

2021-10-06

Van Spel tot Duel. Het schaken in het jonge België



[Henri Serruys - Van Spel tot Duel. Het schaken in het jonge België - frontcover](#)

We are delighted to announce a new publication of our Belgium long-time member Henri Serruys, who embarked on an exploration of a terra incognita of the European chess history, namely chess life in 19th century Belgium. In his Dutch language book *Van Spel tot Duel* (From game to duel) he reports his many discoveries that put Belgium on the map of European chess in that century.

Our Society supported the publication of the book. We draw the attention of our members to the possibility to receive a copy of the limited special edition at the same price as a standard copy.

Bob van de Velde

Van Spel tot Duel. Het schaken in het jonge België

(From Game to Duel. Chess in early Belgium)

Not much was known about chess in 19th century Belgium, and most of its history was feared to best lost in the mists of time. However, Henri Serruys has managed to dispel some of that mist, in the process discovering much more than he initially assumed. Clearly, Belgian chess was rather limited in scope compared to its neighbouring countries. Initially, Brussels and Antwerp were the focal points, but other Belgian cities soon followed. One of the first matches involving a Belgian citizen was that of Michaëls from Brussels against the Frenchman Laigle, resulting in a narrow win for Michaëls.

The author was able to reconstruct a short biography of the latter, a colorful character who also frequently challenged people for a duel, hence the title of the book. All kinds of chess activities and clubs sprung up across the young Kingdom, not just in Brussels and Antwerp, but also in Liège and Ghent. Bruges and Ostend were also places where the bourgeoisie liked to play the royal game. Near the end of the century, Belgian women also came to the fore as chess players.

As correspondence chess and chess problems took off in the 19th century, people such as d'Orville "du club d'Anvers" and the jesuit priest de Kerchove deserve some attention. Their biographies are also highlighted, together with that of Eugène Pécher, the strongest Belgian player at the end of the 19th century.

This early Belgian chess history (in Dutch) encompasses 93 games, often with contemporary annotations, as well as 124 chess problems, including the 97 problems composed by d'Orville, originally published in the French chess magazine *Le Palamède* in the period 1836-1843.

The hardcover book (format: 178 x 254 mm) is 218 pages long, with 86 illustrations as well as an extensive name register and bibliography. It is priced at €29,00.

The book was made possible with the support of the Chess History & Literature Society. CH&LS members are entitled to a special edition of 50 copies on heavy paper (Biotox 120 gr), at the same price of €29,00. Members interested should mail Henri Serruys at henri.serruys@telenet.be, specifying the number of copies (normal or/and special edition) before October 24, 2021 at the latest. In all likelihood, these book orders will then be available in Braunschweig on 27 November 2021, on the occasion of the 81th Klittich-Pfankuch auction. Alternatively, the books can also be mailed after payment of the order, including mailing costs.