

2019-12-19

Russian Chess Literature: Early Periodicals

Part 2

by Michael Clapham

Part one: [Russian Chess Literature: A brief history](#)

This second article on Russian chess literature provides information on early chess periodicals, in chronological order. Further bibliographic details can be found in *Chess Literature, USSR, (1775-1966)*, by N. I. Sakharov, Moscow 1968, and *Chess Periodicals*, by Gino Di Felice, Jefferson and London 2010. The LN catalogue: *Bibliotheca van der Linde-Niemeijeriana*, The Hague 1955 only lists the library's holdings.

_ Shakhmatnyĭ Listok, 1859 title page (Moravian Chess reprint)

1. Shakhmatnyĭ Listok, St Petersburg 1859 to 1863, edited by Victor Mikhailov. Sakharov (1968) 204, Di Felice 2406, LN 6308.

Shakhmatnyĭ Listok (Chess Sheet), the first Russian chess periodical, was published every month for five years from January 1859 to December 1863. The first 37 numbers were issued as a supplement to the literary and scientific journal *Russkoe Slovo* (Russian Word), before appearing as an independent publication from 1862 to 1863, after *Russkoe Slovo* had closed down.

The editor was the prominent chess player Victor Mikhailov (1828 - 1883) and over five years his magazine promoted chess with a wide variety of articles on contemporary events both at home and abroad, games, compositions, biographies of leading players, historical essays, etc. Petrov and Jaenisch both contributed material, and Sergey Urosov's influential *Guide to the Study of Chess* was serialised in the magazine from 1859 to 1861.

1863 was a bumper year for the magazine with a total of 458 pages (previous years had 346, 332, 285, and 343 pages) and a full list of contents for the five volumes was included at the end of volume five. Although initially financed and published by the reputedly very wealthy G. Kushelev-Bezborodko the magazine was discontinued at the end of 1863 due to a lack of subscribers, a fate which became all too familiar for succeeding chess periodicals.



— *Shakhmatnyĭ Listok*, 1859, pp 8-9, courtesy of Jurgen Stigter.

• — *Shakhmatnyĭ Listok*, 1860, pp 284-285. (Moravian Chess reprint)

• — *Shakhmatnyĭ Listok*, 1861, pp 192-193. (Moravian Chess reprint)

• — *Shakhmatnyĭ Listok*, 1863, pp 450-451, Contents (Moravian Chess reprint)

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2. *Shakhmatnyĭ Listok*, St. Petersburg 1876 to 1881, edited by Mikhail Chigorin. Sakharov (1968) 205, Di Felice 2408, LN 6309.

It was 13 years before the next chess periodical appeared in Russia; Adams, p46 states that from 1869 to 1876 the only chess organ in the country was Shumov's column in the weekly magazine *Vsemirnaya Illustratsiya*, although a couple of chess columns in the German language were also published in Russian magazines during this intervening period.

The launch of *Shakhmatnyĭ Listok* in 1876 was one of the initiatives by Chigorin to improve the organisation and affinity of the St. Petersburg chess players. He applied to the authorities in April 1876 for permission to publish his new magazine, this was granted in June and the first issue came out in September 1876. The magazine aimed to stimulate the chess communities both in the large cities and in the provinces. The contents of the first volume for 1876 (September to December) were as follows:

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Chigorin used his magazine to highlight the general disorganisation of Russian chess and suggested ways to improve this, however, it was many years before his ambition for a countrywide official chess organisation came to fruition.

Chigorin published instructional articles with courses on openings and endings, games from international tournaments, beginning with Vienna 1873, annotated by himself, items on chess history, and articles on leading players including Anderssen, Morphy, and Steinitz.

The October and November 1876 issues, (pp 55-61 & 98-103) contained a bibliography of Russian chess literature compiled by M. K. Gonyaev. This listed 30 original works by Russian authors, published both at home and abroad up to 1875, translated works, and journal articles, including over 40 articles by Jaenisch published in chess periodicals around the world. The original works include a manuscript by the Russian émigré to the USA, Serge de Stchoulepnikoff; *Twenty Solutions of the Problem of the Knight's Tour*, Buffalo N. J. 1865; this is currently in the Cleveland Public Library.

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This first Russian chess bibliography is not recorded in *Bibliotheca Van der Linde-Niemeijeriana aucta et de novo descripta*, Volume I. *Chess: Bibliography and History*, The Hague 1974, although other articles by Gonyaev on chess history in *Shakhmatnyĭ Listok* and other magazines are listed (nos. 414 to 420).

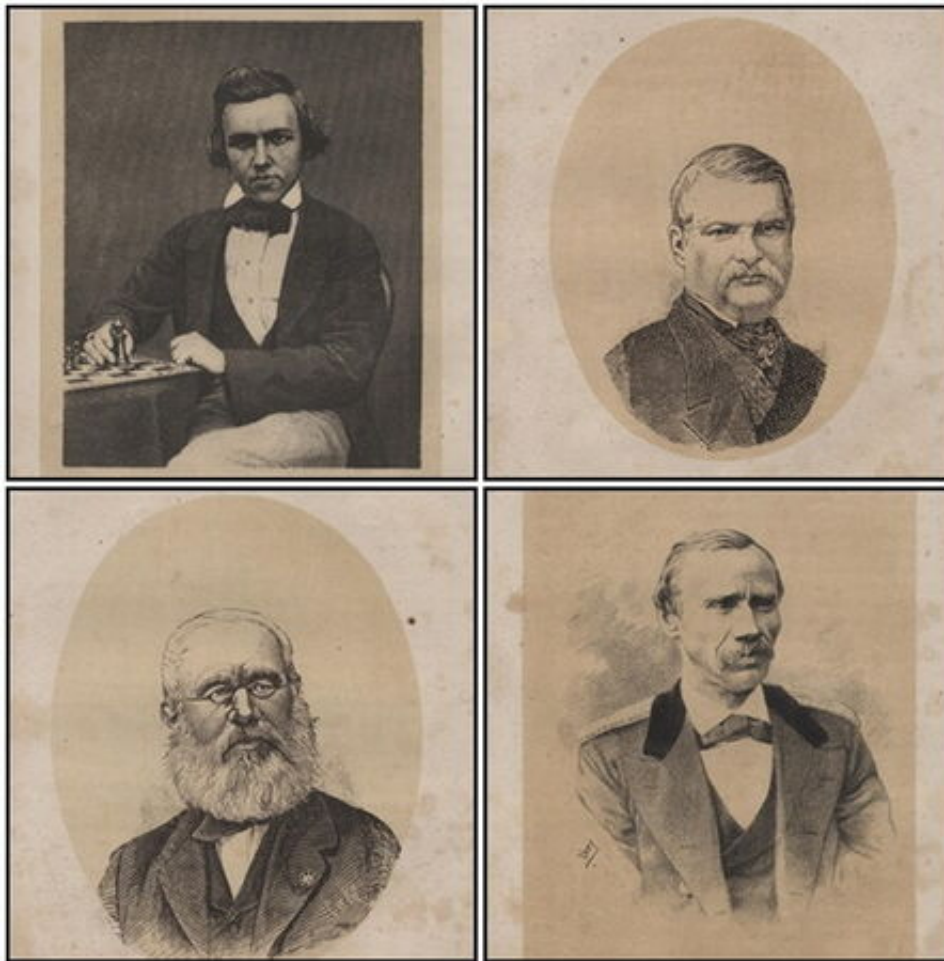
Although assisted with contributions from I. S. Shumov, N. I. Petrovsky, E. S. Schiffers, M. K. Gonyaev and others, the bulk of the burden fell to Chigorin who produced the magazine from his own meagre resources. The monthly magazine had a stuttering existence, there was a temporary gap from July to December 1878, and many issues were double numbers covering two months. Chigorin wrote that he needed 250 subscribers for the magazine to survive, but had only 120 in 1878. This increased to 190 in 1879 but, after five years of financial struggle, he was forced to cease publication in April 1881.

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- Shakhmatnyi Listok, 1880 pp 148-149

To my eyes this was a very well produced magazine, with a varied and useful content, and at least the equal of some Western periodicals of the time. The volume for 1880 included the following four full-page portraits:



Paul Morphy (top left), Carl

Jaenisch (top right)

Alexander Petrov(bottom left), Dmitry Klark (bottom right)

3. Shakhmatnyĭ Zhurnal (Chess Journal), Moscow 1882, edited by A. Hellwig. Sakharov (1968) 206, Di Felice 2416, LN -

The first chess periodical published in Moscow, this lasted for just four issues from July to October 1882. The *Introduction* to the first issue stated that the magazine aimed to promote chess and draughts, giving Russian readers a complete overview of chess life in Russia and abroad, with news, games and compositions. Shakhmatnyĭ Zhurnal organised the first correspondence tournament in Russia.

This periodical is very rare, the Cleveland Public Library only has issue no. 1 and the Royal Library at The Hague has no copies.

4. Shakhmatnyĭ Vestnik (Chess Herald), St. Petersburg 1885 - 1887, edited by M. I Chigorin. Sakharov (1968) 207, Di Felice 2415, LN 6310.

Shortly after the demise of Shakhmatnyĭ Listok in April 1881, Chigorin took over the chess department in Vsemirnaya Illustratsya (Universal Illustrated), following the death of the previous editor I. S. Shumov. He conducted the chess column until 1890, however, a small piece in a weekly magazine was not sufficient for

Chigorin and in 1885 he launched his new chess magazine.

This was published by the St. Petersburg Society for Chess Amateurs and commenced in July 1885. The magazine included the usual fare, but Chigorin also arranged a problem-solving competition and a correspondence tournament. A department for draughts was also included. In keeping with Chigorin's continual crusade for a unified organisation for Russian chess players, he published a Draft Charter of the Russian Chess Union in the first issue for 1886, however, it wasn't until 1914 that the All Russian Chess Federation was finally established.

The magazine closed after 18 months in January 1887 as, once again, Chigorin's energy and enthusiasm had failed to attract sufficient subscribers.

5. Shakhmaty: Ezhemesyachnyi Zhurnal St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg 1890, edited by N. E. Mitropolsky. Sakharov (1968) 208, Di Felice 2419, LN 6311.

Chigorin also had a hand in this magazine although the chief editor was Mitropolsky. Articles included The Chess World 1885 - 1889, Chess departments in Russian periodicals, Russian problem composers and games from Chigorin's drawn match with Gunsberg in Havana in 1890. This magazine, which also had a small section on draughts, survived for just five issues from January to May 1890.

6. Shakhmatnyĭ Zhurnal: Ezhemesyachnoe Izdanie, St. Petersburg 1891 - 1898, 1900 - 1903, editors included P. V. Otto and A. K Makarov up to 1893 and E. S. Shiffers from 1894 to 1903. Sakharov (1968) 210, Di Felice 2417, LN 6312.

This magazine was originally aimed at chess novices and players of moderate strength, i.e. the majority of Russian chess players, but otherwise included the usual mix of chess periodical matter. Although there was a break in publication from May 1898 to December 1899, it became the longest surviving Russian chess periodical to date, running to 123 issues in 13 volumes.

The latest games of Russian and foreign chess players were given along with outstanding earlier games by Morphy, Anderssen, Zuckertort, Steinitz and Chigorin etc. Problems and studies featured prominently under the sub-editorship of N. Maksimov who organised solving tourneys with competitors from Russia and abroad. Translations of Steinitz's Modern Chess Instructor were included and from 1895 a draughts department was added.

Bibliography - additions to previous list

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The article was first published on [Chess Book Chats](#)