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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 \(2.1 MiB\)](#)