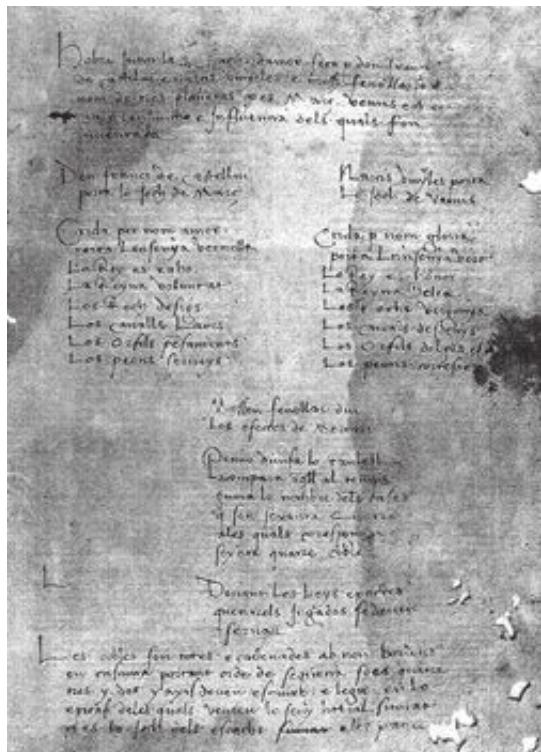


2025-10-07

Scachs d'amor: The Poem That Gave Birth to Modern Chess



Scachs d'amor

José Garzón has sent several articles to complement his lecture given in Valencia on 5 September, which was entitled: [Spain as the cradle of modern chess](#)

These fascinating articles will be published in several instalments, with a summary in English and the full text in Spanish. Here is the first one.

Many thanks to José for allowing us to publish these texts.

Valencia, 1475 — when poetry invented the Queen

by José Garzón

In the twilight of the fifteenth century, in the brilliant humanist city of **Valencia**, three poets — Bernat Fenollar, Narcís Vinyoles, and Francí de Castellví — created a remarkable work titled *Scachs d'amor* (“Chess of Love”).

Behind its courtly allegory lies nothing less than the **birth certificate of modern chess**.

For nearly seven centuries Europe had played the medieval *shatranj*, inherited from the Arab world. But around 1475, this Valencian poem introduced a genuine revolution: for the first time appeared **the Queen**, the most powerful piece on the board, replacing the modest medieval *alferza*. The **bishop** also gained its modern movement, and we already find the **double pawn move**, the **en passant** capture, and the **first outline of castling**.

The poem stages an allegorical game between **Mars** (Castellví) and **Venus** (Vinyoles), with **Mercury** (Fenollar) acting as arbiter.

Across 64 stanzas — like the 64 squares of the chessboard — unfolds **the earliest known game played with modern rules**, ending with a brilliant checkmate delivered by the Queen herself.

It was a perfect reflection of the time: the triumph of a powerful female figure inspired by **Queen Isabella the Catholic** and by the Marian devotion that permeated Valencian poetry.



José Garzón

Discovered in 1905 in Barcelona, the *Scachs d'amor* manuscript was later lost, probably during the Spanish Civil War. Yet preserved photographs have allowed historians such as José A. Garzón to confirm its fundamental role: it predates **Francesch Vicent's** *Llibre dels joch partits dels scachs* (1495) and the later treatises of **Lucena** and **Damiano** that spread the new rules throughout Europe.

Thus, **Valencia** rightfully stands as **the cradle of modern chess** — and we may say, without exaggeration, that the **Queen was born in a love poem**.

Reference:

Garzón, José A. «El acta de nacimiento del ajedrez moderno: el poema *Scachs d'amor*». En: *Pasiones Bibliográficas 5. Valencia: Societat Bibliogràfica Valenciana Jerònima Galés, 2021*, 95-110.

<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8090940>

- [El acta de nacimiento del ajedrez moderno: el poema *Scachs d'amor* - José A. Garzón \(2.1 MiB\)](https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8090940)

