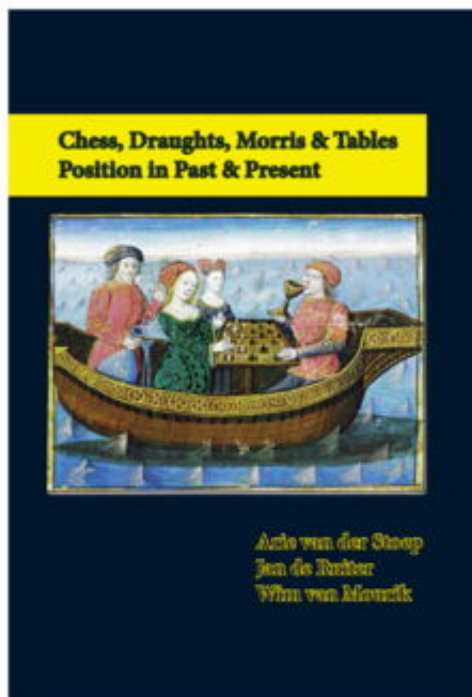


2021-10-11

Chess, Draughts, Morris & Tables. Position in Past & Present



— Chess, Draughts, Morris & Tables. Position in Past & Present -
frontcover

For chess historians it seems important, at least to me, to have a broader view on the history of the game than more or less exclusively on the sources that offer mainly chess material. We may realize that the history of chess is part of the history of mind games or mind sports, which is a much larger field of research, and no less complicated, even when we focus only on the history of the board games. The annual colloquia of the Board Games Studies are there to prove this.

Another proof is the recently published book *Chess, Draughts, Morris & Tables. Position in Past & Present* by the Dutch authors Arie van der Stoep, Jan de Ruiter, Wim van Mourik. As experts on the history of draughts (checkers) they are well known in Dutch draughts circles, and this background becomes clear already on the first pages, not by discussing in the first place the position of draughts and its history, but by immediately presenting the question whether draughts have been developed from chess, or ... just the other way around. But this is not their main concern. Their aim is another, they try to find answers to the many questions that arise about the position of the discussed board games in the societies of the past and the present. To this end they compare the positions of the games in the different phases of history and in doing so they make use of sources from various fields of expertise, such as philology, literature, art history, sociology. Many beautiful illustrations, lavishly spread throughout the book, support this approach.

By the way, Wim van Mourik and Arie van de Stoep are also the authors of [An iconography of draughts: Het damspel in beeld](#), published in 2019 (3rd printing 2021; Hooge Zwaluwe: Uitgeverij Van der Stoep), as well a very beautifully illustrated book, which can be considered as a kind of counterpoint to the many chess books with art-historical content.

However, missing in the bibliography of the book introduced here is the contribution to the comparison of chess and draughts of our honorary member dr. Jurgen Stigter. His short article Draughts and the Académies des jeux can be found in Proceedings of Board Game Studies Colloquium XI in Lisbon 2008 (<http://ludicum.org/etno/proceedings-of-the-board-game-studies-colloquium-xi>, pp. 89-94). Stigter found no chapters or paragraphs on draughts in the many editions of the Académies des jeux and his conclusion was: “Draughts was (more) well-known and often played than *Chess*, but *Chess* was the noble or royal game”, and according to his recent email to me, this implies in his opinion that draughts was so well-known and so much played that it was not considered necessary to pay attention to the game in publications such as the Académies.

By the way, it is remarkable that Stigter introduces his article with almost the same words as Van der Stoep c.s. did 13 years later: “How do you know when and where a game was played and how popular it was? The evidences come from written accounts and illustrations, game artefacts found and linguistic analyses.” (p. 89). Besides, a discussion on the significance and function of the Académies des jeux and the likes, e.g. the Almanachs des jeux and in England the Hoyle editions, as well as the bibliographical references in Stigter’s article are missing altogether. Anyway, Chess, draughts, morris & tables; Position in past & present deserves a thorough review by a reviewer being familiar to the many fields of the history of board games.

As the content of the book in any case may be of interest of members of our society, and probably also for our ‘colleagues’ of the Chess Collectors International, we asked the main author of the book, Arie van der Stoep, to write a short introduction to its presentation here. A couple of copies will be shown at the CH&LS member meeting during the Klittich auction days in November. Now it should be appropriate to conclude this presentation with the very last words of the Epilogue of this book, being the words of the omniscient Emanuel Lasker: “Draughts is the mother of chess, and a dignified mother”.

Bob van de Velde

Arie van der Stoep, Jan de Ruiter & Wim van Mourik “Chess, Draughts, Morris & Tables. Position in Past & Present”.

Publisher: Uitgeverij van der Stoep, Hooge Zwaluwe (Netherlands) 2021.

275 x 206 x 40 mm, 1563 gram, 369 pages, full colour, hardcover.

You can order this book at vanderstoeparie391@gmail.com

Chess in the European civilization, we know everything about it. Except for...

... the position of chess compared to the position of three other major board games: checkers (draughts), morris (merels) and tables (backgammon), and...

... the interaction between chess and draughts, that other game on the chess board.

The authors fill these gaps in two ways. First of all by reproducing 375 paintings, drawings and inscriptions; they show us which social classes played chess, draughts etc. Second by recording the evolution of the four board games.

There are many interfaces. Not only between chess and draughts, in some aspects cognate games, but also between, for example, chess and tables. The explanation: different from our days a player did not restrict himself to one game, he played chess, draughts, morris as well as tables, and after the Middle Ages on one board, the gaming box. This had consequences.

The book introduces an approach that is unknown in the history of board games: by way of language. For his doctoral research (Leiden, Netherlands) the first author collected and analysed the board game terminology in many European languages. This –continued– research yielded new insights. Two examples. The present name for draughts in the United States, checkers, in medieval English was the name for chess. The linguistic analysis revealed influence from draughts on chess. In French the name for draughts is jeu de dames, the name for the chess queen is dame. Is the literal meaning of jeu de dames “game of the chess queens” and is draughts a child of chess? Not in the least: the name of the chess queen in France descends from the draughts jargon and indicates influence from draughts on chess. And there are many more language facts, all explained in an accessible way.

The structure of the book differs from what we are used to. Instead of a chronological presentation of facts the authors tell stories, as well in the 37 chapters as in the comment on the reproductions, and with attention to historical background. The reproduction of Marie Antoinette’s draughts book and draughts board for instance induced the authors to put her faith in the context of her time, just as Lady Hamilton’s subscription to a draughts book, she wished two copies –one for her Horatio? During a stay of some days in Amsterdam, Napoleon demanded a draughts board; his brother Louis Napoleon, king of Holland, was a member of a chess club. How could an Italian Frenchman be king of Holland? And many more little stories colouring the past.

Arie van der Stoep