

2025-12-20

## On firzán, alferza, reyna and dama

**GIOCHI DELI PARTITI:  
ALA RABIOSA.**  
Dice lo biancho alo negro che li dara mato in doi  
trati ne piu ne mancho lo biancho iocara prima la  
pedona in-a, e fera mato lo negro per forza p che se  
dara secho, lo biancho se coprita cō lo cavallo & li  
dara secho mato in diuoperto. e si lo biancho iocaffe  
altramēte nō se daria. p ch lo negro iocaria lo ro-i. b.



**Loeges de partidos de la dama**  
Dize el blanco q li dara mate in dos lances ni mas  
ni menos. el blanco iuega primer el peon in-a, y al se-  
gondo lance mate in descubierta, y si iugalle in o-  
ro modo nō se daria. por che lo negro iugaria su ro-  
que in-b. y se cubreria con el. y esta es la defen-  
sa.

— Damiano, 1512 (1967 edition). Author's library. Note the typical extensive descriptive notation of the moves. At the bottom, we see the use of *dama* in Spanish.

Here is a new text by José A. Garzón, whom I would like to thank. He told us about in Valencia last September.

You can find a summary in English and download the [full text in Spanish](#) in PDF format.

It was published in the book *Pasiones Bibliográficas 8*, which has just been released, edited by the Societat Bibliogràfica Valenciana Jerònima Galés.

### Summary in English

The article examines the origin, naming, and nature of the queen in chess, arguing that the late 15<sup>th</sup>-century reform of the game was not the result of a gradual feminization of an existing piece, but rather the creation of a completely new piece, endowed with a new name, a new movement, and a new strategic role.

In ancient and medieval chess (*shatranj*), the piece next to the king was called *ferz* (or *firzán*, *alferza*) and had a very limited range of movement. In medieval Europe, under the strong influence of Jacobus de Cessolis' moral treatise, the piece was often referred to as *regina* or *domina* in Latin, and *reina* in Romance languages. However, these feminine names did not bring about any change in the rules.

III.

Ninguno punto ni debe jugar de la mano de un  
vez, considerando quando se enaques a un juego de  
Rey, que lo mate al mismo tiempo con la Torre; pero  
en este caso no puede abdicar el Rey de la Torre ni  
otro algarav como con el caso de promotion en Italia, si  
no en otros con las Juegas.

IV.

Siempre que un Rey llega a alguna de las casas de  
la ultima linea del Tablero, que es la primera linea  
del enemigo, se hace Dama o Reyna, con todas las  
marchas, retrocesos y pasados de la Reyna; y si el  
Rey de Togue, abaja al Rey a casa de su lugar, a mo-  
do que tenga con que defenderse.

V.

El Rey que llegue a la ultima linea no debe hacer  
de Dama quando le toquen el caballo del mismo Rey, pero  
puede convertirse en la pieza que eligiere de las mojas,  
por que le faltan para evitar la debilidad de otros  
a una Dama, como practican en Alemania, en  
mojas numero de Torres, Alfiles, y Caballos de loro  
que corresponden a cada partido.

— General Laws of the Game of Chess (Barcelona, 1781).

Author's library. Queen and King remain synonymous two centuries after Ruy López's treatise. It is noteworthy that pawns are prohibited from promoting to queens if the original queen is still on the board, as was already the case in *Scachs d'amor*. Minor promotion was probably accepted in Spain at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The core argument of the article is that the term *dama* does not represent a simple linguistic shift, but appears exclusively with the birth of modern chess, first attested in the poem *Scachs d'amor* (Valencia, c. 1475), the foundational text of the reform. The authors of the poem did not merely rename a piece: they deliberately created a new chess piece, initially conceived as a "total piece" combining the movements of all others, except the knight, whose inclusion was eventually rejected as impractical.

A systematic analysis of early sources shows that in all technical Spanish chess treatises of the first century of modern chess, the piece is consistently called *dama*. Medieval terms such as *reina*, *regina*, or *alferza* survive only in moral, allegorical, or transitional contexts. The shift from *reina* to *dama* therefore marks a conceptual break, not a linguistic continuity.

The article also critically examines attempts to link the powerful queen to a real historical woman (such as Isabella the Catholic). These interpretations are considered secondary and largely symbolic: the reform is fundamentally technical and internal to the game. Political references in *Scachs d'amor* do exist, but they are allegorical and sometimes even critical rather than celebratory.

Finally, the introduction of the queen, together with the modern bishop, radically transformed chess. Jumping pieces (except the knight) were abandoned, long-range movement became dominant, and the game shifted toward strategy, tactics, and opening theory. This was not a slow evolution, but the creation of a new game, explicitly identified by contemporaries as the chess of the queen (*axedres de la dama*).

[A propósito de firzán, alferza, reyna y dama - José A. Garzón \(1.0 MiB\)](#)