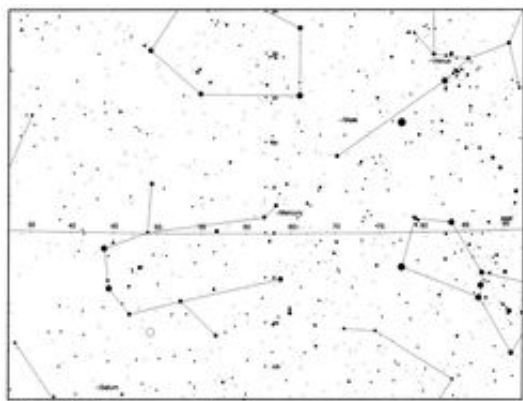


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## Valencia, Cradle of Modern Chess



— Planetary conjunction. Valencia, 30 June 1475 This image shows the planetary conjunction of Mars, Venus, and Mercury visible from Valencia on 30 June 1475. According to the authors of *Scachs d'amor*, this rare celestial event inspired their poem. Astrophysicist Juan Antonio Belmonte confirmed the conjunction's visibility in Valencia. The poem contains the first description of the modern queen's movement, marking the birth of modern chess and providing a chronological reference for its origin.

The last two articles, sent to us by José A. Garzón, are more of a summary of his research.

Once again, I would like to thank him for these various contributions.

## A Historical Journey through the Earliest Books and Manuscripts

by José A. Garzón

In this 2021 article published in *eHumanista*, historian José A. Garzón reflects on more than two decades of research devoted to a fundamental question:

*Where and when was modern chess born?*

Through a meticulous study of fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century manuscripts and printed books, Garzón demonstrates that **Valencia**, on Spain's Mediterranean coast, was the true birthplace of the modern game.

## From Shatranj to the Chessboard of Europe

Garzón traces the evolution of chess from its Indian ancestor, **chaturanga**, to its Arabic form, *shatranj*, which reached medieval Europe through Muslim Spain.

For centuries, the rules barely changed: pieces moved slowly, and the *alferza* — the forerunner of today's queen — could advance only one square diagonally. The game mirrored the static hierarchy of the feudal world.

## The Valencian Revolution (1474–1495)

Everything changed in late-fifteenth-century Valencia. Around **1475**, three humanist poets — Bernat Fenollar, Narcís Vinyoles, and Françí de Castellví — composed *Scachs d'amor* (“Chess of Love”).

This allegorical poem depicts the **first known game using the modern rules**: the Queen and the Bishop gain their current powers, pawns may advance two squares, and the game becomes faster, more tactical, and more dramatic.

In a stunning poetic metaphor, Castellví (Mars) defeats Vinyoles (Venus) under the arbitration of Fenollar (Mercury). The Queen — symbol of both divine femininity and royal authority — delivers the final checkmate.

Garzón interprets this poem as nothing less than **the birth certificate of modern chess**.

## Francesch Vicent and the Printed Revolution

Twenty years later, in **1495**, Francesch Vicent — a scholar from Segorbe living in Valencia — published the *Llibre dels jochs partits dels scachs en nombre de 100*, the **first printed treatise on modern chess**.

Although no copy survives, Garzón reconstructed its contents from a manuscript discovered in **Cesena** (Italy), which contains 100 modern problems written in Valencian.

Vicent’s treatise became the model for later authors such as Lucena (Salamanca, 1497) and Damiano (Rome, 1512), spreading the Valencian “game of the Queen” throughout Europe.

## Manuscripts That Changed the Game

Garzón’s study examines a network of key documents that trace this transformation:

- the *Scachs d'amor* poem — the poetic origin of the modern rules;
- Vicent’s lost *Llibre dels jochs partits* (1495);
- the **Cesena** and **Perugia** manuscripts that preserve its content;
- and the Damiano (1512), which he interprets as a **Roman adaptation of Vicent’s original work**.

Together, these sources outline a clear chain of transmission from Valencia to Italy, from poetry to print.

## The Chessboard of the Renaissance

Beyond the historical evidence, Garzón shows how this transformation mirrored a broader cultural shift. The slow, contemplative “feudal” game gave way to a **dynamic, creative, humanist chess** — a perfect symbol of the Renaissance spirit.

The rise of the Queen on the board paralleled the rise of powerful women in politics and art, from Queen Isabella of Castile to Lucrezia Borgia.

## A Legacy That Endures

Garzón's conclusion is both scholarly and poetic:

Fenollar, Vinyoles, and Castellví created the new game in Valencia (1475).

→ Vicent codified and printed it (1495).

→ Lucena and Damiano carried it across Europe (1497–1512).

Five centuries later, every Queen's move on the chessboard still carries the echo of that **Valencian Renaissance**, when poetry, printing, and humanism transformed an ancient oriental pastime into **the modern game of chess**.

## Reference:

Garzón, José A. "Literatura y ajedrez en la Europa de los siglos XV y XVI: el origen valenciano del ajedrez moderno". En *eHumanista* 47, 2021, pp., 197-218. *Journal of Iberian Studies*. University of California, Santa Barbara.

- [Literatura y ajedrez en la Europa de los siglos XV y XVI - José A. Garzón \(919.5 KiB\)](#)