la vida fuesse menester saber y prudencia, con todo conuenia ser ayudado de vn poco de ventura como podrian ver en aquel iuego.* »

"At the time of this king [CHOSRAU I (531-579)] two very famous books of philosophy were brought from India to Persia, one called *Kelilah*, the other *Wademana*, and the **Chess Game**, which the Indians sent to the Persians, describing the impermanence and changeableness of the things of life and its constant struggle. To this, MIRKOND says, the Persians replied by sending them the **Nard**, saying that *although knowledge and wisdom were necessary for life, it was nevertheless right to be helped by a little luck, as they could see in this game.*"

➡ MIRKOND's interpretation is different from FIRDAUSI's well-known one.

Chess endgames with LÓPEZ

In keeping with the times, LÓPEZ only commented on a few chess endgames. His selection reveals that he must have already had significant knowledge of the endgame. He comments on this in chapter 27 of the first book.

- A rook and knight do not win against a rook.
- A rook does not win against a knight.
- A rook and bishop win against a rook. [This is not correct!]
- Rook does not win against bishop if the weaker king goes to the right corner.
- The king and pawn do not win against the king if you can defend yourself with opposition. [The term "opposition" first appears in *MS Chapais* in 1772].
- King, rook pawn and bishop do not win if the bishop does not control the corner square.
- King and queen against king and bishop pawn is drawn by stalemate.

The concept of **opposition** in LÓPEZ

La.23. sea, Que vn peon y vn rey no pueden hazer dama al rey contrario: y afsi no le pueden dar mate, si el rey defendiente tuuiere la delantera de manera que le pueda ganar al contrario, de venir à estar con el **en frente a tercera casa:** y que aya de jugar el contrario, que pretende hazer dama. Y siempre procure de guardar esta regla, que andãdo su contrario contorneando el peon, siempre q̃

About chess notation

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56
57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64

- The oldest reliably datable evidence of **numerical notation** can be found in the work by LÓPEZ (1561, p. 47 f.).
- There the numbering is h1-a1 = 1-8 to h8-a8 = 57-64, line by line.
- Perhaps even older is the Spanish *MS Add. 28710* (British Library), which also contains the numerical notation, beginning on a1.
- According to GARZÓN's description, the work was probably written by a mathematician who did not know LÓPEZ's book. GARZÓN therefore dates it between 1550 and 1575.
- But the *MS Allemand 107*, in which the numerical notation already appears, is probably even older, and this points to a Italian origin, because the author of the MS was in Italy, not in Spain.

3. On the distribution of LÓPEZ's book in Europe

- After its publication in Alcala de Henares in 1561, the book was first translated into Italian by TARSIA in 1584.
- A list of early translations, mainly in French, can be found in VAN DER LINDE (1874), Book I, pp. 347-350 or in NEBEA (2012).
- A modern French adaptation, to which I refer, was published in Paris in 2015 by Stéphane LABORDE.
- The chapter on LÓPEZ's book in *The Classical Era of Modern Chess* by Peter J. MONTÉ (2014) on pages 124-146 is also very helpful.
- Of course, the classic works are also still useful, for example by VON DER LASA, VAN DER LINDE, MURRAY and EALES.

1561	Spain	LÓPEZ DE SEGURA, Ruy. <i>Libro de la invencion liberal y arte del juego del Axedrez</i>
1584	Italy	TARSIA, Giovanni Domenico. <i>Il givoco de gli scacchi</i> , Venetia.
1609	France	<i>Le jev des échecs</i> . Chez Jean MICARD. Paris.
1615	France	<i>Le royal jeu des échecs</i> . Seconde édition. Chez Gille ROBINOT. Paris.
1616, 1617	Germany	SELENUS, Gustavus. <i>Das Schach oder Königspiel</i> .
1636	France	<i>Le royal jeu des échets</i> . Chez Clavde GOVRAVLT. Paris.
1665	Belgium	<i>Le jeu des échecs</i> . Chez Lucas VANDEN KERCHOVE. A Bruges (Brügge).
1674	France	<i>Le royal et nouveau jeu des eschets</i> . Chez Antoine DE RAFFLÉ. Paris.
1813	England	SARRATT, Jacob Henry. <i>The works of Damiano, Ruy López and Salvio on the game of chess</i> .
2015	France	LABORDE, Stéphane. <i>Livre de l'invention libérale et art du jeu d'échecs</i> . Paris.

❧ LIBRO DE LA ❧

INVENCION LIBERAL Y ARTE

del juego del Axedrez, muy vtil y prouechosa:
assi para los que de nueuo quisiere[n] depren-
der à jugarlo, como para los que
lo saben jugar.



❧ *Compuesta aora nueuamente por Ruylopez de Sigura cle-
rigo, vezino dela villa Casra. Dirigida al muy illustre se-
ñor don Garcia de Toledo, ayo y mayordomo ma-
yor del Serenissimo Principe don
Carlos nuestro señor.*



❧ En Alcala en casa de Andres
de Angulo. 1561.

❧ CON PRIVILEGIO. ❧

❧ *Esta tassado à cinco blancas el pliego.* ❧

IL
GIVOCO
DE GLI SCACCHI

Di Rui Lopez, Spagnuolo;

Nuouamente tradotto in lingua Italiana
da M. GIO. DOMENICO TARSIA.

A L L' E C C E L L E N T I S S I M O
S. IACOPO BVONCOMPAGNI
DVCA DI SORA, E D'ARCE,

*Sig. d'Arpino, Marchese di Vignuola, Capitano Generale de gli
huomini d'arme del Re Cattolico nello Stato di Milano, e
Gouernator Generale di Santa Chiesa, &c.*

CON PRIVILEGIO.



I N V E N E T I A,
Presso Cornelio Arriuabene.
M D LXXXIII.

LE
IEV-DES ESCHECS,
AVEC SON INVENTION
SCIENCE ET PRACTIQUE.

Où par vn tres-docte & intelligible discours sont amplement
descrits les moyens d'ordonner son Ieu tant pour
l'offensive que la defensiva.

Traduit d'Espagnol en François.



*Lanc
890.*



A PARIS,
Chez JEAN MICARD, rue des Carmes, à l'enseigne de la
Bonne Foy, & au Palais, en la Gallerie par où l'on va
à la Chancellerie.

M. DCIX.
Avec Privilege du Roy.



THE WORKS
OF
Damiano, Ruy-Lopez,
AND
Salvio,
ON
THE GAME OF CHESS;
TRANSLATED AND ARRANGED:
WITH
REMARKS, OBSERVATIONS, AND COPIOUS NOTES
ON
THE GAMES.

CONTAINING, ALSO,
SEVERAL ORIGINAL GAMES AND SITUATIONS,
BY THE EDITOR.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
*The Elements of the Art of Playing without seeing
the Board.*

—
Qui joue un coup en vain
Perd un grand avantage,
Joueur habile et sage
Ne fait rien sans dessein.
• • • • •
Distracts ne soient tes yeux
Ni ta main trop légère.
Un beau coup s'offre à faire,
Vois s'il n'est rien de mieux.

M. DE ST. USSANS.

By **J. H. SARRATT,**

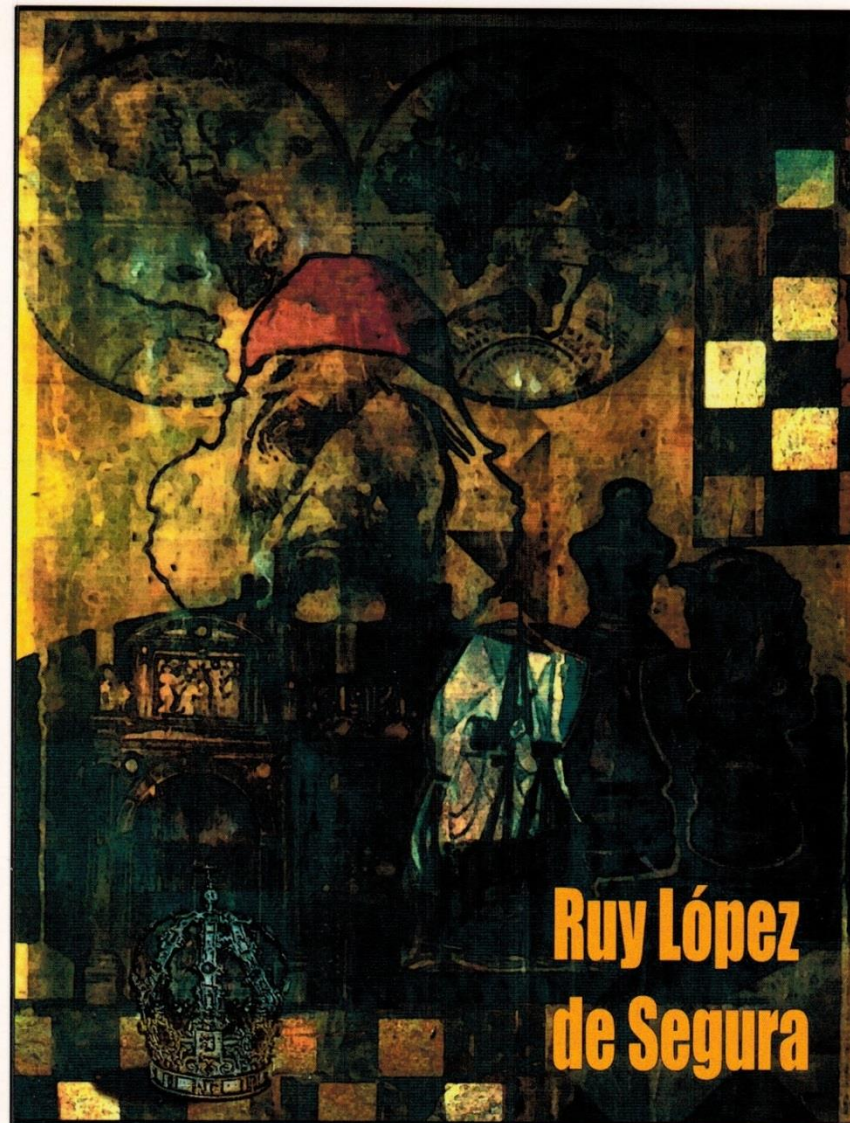
Author of a Treatise on Chess, &c., and Professor of the Game.

London:
PRINTED FOR T. BOOSEY, No. 4, OLD BROAD STREET,
ROYAL EXCHANGE.
1813.

The Classical Era of Modern Chess

Peter J. Monté

McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers



**Ruy López
de Segura**

**LIVRE DE L'INVENTION LIBERALE
ET ART DU JEU D'ECHECS**

