

The Chess Collector Magazine

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Editors’ Comments

We hope that you will enjoy this bumper issue of the Chess Collector Magazine and will join us in welcoming new members Ian Allan from England and Georgios Nkotos from Switzerland.

To start, we would like to bring to everyone’s attention an exciting upcoming book publication by fellow CCI member, and President of the Italian CCI section, Massimiliano De Angelis. Max has produced a significantly revised and enhanced update to his 2018 book on “Antique Italian Chess Sets”. The launch of this new book takes place in Rome on 21 January 2026 in the beautiful Palazzo Altieri, and you are more than welcome to attend the event if you happen to be in Rome. A special discount is available for CCI members who would like to purchase the book. Full details on the book and its launch can be found in the Members Section on pages 4 - 5. The Members Section also contains a brief review of the recent Howard Staunton Society dinner.

Peter Whitehead then highlights on page 6 a stunning exhibition in Singapore called “Let’s Play! The Art and Design of Asian Games” which features a number of items from the collection of CCI member Sir Antonio Horta- Osorio. He follows this on page 8 with a review of the recent meeting in Nuremberg of the German Section of CCI. In our regular feature “Meet the Collectors” on page 14, Jim Joannou visits Grandmaster Raymond Keene, OBE. This is followed on page 17 by an article from Holger Langer on a very special chess set which was used in the 1979 Interzonal Tournament in Rio de Janeiro. René Meijer discusses his enjoyment of commissioning and collecting replica chess sets on page 21. I have to admit that his article resonated strongly with me. I will never be able to own my favourite chess pieces- those wonderfully quirky and enigmatic Lewis chess figures- and for several years now, I have been commissioning high quality replicas of my favourite pieces from a master craftsman. Such commissioning is so much more rewarding than just simply submitting an order and making a payment. As you follow the process each step of the way, you get to understand the difficulties in using the chosen materials and this makes you appreciate the final item even more. And this does not include all the side discussions which you end up having with an expert on your favourite chess pieces. Jim Joannou was intrigued by a brief scene in the recent BBC TV drama “King and Conqueror”, and further investigation has led us to ask our readers for feedback on a specific question- please see page 29 for more information. The issue then finishes with an article by Sergio Coellar Mideros on an antique Ecuadorian Staunton set on page 31.

Please note that given the number of articles submitted, there is no Auction Review section in this issue although we would like to mention both the beautiful Nasrid board (Spain 15th/16th century) shown on the right which sold at auction very recently for a hammer price of GBP 5000 (\$6600, €5700) and the fact that seven antique chess sets are being offered in Waddington's "Decorative Arts and Design Auction" in Toronto on 11 December 2025. All seven sets are being sold by an existing CCI member and include an English Ivory Lund- type chess set formerly in Gareth William's collection, a Chinese export carved ivory disc chess set, a Chinese Ivory puzzle ball set, an Indian carved ivory set and a bone "Pulpit" set. All ivory purchases require Canadian CITES export permits.



Finally, we would like to bring you the exciting news that our former CCI President Dr Thomas Thomsen has been awarded the 2025 Lasker Prize in recognition of his efforts at promoting chess as a cultural and educational asset, succeeding none other than former World Champion Magnus Carlsen who received it in 2024. The photo below shows Thomas receiving the Prize from the Chairman of the Lasker Society Thomas Weischede and from the President of the German Chess Federation, Ingrid Lauterbach. Please see the review of the 2025 Annual meeting of the German Section of CCI on page 8 for further details.



If you have any comments or suggestions for future issues of the magazine, then please send your Comments to: jimjoannou@btinternet.com and peter@whitehead.com

Front Cover

A selection of items from the permanent collections of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. Clockwise from top left- 13 bone chess pieces (10th – 12th C) found in Germany, Games table with counters, Geislingen pieces, Games box (~1600) with late 18th C Alpine chess set, Walrus ivory knight (H 9.4cm, 15th C), bishop (H 9.5 cm, 16th C), Games box (~1600), ivory chess piece (~1500 and H 2.7cm) depicting two monkeys on a dog, rook (5.5cm H, 16th C), three 12th C stag horn pieces. All photos by Peter Whitehead.

Members Section

“Antique Italian Chess Sets- Playing Sets from the 18th and 19th century in History and in Art”- by Massimiliano De Angelis

As a CCI board member and President of the Italian section (CCI Italia), and as a member of the Culture Commission of the Italian Chess Federation, Massimiliano De Angelis hardly needs an introduction. Max has written articles for specialised journals and has presented his work at conferences organized by CCI Italia, including those attended by members from other continents. He is a passionate chess player, and collector for more than thirty years, with a particular emphasis on Italian pieces. His focus on antique Italian chess sets led to the publication in 2018 of his first book “Antique Italian Chess Sets- Playing sets from the 18th and 19th century” which received enormous praise and success both at home and abroad (please see The Chess Collector Magazine Volume 30, No 1, pages 8-13 for further details).

At 123 pages (compared to 95 pages for the 2018 book), this upcoming publication, entitled “Antique Italian Chess Sets- Playing sets from the 18th and 19th century in History and in Art”, is significantly revised and enhanced, resulting from the incorporation of in- depth study and detailed research on previously unknown rare abstract Italian chess sets from the 18th and 19th century. The discovery of these additional sets has further enabled Max to propose considerations on the classification of chess sets that were produced and sold in this period in Italy. His new book aims to provide certainty to the chess world regarding the attribution of 18th and 19th century Italian playing sets produced and sold in certain specific areas of the Italian peninsula, thus compensating for the previous cultural and historical void on this topic which has only ever been addressed by Massimiliano De Angelis. This book confirms Max’s ongoing dedication to researching and studying historical chess material and cements his position as the expert on such antique Italian sets.



The new publication exhibits the same levels of quality which made the 2018 book such a pleasure to read. As previously, the text has been translated into English to confirm and reinforce the international interest shown for the 2018 edition. Furthermore, the book displays the same focus on high quality colour photographs of chess pieces and has been particularly well- designed in terms of typography.

The book launch itself will take place on January 21, 2026, at 7 p.m. at the “Nuovo Circolo degli scacchi” in Rome (Italy), Palazzo Altieri, Piazza del Gesù n. 49. All members and interested parties are cordially invited to the launch during which the President of the Italian Chess Federation, Luigi Maggi, will be in conversation with the author. A drink will also be offered to participants. Please note that the particularly prestigious setting for this event requires formal attire (dark suit, tie, and black shoes).

For information and confirmation of attendance at the book launch, as well as to reserve your copy of the book, please write directly to Massimiliano by email at maxchess2001@yahoo.it. CCI members will receive a special 30% discount on the publishers’ book price- to avail yourself of this offer, please contact Max directly to purchase the book rather than contacting the publishers.

A detailed book review of “Antique Italian Chess Sets- Playing Sets from the 18th and 19th century in History and in Art” will follow in the Chess Collector Magazine in 2026.



The Howard Staunton Society Dinner

The Howard Staunton Society was formed in 1993 to honour the memory of Howard Staunton, and to erect a headstone on his grave at the Kensal Green cemetery in London. On Friday 14 November, the Society held a formal ‘black tie’ dinner at “L’Escargot”, the oldest French restaurant in London, to celebrate the enduring legacy of Howard Staunton. The meal was the same as that which

Staunton had enjoyed at an event 170 years ago and consisted of smoked haddock and quails’ eggs as a starter, followed by a main course of roast duck à l’Anglaise with braised red cabbage and roast potatoes, and steamed treacle roll for dessert. The cheese course consisted of grilled Stilton rarebit. CCI were represented at this prestigious dinner by President Michael Wiltshire and Jaques expert Sir Alan Fersht who were both guests of CCI member and Staunton Society Trustee Raymond Keene, OBE. As part of the dinner, Sir Alan gave a short talk, explaining how his interest in Jaques sets started more than 25 years ago when he stumbled across his first set in an antiques shop- this was a very early set with green registration stickers and with both the signature and the entered number 628 being hand- written. The set was on display during the evening.



Ray Keene, OBE (left), Sir Alan Fersht (right) and CCI President Michael Wiltshire (standing).



Knights from Jaques set No. 628 (Sir Alan Fersht Collection)

For more information on the Howard Staunton Society, please visit www.stauntonsociety.com.



Let's Play!

The Art and Design of Asian Games

Peter Whitehead

If you are travelling in Asia over the next 6 months, then a detour via Singapore would certainly be worthwhile to see the special exhibition “Let’s Play! The Art and Design of Asian Games” at Singapore’s Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM). The mission of the ACM is to present the art and history of Asia as a whole through the lens of Singapore as a port city using the museum’s outstanding permanent collection and through special exhibitions. Opened in 1997, the museum can trace its roots back to the Raffles museum which was itself founded in the mid- 19th century. As stated on their website, “ACM focuses on the many historical connections between cultures and civilisations in Asia, and between Asia and the world”. The special exhibition “Let’s Play! The Art and Design of Asian Games” clearly adheres to this precept by exploring the history of Asian games and how they have shaped culture, identity and community. The exhibition considers the games of chess, chaupar, weiqi (“go”), xiangqi, shogi, carrom, mahjong, and congkak amongst others.

The exhibition brings together more than 150 works of art, including a significant number from the collection of CCI member Sir Antonio Horta- Osorio (pictured below during the Guest-of-Honour’s exhibition tour).

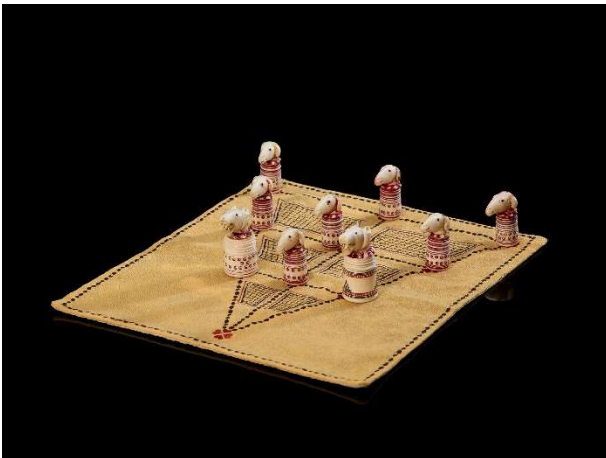


Antonio Horta-Osorio with Guest-of-Honour Acting Minister for Culture, Community, and Youth Mr David Neo, at the launch of Asian Civilisations Museum's special exhibition Let's Play! The Art and Design of Asian Games on 4 September 2025. Image courtesy of Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth, Singapore.

Some exhibition highlights are shown below including a “John Company” chess set (top left), a 19th century ivory figural set with Thai aristocrats (top right), an 18th or 19th century ivory and cloth Indian game of “Tiger and Goats” (bottom left) and bottom right, a folding game board from Western India dating from the second half of the 16th century with an ingenious hidden drawer revealing an ivory figure to the sound of music!



All four images shown here are courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum.



The museum’s Instagram account @acm_sg contains a number of additional photos, including those shown below (images courtesy of the ACM Instagram account), as well as video footage of the exhibition.



The special exhibition “Let’s Play! The Art and Design of Asian Games” is on display at the Asian Civilisation Museum in Singapore until 7 June 2026. For more information, please visit www.acm.org.sg. I would like to thank Clement Onn (Director, ACM and Peranakan Museum), exhibition curators Noora Zulkifli and Malvika Agarwal, and ACM Head of Audience Jia Yi Lum for their support in putting this article together.

The 2025 Annual Meeting of the German Section of CCI

Peter Whitehead

The setting for the 2025 annual meeting of the German Section of CCI was the beautiful Franconian town of Nuremberg between Friday 31 October and Sunday 2 November 2025. I personally took advantage of the fact that the Ryanair flight left Stansted airport at 6am to arrive in the city centre before 0930 on the Thursday morning which gave me two days to explore this historic town prior to the start of the meeting. Nuremberg was an Imperial City of the Holy Roman Empire (the view from the Imperial Castle's Sinwell Tower is breathtaking), the hometown of Dürer (his house is definitely worth a visit), and a major toy and games manufacturing centre with a dedicated toy museum. It is also the home of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, the largest German-speaking museum of cultural history with an outstanding permanent collection including a collection focusing on toys and games which was on the CCI meeting itinerary. Nuremberg is also known for its "lebkuchen" (think gingerbread biscuits but so much better) and I made the interesting discovery that the real lebkuchen are made without flower- "ohne mehl" as they advertise locally- unlike the cheap versions available in supermarkets around the world. Yes, you do pay for what you get, and the real deal is much more expensive, but the difference in taste is indescribable. In addition to great Franconian food, I was also looking forward to seeing wonderful chess sets and discussing all matters related to chess collecting with a group of like-minded people. I was not disappointed!

The week-end events were attended by over 60 participants and, although the great majority were naturally from Germany, there was a very strong Dutch delegation, several members had travelled from Switzerland, two of us came from the UK, two from the US, and one member each had travelled from Norway and Spain. The meeting kicked off on the Friday evening with a drinks reception in the lobby of the Novotel hotel followed by dinner in the hotel dining room. Dr Thomas Thomsen had meticulously planned the whole week-end and as always, his organisation was both superb and thoughtful- this even included generously bringing from home crates of his elegant Spanish wines to be served at the dinners to spare participants from having to experience inferior offerings. Conversations were animated throughout the evening as members caught up with friends and continued until 1 am in the hotel bar.

The Nuremberg CCI meeting had been advertised in advance in the mainstream German press in the Chess columns of "Welt am Sonntag" of 26 October and in Zeit Magazin nr 46/2025 of 29 October. This probably explained the presence at the conference session on the Saturday morning of such illustrious guests as Ingrid Lauterbach, the President of the 100 000- member strong German Chess Federation, German Grandmasters Gerald Hertneck and Dr Helmut Pfleger, and schools' chess trainer supremo Walter Rädler amongst others.

After welcome comments from CCI- Germany President Wolfgang Angerstein and meeting organiser Dr Thomas Thomsen, a very informative morning of talks began with local toy and games historian and curator Dr Marion Faber on the subject of Nuremberg as a manufacturing centre for chess sets. This covered a wide range of topics from the burning of playing cards and board games by the inhabitants of Nuremberg in 1452 to a discussion of the origins of the Selenus pattern; from Friedrich Schiller's Selenus chess set to the 4 variants of the Selenus type by country (German, Roman, Austrian and English) before considering one of the main local producers. In addition, Marion very kindly acted as our local guide during the entire week-end! She was followed by Dr Thomas Thomsen who presented three chess sets depicting Nuremberg buildings including one very fine fret saw set. Thomas also had the sets physically on display for participants to enjoy during the breaks. Tom Gallegos (President of CCI- USA) then gave a report on the CCI Western Hemisphere

Conference which took place in New Orleans between 4 – 7 September 2025. This was attended by 37 members and had a strong Paul Morphy theme.

After a coffee break, the artist Elke Rehder said a couple of words before handing out cards depicting one of her chess- related art works to all participants (please see www.elke-rehder.de). This was followed by two related talks on the topics of inclusivity and diversity in chess as well as using chess to promote cultural interactions and exchanges across countries.

In the first such presentation, Laura Schalkhäuser, board member for CSA, ChessSports Association (www.chesssport.eu), an international organisation for the promotion of popular sports especially chess, spoke about initiatives to encourage girls to play chess (“Chess for Girls” project) and the “Open Window” project for more inclusion in chess of people with disabilities (www.offenesfenster.eu). Laura also brought with her an analog clock for use in schools aimed at teaching children how to both tell the time using a non- digital device and learn about chess- the hours on the clock not being represented by numbers but in chess value equivalent figures (so the 5 o’clock point being represented by a rook). She also came with a delicious cake which was enjoyed by all at dinner that evening!

The second related talk was given by FM Thomas Weischede, Chairman of the Emanuel Lasker Society (Emanuel Lasker Gesellschaft or ELG in German), on the activities of the Society. Its mission is the promotion of chess as a cultural and educational asset. Founded in Berlin in 2001, the Society’s values and beliefs include respect, equality of opportunity, tolerance and civic courage, all reflecting those of the man after whom the Society is named. Emanuel Lasker was born in 1868, and in 1894 he became the second official World Chess Champion, retaining the title without interruption for an unparalleled 27 years. He also held a doctorate in mathematics and published works on politics and philosophy. With the advent of National Socialism to power, Lasker decided that, as a German Jew, he was no longer safe at home and went into exile in 1933 successively to the Netherlands, England, Switzerland, the Soviet Union and the USA where he died in 1941. His experience as a refugee is echoed in one of ELG’s key programs, *chess4refugees* which aims to promote the benefits of chess on integration in schools via chess clubs and welcome classes. Another key ELG program is *chess4Europe* which focuses on building a cultural bridge across Europe from Ireland to Ukraine. The Emanuel Lasker Society is open to all who value the cultural benefits of chess and members include renowned Grandmasters, former world champions as well as representatives from the worlds of politics, business, science, art, and culture. For more information on the Society, please visit <https://lasker-gesellschaft.de>.

This was followed by a wonderful moment when our very own Dr Thomas Thomsen was awarded the 2025 Lasker Prize succeeding none other than former World Champion Magnus Carlsen who received it in 2024. The Lasker Prize honours individuals or institutions that have “rendered outstanding services to the promotion of chess as a cultural and educational asset”. Thomas has definitely met these requirements given his commitment at all levels with CCI over the decades, and his involvement in, and facilitation of, many chess exhibitions over the years. He was also a founding and initial board member of the Lasker Society. Thomas was presented the Lasker prize by Society Chairman Thomas Weischede and by the President of the German Chess Federation Ingrid Lauterbach (please see photo on page 3).

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Angerstein then continued the morning session with a talk on 3D (and higher dimensional) chess variants, before Dr Gero Jung concluded proceedings with a presentation on Kholmogory chess sets.

Lunch was served in the hotel with all participants still buzzing with excitement following the morning session and Thomas’s Lasker Prize! The afternoon was then spent admiring the chess sets and pieces on display in the

Games and Toy department of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (<https://www.gnm.de>) before participants returning to the hotel for the chess market.

A wonderful gala dinner was held in the “Heilig Geist Spital” restaurant. Founded in 1339, this was one of the largest hospitals in the Middle Ages and now houses both a care home for the elderly and the restaurant. The meal itself consisted of the Franconian specialities of dumpling soup, followed by braised beef in gingerbread sauce with potato dumplings and red cabbage, and vanilla ice- cream with hot cherry sauce; all washed down with more copious amounts of Thomas’s delicious Spanish wine. As an added treat, Laura Schalkhäuser’s cake was also served as a second dessert. Everyone returned very happy and contented to the hotel where conversations and drinks continued to flow in the bar until well past midnight.

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end, and Sunday morning was a series of goodbyes over breakfast and in the hotel lobby as participants started their journeys home. A return visit to the Germanisches Nationalmuseum was organised for those still in town for a few hours to see the “Nuremberg Global 1300 - 1600” special exhibition highlighting the importance of Nuremberg as a manufacturing and trading centre for luxury goods during that time period, followed by lunch in its Café Arte.

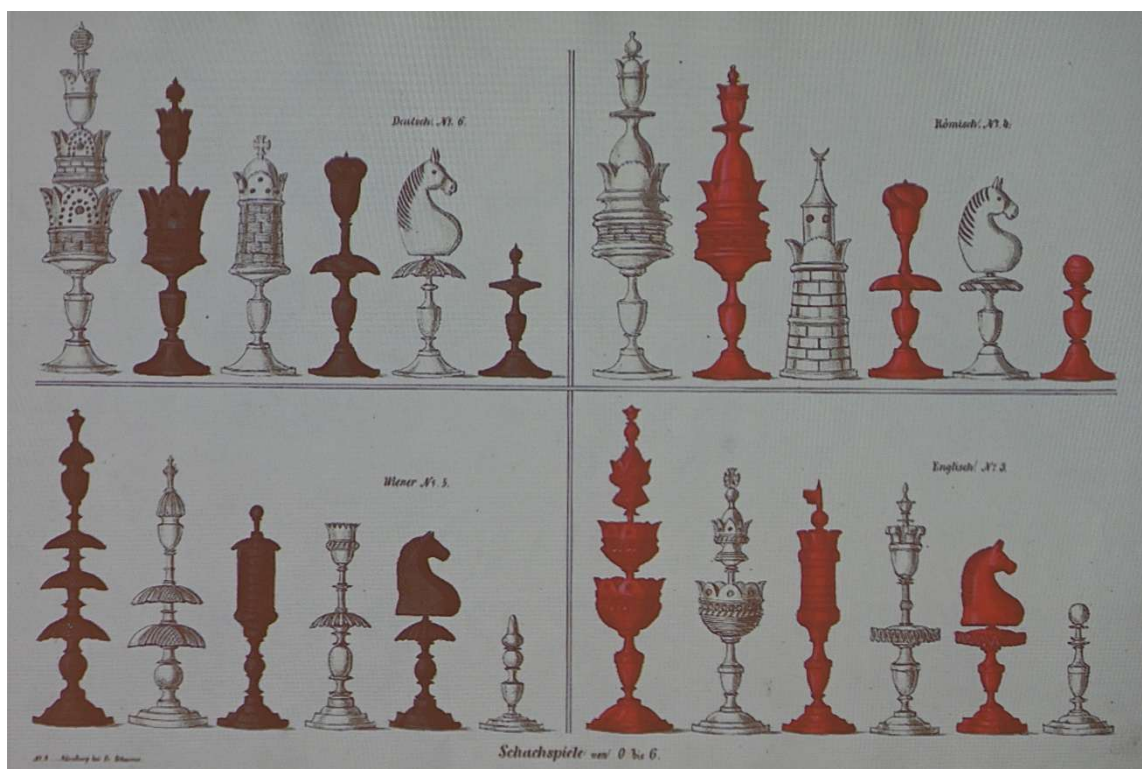
Please find below a selection of photos from this wonderful meeting (all photos by the author).



Meeting organiser Dr Thomas Thomsen welcoming participants at the dinner on the Friday in the hotel (top left), participants getting ready for the Saturday morning session of presentations (bottom left), and Laura Schalkhäuser with the pedagogical analogue chess clock (right).



Dr Thomas Thomsen introducing Tom Gallegos's talk on the New Orleans meeting (above). Dr Gero Jung and US Treasurer Luann Woneis (right) ensuring the proper running of the Saturday morning session.



Above- from Dr Marion Faber's presentation- the four types of Selenus sets- German (top left), Roman (top right), Austrian (bottom left) and English (bottom right). Below- the white pieces from Dr Thomas Thomsen's fret saw chess set displaying Nuremberg themes.





Above left and right- pieces from a Nuremberg-themed chess set belonging to Dr Thomas Thomsen.



Above left- Corsta Danner sharing a moment with Reinhard Egert;
Above right- Dr Karl Klittich (left) with his mother (middle), and Dr Gero Jung (right).



Chess related items on display in the permanent exhibition of Toys in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.



CCI members (above left) enjoying the Toy exhibition at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, including Holger Langer and Michael Wiltshire (above right).



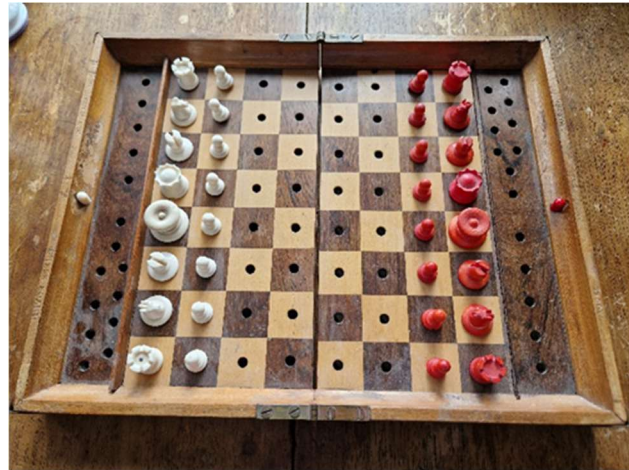
The chess market (above)- the Dutch table (left) with Joost Van Reij (front left), John Van Veen (standing) and Bram Ueffing; and Ole Dronen (above right). Laura Schalkhäuser's cake (right). The Heilig Geist Spital restaurant (below left) and CCI President Michael Wiltshire sporting the latest in chess fashion (below right).



Meet the Collectors- Raymond Keene, OBE.

Jim Joannou

During August this year, I started an email discussion with the famous English Grandmaster and fellow CCI member, Raymond Keene, OBE (pictured below left). He needed help to repair an early 20th century Jaques “In Statu Quo” set that he owned (picture below right), so we arranged for me to visit him at his South London home, which was a double pleasure for me as this was the area near which I grew up and went to school. Ray owns a number of chess sets but he does not class himself as a ‘collector’.



Raymond Keene retired from competitive play in 1986, but his active chess playing resume is very impressive. Ray was a British junior chess champion and competed at the highest levels. He won the British championship in 1971 and was the first player from England to earn a Grandmaster norm in 1974. He was awarded the title of Grandmaster itself in 1976. He represented England at many international chess competitions and Olympiads for nearly two decades, which included the famous chess Olympiad in Havana in 1966. The record of his achievements as a chess player is too long to list here- for full details please refer to: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raymond_Keene.

Ray Keene was also a FIDE International chess arbiter and after he retired from playing, he became a chess organiser, journalist and author. He brought Victor Korchnoi and Garry Kasparov together for their 1983 Candidates' semi-final match in London and also arranged for the first half of the 1986 World Chess Championship return match between Kasparov and Karpov in London. Again his involvement in organising chess matches is impressive. He became the chess columnist for a weekly magazine called ‘The Spectator’ in 1977, which lasted for over 40 years. Ray has appeared on BBC television commentating on six World Championships, and he has written over 200 books on chess and mind games.

Ray was awarded the OBE (Order of the British Empire) in 1985 for services to chess. Today, Raymond Keene writes a column for ‘The Article’, which is an online magazine. He founded, and is currently President of, The World Memory, Mind Mapping and Speed Reading Sports Councils, and is also President of the Governing Council at the Institute of Brain Chemistry and Human Nutrition in London. Again, the list of his current activities is extensive.

Chess sets

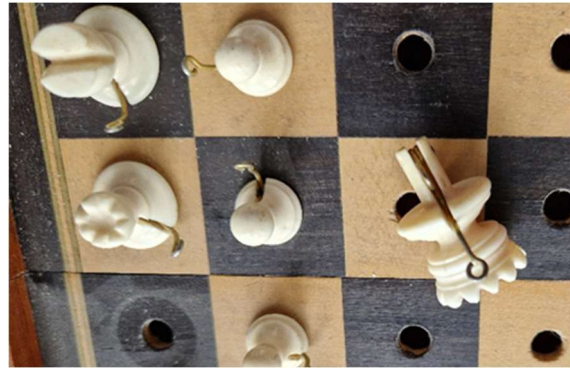
Ray was 6 years old when he had his first encounter with a chess set, and over the many years of his involvement in chess, he has accumulated many chess sets and chess ephemera. On the wall of his living room is an unmissable picture of Howard Staunton (see photo below left).



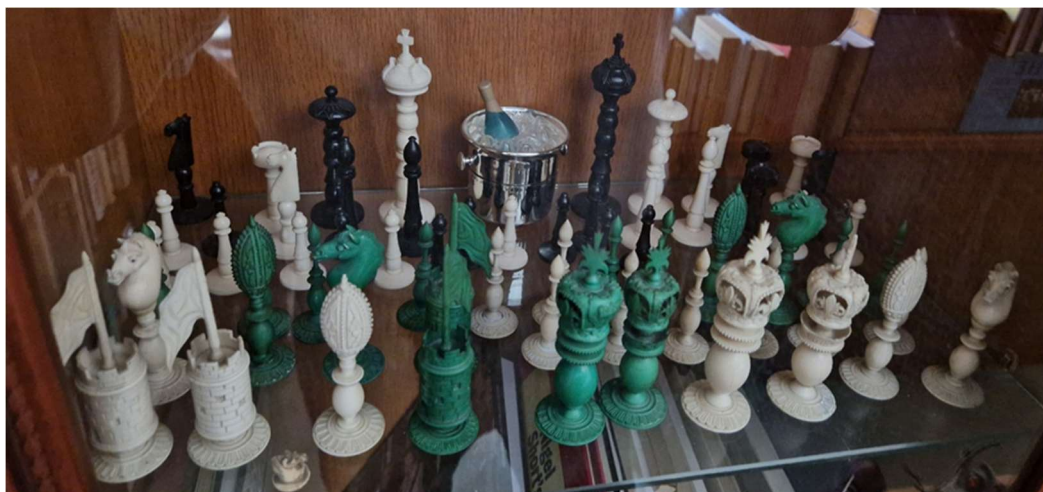
The chess sets owned by Ray Keene vary from antique 19th century Jaques sets to a late 20th century Polish set. My eyes first rested on an impressive Ivory Jaques set, which has since been dated, via a Facebook group, to ~1900 (pictured above right). In his hallway stands an antique walnut chess table, which dates from the early 1800s and was set up with a contemporary St George style set (please see photo below).



Ray showed me an interesting item that I had never seen before! It was a French travel set which was made in the style of the Jaques “In Statu Quo” design, but with a unique locking mechanism for the pieces. Each chess piece has a small ‘spring’ arm, which opens and shuts a split peg underneath the chess piece. You pick up each piece by squeezing the spring arm, which allows it to be removed. When the piece is replaced, it automatically releases the spring arm and locks the piece back in the board (please see photos overleaf).



Over the years, Ray has sold a number of sets that he owned, which he now regrets. He used to have a very rare, club- size, BCC set in ivory, which is now in the collection of Jon Crumiller. He also sold his Staunton 'Havana' set, which was a reminder of his achievement at the chess Olympiad in 1966. I discovered more chess sets in a glass cabinet in his home office. The two pictures below are of three sets, the first photo being of a 19th century bone English Barleycorn set, with the second one showing a very nice ivory natural and green- stained 'Burmese' set which also dates to the 19th century behind which is a natural and black- stained 20th century Indian set probably made from camel bone.



When Collecting Meets Chess History -

The 1979 Rio de Janeiro Interzonal Tournament Chess Set

Holger Langer

Sometimes, as a collector of chess pieces, you come across opportunities that you simply cannot pass up. This is what happened to me recently when I had the chance to purchase a historically significant chess set- one that was used at the Interzonal Tournament in Rio de Janeiro in 1979. I already had an identical set in my collection. However, that set was only identical to the competition pieces. The set I was now being offered was something special: it was one of the sets actually used in the tournament, i.e. original pieces in the truest sense of the word. Such chess pieces are very rare nowadays, and it is even harder to authenticate their provenance. So I consider myself lucky that I was contacted by FM Alberto Pinheiro Mascarenhas, who played an active role in the 1979 Rio Interzonal and owned one of these rare sets, which he offered to sell to me. More on this later.



Fig. 1 - The participants of the 1979 Rio de Janeiro Interzonal Tournament

First, a few words about the tournament itself. Anatoly Karpov had won the World Chess Championship title by forfeit against Bobby Fischer in 1975 and defended it against Viktor Korchnoi in 1978. Now it was time to find a new challenger for Karpov. Three of the eight players in the Candidates Tournament were to be determined at an interzonal competition in Rio de Janeiro. In order to compete in the Interzonal, it was necessary to qualify in zonal tournaments. Among the successful qualifiers and participants in Rio de Janeiro (Fig.1 above) were Grandmasters Yuri Balashov, Guillermo Garcia Gonzalez, Robert Hübner, Borislav Ivkov, Henrique Costa Mecking, former World Champion Tigran Petrosian, Lajos Portisch, Gyula Sax, Leonid Shamkovich, Jan Smejkal, Jan Timman, Eugenio Torre, Rafael Vaganian and Dragoljub Velimirovic, as well as International Masters Luis Marcos Bronstein, Khosro Harandi, Jean Hebert and Shimon Kagan. For the 19th player, the Brazilian Chess Federation, as host, nominated Jaime Sunye Neto, who was still competing without a title at the time and who was to achieve his last required IM norm at the tournament.



Fig. 2 - Copacabana Palace Hotel, Rio de Janeiro, the venue of the 1979 Interzonal.

The decision to hold the tournament in Rio de Janeiro was a welcome opportunity for the Brazilian Chess Federation to draw attention to Brazilian chess through such a major event. To host the Interzonal in Rio was decided by two important persons, the President of the Brazilian Chess Federation, Dr. Sérgio Farias, and the Brazilian Finance minister, Mr. Mário Henrique Simonsen, during some friendly blitz chess games! They got the financial support of a great patron of Brazilian sports, Mr. Antônio Carlos de Almeida Braga (owner of the company Atlântica Boavista Seguros - this name appeared in the Tournament's official

name), who also sponsored F1 Champion Ayrton Senna in his early career and Brazilian volleyball teams. The tournament, organised by FM Lincoln Lucena, was held at the Copacabana Theatre, an annex of the Copacabana Palace Hotel (Fig. 2 below), arguably the most famous and luxurious hotel in Rio de Janeiro. The tournament was scheduled to take place from 23 September to 20 October 1979. A women's tournament was held in parallel, but it received far less attention. The focus was on the men, with the Brazilian Chess Federation's hopes resting on their strongest player, Henrique Mecking. Public interest was high. Even celebrities such as actress Sonia Braga (no relation to the main sponsor) watched numerous games and cheered on their compatriots. But the tournament had a few surprises in store for the Brazilians.

Alberto Mascarenhas, then in his early 20s, was a close confidant of Henrique Mecking. Both lived in Rio de Janeiro and were active in the local chess scene. They knew each other well. Mascarenhas was invited to work at the tournament by another mutual friend, FM Luiz Loureiro, who was responsible for coordinating and assembling the staff. Since Mecking knew him well, Mascarenhas was given a special task: he was to stay close to Mecking and operate a demonstration board, which was the only one in the theatre showing Mecking's games to the audience. In order not to disturb Mecking, but at the same time to give the audience the opportunity to follow the game, the demonstration board was placed to the right of the stage in front of the first row of spectators (Fig.3 to the right). Opposite the chess clock, a commentator sat at the board and wrote down the moves. All other games were reproduced in the same way in another large room outside the theatre. There, the games (including Mecking's) were analysed by several strong players, including IM



Fig. 3 - Picture of the first round match of Mecking (back left) vs Ivkov. Alberto Mascarenhas and the display chessboard operated by him are in the foreground on the right.

Alexandru Segal and IM Hermann Claudius van Riemsdijk. The commentators regularly passed around small slips of paper with the latest moves, which enabled analysis in almost real time.

The atmosphere in the tournament was very relaxed, as evidenced by the casual attire of some of the players. Since their accommodation and the tournament venue were located in the same building complex, the players did not even have to leave the building. As an example of this relaxed dress code, Alberto remembers seeing Petrosian wearing comfortable sandals with socks on the stage where the games were played. This informal atmosphere could have benefited Mecking, whose health was already poor at the start of the tournament. But things turned out differently.

Henrique Costa Mecking, also known as Mequinho, remains one of Brazil's strongest chess players to this

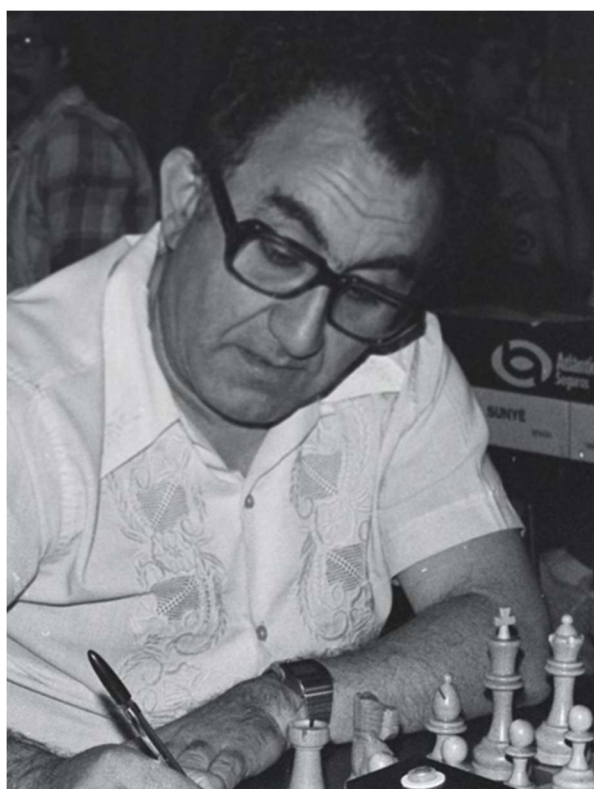


Fig. 4 - Tigran Petrosian during the tournament with the type of chess pieces used.

day. In 1977, he reached third place in the world rankings behind Anatoly Karpov and Viktor Korchnoi. He is also the first Brazilian to have earned a Grandmaster title. He won the Interzonal Tournaments in Petropolis in 1973 and Manila in 1976 and was therefore highly rated for the Interzonal Tournament in his hometown of Rio de Janeiro in 1979. However, in 1978 he was diagnosed with a serious illness, myasthenia gravis. This is a very rare neurological autoimmune disease in which the transmission of signals between nerves and muscles is disrupted, which can lead to paralysis in large parts of the body. In severe cases, it can result in paralysis of the respiratory muscles, which can also lead to death. The disease is exacerbated by mental and physical stress. All of this did not bode well for Mecking's participation in the Interzonal Tournament. He himself was very reluctant and did not want to compete at all due to his health condition, so it took a great deal of effort to persuade him to participate. In the first round on Sunday 23 September 1979, Mecking drew with Boris Ivkov. The following Monday, he was scheduled to play Jan Smejkal, but the game was adjourned. Mecking did not resume it afterwards. His

health had deteriorated, so his doctor advised him not to continue participating. Mecking withdrew from the tournament. He did not resume playing chess until the 1980s, after his illness had unexpectedly improved, which Mecking later frequently attributed to his strong and deep Catholic faith.

For the Brazilian Chess Federation, Mecking's withdrawal was a disaster, as it meant that Brazil's strongest player was no longer represented. However, there must have been some satisfaction in the fact that Sunye, the only Brazilian remaining in the tournament, finished in fifth place, which he shared with Ivkov, after two draws against Timman and Petrosian and a victory against Portisch in round 9. He had narrowly missed out on the playoff between the top four players and was the surprise of the tournament, not only from a Brazilian perspective. Outside the tournament hall, his games were followed by the audience with the same excitement as a football final. After every good move he made, the spectators started jumping and cheering. It was difficult to maintain the silence required for the tournament.



Fig. 5 - 1979 Rio de Janeiro Interzonal tournament pieces, Holger Langer collection

But back to the chess pieces (please see Fig. 4 on the previous page and Fig. 5 above). Dijalma Baptista Caiafa, an active chess player from Rio de Janeiro who had also been involved in organising and hosting the tournament, kept a set of the competition pieces after the end of the tournament, on which he played many private games at his home. He was also Alberto Mascarenhas' chess coach. After Caiafa's death, his widow donated the set to the local chess club 'Associação Leopoldinense de Xadrez' or ALEX for short (as a tribute to Alexander Alekhine), of which Mascarenhas is president and from whom I was finally able to purchase the pieces.

The pieces were manufactured by Bonatto & Cia. Ltda., a company based at Rua Dr. Goulin, 2351 in Curitiba in the state of Paraná, in the far south of Brazil. Bonatto was founded shortly after the Second World War, on 6 June 1946, and specialised in the manufacture of wooden articles. The chess pieces manufactured by Bonatto, of the type used in the Rio de Janeiro Interzonal Tournament, are made from local hardwood. The white side is coated with a clear varnish, while the dark side is lacquered black. The king size is 11.5 cm. All pieces are weighted with lead inserts. Bonatto chess pieces were always supplied with green felt bases. However, there is one special feature that only those directly involved in the tournament are aware of: for the 1979 Interzonal Tournament in Rio de Janeiro, Bonatto covered the small quantity of tournament pieces with orange- pink felt bases. In addition to all the valuable information I received from Alberto Mascarenhas about the origin of this set of pieces and the tournament, it is the orange-pink felt pads that identify the chessmen as an original tournament set of the 1979 Rio de Janeiro Interzonal chess Tournament and as a valuable piece of chess history.

Picture Credits

Fig. 1 – Barbara Hund, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gruppenbild_M%C3%A4nner_ITZ_1979_Rio.JPG

Fig. 2 – Charles J. Sharp, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Copacabana_Palace_Hotel_Rio.jpg?uselang=de

Fig. 3 – unknown photographer, picture provided by Alberto Mascarenhas.

Fig. 4 – Barbara Hund, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Petrosian,Tigran_1979_Rio_c.jpg

Fig. 5 – Holger Langer, www.chess-collection.de.

The Joy of Commissioning and Collecting Replicas

René Meijer

In this article, I describe some replicas of historically significant chess pieces that I had someone make for me- with work by Dutch wood turners and carvers, and a special trip to Italy for a unique encounter in a village in the Apennines.

I have been collecting chess pieces for ten years. Although I own a number of original sets, my emphasis is on commissioning and collecting replicas. I suspect that this makes me something of an oddity among chess collectors, most of whom are primarily interested in original chess sets, preferably completely intact and without damage. First, I will explain my reasons for mainly collecting replicas. I will also discuss the groundbreaking exhibition “The Imagery of Chess”, and consider a number of associated replicas, including the development of the famous Bauhaus chess pieces. Then I will describe some special replicas, including those originally designed by Luca Pacioli and Leonardo da Vinci, as well as the famous chess pieces from Venafro (Italy), and those by Alexandr Rodchenko.

My Motivations

Like other collectors, I am also interested in historically significant chess pieces. However, my enthusiasm mainly concerns the aesthetics and design of the pieces, and their historical significance in the development of chess pieces. I am not really interested by the fact that a chess set is an original from a particular year. What I like is how wood turners and carvers have succeeded, and still succeed, in creating a harmonious whole, in which the proportions of the pieces in relation to each other and the materials used create a beautiful visual impression. A second reason to embrace replicas is the fact that some original pieces are not for sale or are beyond my financial means. In addition, some sets are only available in museums, and often there is only one copy. In that case, you have no choice but to buy, or commission, a replica if you want to own that set. A third reason is that I am attached to completely intact chess sets. Although there are many authentic sets without damage, I prefer a replica to a restored set because the latter is in fact also no longer completely original.

Now, I believe that everyone should collect what they like. The pleasure of collecting and seeing the pieces is what matters, and tastes differ. For example, I am mainly interested in wooden pieces, but I can appreciate when someone is crazy about porcelain chess sets, even though I will never collect them myself.

I would like to mention two men to whom I am grateful for their efforts in bringing historically significant pieces to life through beautiful replicas, and who have inspired me: Frank Camaratta and Rick Knowlton.

1. The Exhibition “The Imagery of Chess”

The *Imagery of Chess* exhibition was organized in 1944 at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York on the initiative of influential art dealer Julien Levy, Surrealist painter Max Ernst, and renowned artist Marcel Duchamp. I became interested in this for two reasons. Firstly, there is the beautiful 2005 book “The Imagery of Chess Revisited” edited by Larry List (Ref.1). This book showcases a large number of modern artworks related to chess, including paintings, sculptures, and, of course, chess sets. In addition to Max Ernst and Marcel Duchamp, thirty other artists were invited to contribute, including Yves Tanguy, Dorothea Tanning, Ossip Zadkine, Man Ray and Isamu Noguchi.

Marcel Duchamp, Surrealism, and the Dada movement have interested me for years. What is special about Duchamp is that he cannot really be placed in any art movement, because he went completely his own way. What is fascinating is that around 1924 he more or less gave up making art in favour of playing chess¹. Duchamp reached a reasonable level and represented France in competitions and several Chess Olympiads (Refs 2 and 3). However, the title of Grandmaster was not meant to be for him.

Yves Tanguy

As my first replica, I recreated Yves Tanguy's chess set with friends (Fig. 1 below). Yves Tanguy was a French-born Surrealist artist and a good friend of Levy, Ernst and Duchamp. He made the set he exhibited as early as 1938 (Ref. 1, pp 63 – 66). In the Dada movement's tradition of making art from everyday objects, he carved the pieces from an ordinary broomstick. Each chess piece is cylindrical and reduced to its most basic form. The design is sleek, certainly revolutionary for its time, and completely different from the traditional Staunton pieces. It is a design that many will say, as with some of Karel Appel's paintings, "My 8-year-old sister could do that", but what matters here is the creative idea and its execution in line with the Dada movement.



Fig. 1 - Yves Tanguy set (A. Vollegraaf / J. Haug)

Please note that in the captions to the figures, any names given in brackets refer to the wood turners and carvers who actually made the replicas for me. All photographs were taken by the author.

Marcel Duchamp

The second replica (Fig. 2 overleaf left) is Marcel Duchamp's famous chess set which dates from 1919 and is also known as the *Buenos Aires Chess Set*. Although not actually part of *The Imagery of Chess* Exhibition, this set, more than any other, perfectly embodies the spirit of the exhibition. Of course, this is not for sale anywhere and, if I am well informed, Duchamp's heirs are also preventing its reproduction. In any case, an attempt to market this set in 3D print a few years ago was thwarted by the heirs. These chess pieces are much more traditional in shape than those of Yves Tanguy, but the design is intriguing, especially the unusually carved knight, which rests on a metal pedestal (Fig. 3 overleaf right). The pieces were made by wood turner Koedijk apart from the four knights which were made by wood carver Schropp- this made me understand that these are quite different professions!

¹ "According to Man Ray, one night Duchamp studied a game into the early morning hours, leaving the pieces in a position that he planned to study further the next morning. When he awoke, he discovered that Lydie (Duchamp's first wife) had glued the pieces to the board, in an apparent effort to express her disapproval of the inordinate amount of time he devoted to the game. This story was later denied by Lydie. Nevertheless, they divorced a few months later..." (Naumann, Francis M. and Bailey, Bradley, "Marcel Duchamp, The Art of Chess", p22).



Fig. 2 – Marcel Duchamp set (O. Koedijk / W. Schropp)



Fig. 3 – Duchamp knights (W. Schropp)

Man Ray

Born Emmanuel Radnitzky, Man Ray founded the American branch of the Dada movement. A famous painter, photographer and illustrator, and a friend of Duchamp since 1915, he can be seen as the illustrator of the Dada and Surrealist period in the 20th century. He regularly played chess with Duchamp, including at the Marshall Chess Club in New York, which Duchamp had joined in 1916 (Ref. 1, p45). Man Ray himself said about chess, "I remained a third-rate player, a wood pusher as he [Duchamp] said: my interest was directed towards designing new forms for chess pieces, of not much interest to players but to me a fertile field of investigation" (Ref. 1, p44).



Fig. 4 – Man Ray's Early Wood Chess Set replica



Fig. 5 – Man Ray's 1945 Wood Chess Set (O. Koedijk)

Although not present at the inception of the exhibition in 1944 as he lived far away in Los Angeles (Ref. 1, p44), two sets by Man Ray were on display at the exhibition. The first, entitled *Silver Chess Set*, was an exquisite 1926 variation of his *Early Wood Chess Set*. Man Ray made this wooden set in 1920, a year after Duchamp's *Buenos Aires Chess Set*, and it is widely available as a replica (Fig. 4 above left). Here, too, the background of the design and aesthetics of the final set is noteworthy. Man Ray sought to use basic geometric shapes and made use of everyday objects that he found in his studio, among other places. For example, the bishop is a vase, and the knight is the scroll at the end of a violin. I commissioned a replica (Fig. 5 above right) of Man Ray's second exhibited set, *1945 Wood Chess Set*. This set differs from the first one in a number of ways but is certainly just as attractive in terms of design. A beautiful book by Larry List about Man Ray and chess (Ref. 4) was recently published. This book has a lot of very interesting information about Man Ray, and the background of both chess sets I have mentioned above.

Max Ernst

Max Ernst created a beautiful set, *1944 Wood Chess Set*, which is available for purchase as a replica (Fig. 6 below left). What is unusual about this set is that the queen is larger than the king, unlike almost all other chess sets. This is an expression of the fact that the queen is the strongest piece on the chessboard.



Fig. 6 – Max Ernst chess set



Fig. 7 – Isamu Noguchi chess set

Isamu Noguchi

Isamu Noguchi's completely original set was on display at the exhibition. A replica (Fig. 7 above right) of this set has recently been re-released on the market (Ref. 5).

Josef Hartwig

Josef Hartwig's famous 1924 Bauhaus chess set was not actually part of *The Imagery of Chess* exhibition. However, one of the rare 1923 prototype sets was present because it had been loaned to the exhibition by participant Dr. Gregory Zilboorg, writer and psychoanalyst (Ref. 1, pp 55 - 60).



Fig. 8 – 1924 Bauhaus chess set replica

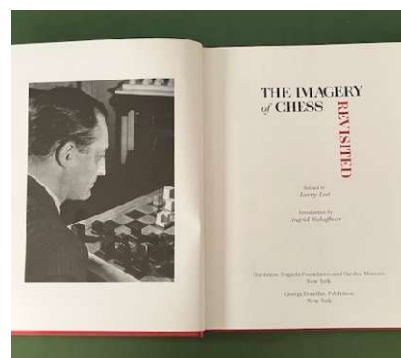


Fig. 9 – The Imagery of Chess Revisited book showing the 1923 Bauhaus Prototype chess set

It is fascinating to see the stages Hartwig's chess pieces went through before they took on their final form in 1924, as found in both original 1924 sets which are regularly available on the auction markets and the replica sets which are still being commercially produced (Fig. 8 above left). As is well known, the revolutionary aspect of Hartwig's pieces is that their shape represents the movement of the piece in question. For example, the knight has an angular shape, symbolizing the knight's jump. Many photos of the precursors to the final design of the chess pieces can be found on the internet. In the book "The Imagery of Chess Revisited", the

first photo on the left-hand inside page shows gallery owner Julien Levy with the 1923 *Bauhaus Prototype Chess set* lent to the exhibition by Dr. Zilboorg (Fig. 9) in which the pieces have square bases, which are missing from the final set. Hartwig always strove to minimize his design and later omitted these bases.

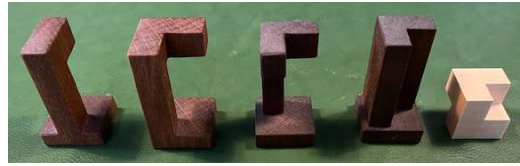


Fig. 10 – The evolution of Hartwig's knight (J. v.d. Sluis for the dark pieces)

I had replicas made of the development of all the Bauhaus pieces and discovered that Hartwig created at least four versions of the knight before arriving at the final 1924 design (Fig. 10 above). Figures 11 (below left), 12 (below middle) and 13 (below right) show the development respectively of the bishop, queen and king from before 1924 to their final design forms. The light pieces in all these photos are commercial replicas.



Fig. 11 – Bishop's evolution (J. v.d. Sluis for the two dark pieces)



Fig. 12 – Queen's evolution (J. v.d. Sluis for the two dark pieces)



Fig. 13 – King's evolution (J. v.d. Sluis for dark piece)

2. The chess pieces of Luca Pacioli /Leonardo da Vinci

We now leave *The Imagery of Chess* exhibition and go in search of older historically significant chess pieces. In my search, I came across Ezio Zanini, a woodworker and artist from Northern Italy. This remarkable man is fascinated by the Middle Ages and works with wood using historical tools from earlier times. He has written books on old board games (Ref. 6) and on woodworking tools used in the past (Ref. 7). On his website www.viduquestla.it, I came across a chess set which he had made based on the chess pieces drawn in Luca Pacioli's famous book "De Ludo Scachorum" (On the Game of Chess) (Fig. 14 below left). How did this come about?



Fig. 14 - Luca Pacioli /Leonardo da Vinci set (E. Zanini)



Fig. 15 – "De Ludo Scachorum" facsimile

In 2006, a remarkable discovery was made in Gorizia, an Italian city on the border with Slovenia. A very special manuscript was found in the library of Count Guglielmo Coronini Cronberg (who died in 1990). It was the book "De Ludo Scachorum", a work thought to have been lost for around 500 years. Its publication date is between 1497 and 1508, and its existence was known thanks to the testimonies of its author, Luca Pacioli. This famous mathematician, founder of modern accounting, and author of books on classical and Arabic mathematics, was a confidant and advisor to none other than Leonardo da Vinci. The rediscovered chess book

is special because it was written at the end of the fifteenth century, the period in which chess transitioned from the old form of the game to the modern rules (such as changes in the moves of the queen and bishop, and castling). “De Ludo Scachorum” contains chess problems (of the type “checkmate in x moves”), some of which follow the old rules and others the modern ones. But even more fascinating is what architect and chess historian Franco Rocco claims to have discovered about this manuscript. He believes that the chess pieces in the book were drawn by Leonardo da Vinci himself (Fig. 15). It would be too involved to reproduce Franco Rocco's arguments here, but interested readers can consult the Italian (Ref. 8) or English (Ref. 9) editions of his book.



Fig. 16 – Commentary book, Ref. 11

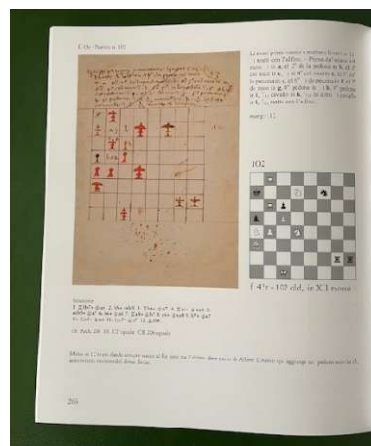


Fig. 17 – Game transcription into current notation

The original book is in the possession of the Aboca museum in Gorizia, which has published a very beautiful facsimile of it (Ref. 10), as well as an accompanying commentary book (Ref. 11 and Fig. 16 above left) containing, among other things, all the problems transcribed into the current notation (Fig. 17 above right). Contributors to this wonderful explanatory book are the well-known Italian chess experts Diego D'Elia, Alessandro Sanvito, and Adolivio Capece. Interestingly, the pieces have never been physically found in the form in which they are drawn, so it is likely that original pieces were never made (or never survived to the present day). I asked Ezio if he would make me a wooden replica of the chess pieces designed by Luca Pacioli/Leonardo da Vinci. The result can be seen in Fig.14 on the previous page. This initial contact with Ezio led me to the commissioning of the next replica, that of the unique chess pieces from Venafro.

3. The chess pieces from Venafro

Arguably the oldest chess pieces in Europe were found in Venafro, a town of about ten thousand inhabitants in the province of Isernia (Italy). They were discovered in 1932 and are now in the town's archaeological museum. The chess pieces are abstract in form and bear witness to the presence and influence of the Arabs in Italy between the 9th and 11th centuries. Radiocarbon dating analysis has confirmed that the pieces most likely date from this time period- please refer to Ref. 12 for these scientific results and to Ref. 13 for an associated Chess Collector Magazine review. Nineteen chess pieces were found, some of which are broken (Fig. 18 overleaf). It is remarkable that the pieces are made of deer antlers, rather than ivory or cattle bones.

I decided to commission replicas of these unique pieces after my earlier contact with Ezio Zanini, the woodworker and artist from Northern Italy. It turned out that we both owned two books about these special chess pieces (Refs. 12 and 14). The book “Gli schacchi di Venafro, Ipotesi interpretative e storia degli scacchi più antichi d'Europa” (“The chess pieces of Venafro, hypotheses for interpretation and history of the oldest chess pieces in Europe”) in Ref. 14 contains beautiful photos of the original pieces and a drawing of deer antlers (Fig. 20 below, top row, right). Ezio was happy to accept my request as it would be a challenge for

him to craft deer antlers into chess pieces. After he sourced some deer antlers, he worked hard on them, removing the outer bark and making the slanted notches which was a huge job as these notches are not originally on deer antlers.



Fig. 18 – The original Venafro pieces on the cover of Ref. 14



Fig. 19 – The author (left) and Ezio Zanini

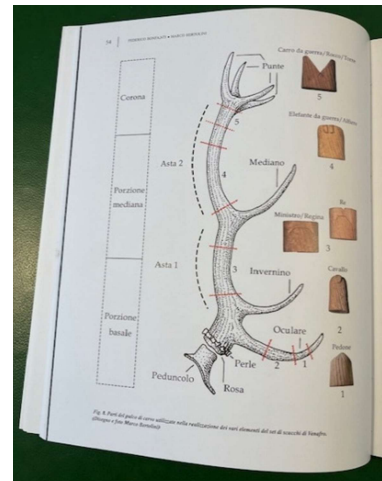


Fig. 20 – Deer antlers and cutting pieces



Fig. 21 – the slanted notches on the replica (E. Zanini)



Fig. 22 – The Venafro replica (E. Zanini)

Last summer, I stayed in Bologna with a friend, and we rented a car and drove to a village two and a half hours away from this beautiful city. We arrived around 1:00 p.m. and were warmly welcomed by Ezio and his wife Erika at the local, and only, restaurant for lunch. In Italy, eating together is a good way to start a friendly relationship. Afterwards, we went to his house and studio four kilometres away. There, we found beautiful wood carvings, including decorations for door panels and various pieces of furniture. And, of course, the famous replica chess pieces (Fig. 22 immediately above right and Fig. 19 above, top row, middle, which also shows the author on the left and Ezio on the right). The non- natural, stained pieces have a red tint, applied with wax. The reason for this is that the aforementioned book (Ref. 14) states that two pawns have some red pigment (p. 56: “l’analisi allo stereomicroscopio delle superfici ha inoltre evidenziato la presenza di piccolissime tracce di pigmenti rossi su due pedoni”; “the analysis with the stereomicroscope has, among other things, revealed the presence of very small traces of red pigment on two pawns”). Needless to say, as we said our goodbyes to Ezio and Erika, we were excited and happy and, with the chess pieces in a wooden box (also made by Ezio), we began our journey back to Bologna.

4. The chess pieces by Aleksandr Rodchenko

Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956) was a Russian artist, sculptor, and painter. He specialized in graphic design and photography and was one of the founders of constructivism (Wikipedia). Rodchenko designed a chess table and chess pieces for the model room of the Workers' Club in the newly formed Soviet Union in the 1920s. Please note that the information below is based on a brochure about the chess table- Ref. 15.

The Workers' Club was a meeting place and was intended to represent the communist way of life. In a relatively small space, workers could engage in various activities for relaxation and entertainment after work. Rodchenko had to take into account the economical use of floor space and the space occupied by each object, so that the object itself could be used as optimally as possible. He also sought simplicity in both its use and standardization. The model room for the Workers' Club was a small hall for about 30 people, used for lectures, political meetings, film and theatre performances, and as a reading, games and recreational room.

Rodchenko's table forms a whole with the two chess chairs and could be pushed away like a sled. The chessboard could be tilted, and only when it was in a vertical position could the players get up and leave.



Fig. 23 – the cardboard box of Rodchenko chess table



Fig. 24 – Rodchenko chess set (J. v.d. Sluis)

The model room, chess table, and chess pieces were first created under Rodchenko's direction for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925. It was the first time that developments in Soviet art had been shown so extensively in Western Europe, and it made a huge impression on the public. Unfortunately, the original chess table and pieces were lost during World War II. However, a number of life-sized replicas have been made, most recently on display at the Kröller-Müller Museum in the Hoge Veluwe National Park in the Netherlands. There is also a small cardboard box available for purchase from antiquarian booksellers, containing sheets of sturdy paper from which a small model chess table can be made (Fig. 23 above left). I was not able to reconstruct the chess table, but I had someone make the chess pieces for me (Fig. 24 above right). The sleek, geometric design and the bright colours of black and red are striking.

Finally

For me, the process of discussing the making of a replica with a skilled woodturner offers a lot of joy and satisfaction. In this way, I came to better understand the effort which a woodturner has to make to realize a very good copy of an existing historically significant set.

René Meijer is a Dutch psychologist who lives in the centre of The Netherlands. He is member of the local chess club. At this time, he prefers commissioning and collecting replicas more than actually playing chess.

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King and Conqueror

Jim Joannou

A recent, historical TV drama shown on BBC1 in the UK (available for download via the BBC iPlayer) called 'King and Conqueror' tells the story of the buildup and background to the Norman Invasion of England in 1066, by William the Conqueror of Normandy. This famous English battle is known as the Battle of Hastings (although the actual site of the engagement is in the town of Battle, 20 miles away from Hastings, which was formed around its eponymous Abbey founded on the orders of William probably to atone for the slaughter there), and is recorded on the, even more famous, Bayeux tapestry, which is housed in the 'Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux' in Normandy, France.

One of the scenes from this drama (10 minutes and 40 seconds into episode 7) shows Edith, the wife of the last crowned Anglo-Saxon King of England, Harold Godwinson, possibly playing a game of chess (please see photo below).



It has been established (please see Ref. 1 for a review) that chess arrived in England in the middle of the 11th century and that it was mainly played by Royalty and members of the Church, so it is just possible that this scene, set in 1066, may be feasible! Noble women were regular chess players in medieval Europe, especially once the queen replaced the vizier on the chessboard, which enabled interactions with the opposite sex in ways which would not normally be possible. The high point of chess as a “courtly ritual” was during the Troubadour period from the early 12th century to the end of the 14th century. Chess was further considered a suitable game for women until the late 15th century until an anti-feminist backlash occurred leading to a decline in the number of women being allowed to play chess, starting perhaps paradoxically because of the change of the rules leading to the queen becoming the most powerful piece on the board (please see Ref. 2 for a history of the arrival of the chess queen on European chessboards). So Edith, as a leading noblewoman, playing chess in 1066 is not necessarily historically inaccurate.



However, the style of the chess pieces shown is certainly not correct. We know that the early chess pieces in England were of the Arabic, abstract style as evidenced by the archeological discoveries in England (please see Ref. 1). The photo above left is a close-up of the set from the TV drama together with the oldest known chess pieces discovered in England, the Witchampton Chess pieces, pictured above right, for comparison.

But is Edith playing chess or is she playing Hnefatafl, also known as the Viking game? The board seems to be greater than 8x8 and all pieces apart from the white king have a similar height and shape with just different colouring to differentiate defenders (white- stained) from attackers (in blue). In addition, the only apparent king on the board is located very close to the centre of the board which is its starting location for Hnefatafl. Historically, it would not be inconceivable for Edith to be playing this game. Her mother-in- law was Viking and the Viking Cnut reigned as King of England from 1016 until 1035 with his sons then reigning until 1042 so that Scandinavian culture and customs would have been well- known at the time.

Please do send us your comments- do you recognize the style of chess pieces shown or do you believe that these photos depict the Viking game Hnefatafl?

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An Antique Ecuadorian Staunton Set

Sergio Coellar Mideros (translated and edited by Peter Whitehead)

All photos by Sergio Coellar Mideros unless stated otherwise.



A popular tourist attraction in Ecuador is the flowering of the local yellow Guayacán trees which takes place in the New Year with the first rains of the winter season. The largest forest of such trees in Ecuador can be found in Zapotillo in the province of Loja and surrounds the villages of Mangahurco, Bolaspamba and Cazaderos. When flowering occurs, the forest takes on an intense yellow colour, and the air is filled with the characteristic aroma of the Guayacán blossom. Once pollination is complete, the delicate flowers fall from the trees covering the ground in an intense yellow blanket. This incomparable natural event lasts a week and brings spiritual tranquillity and harmony with nature to those who experience it.



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The Ecuadorian Guayacán tree produces one of the heaviest, strongest and most durable types of wood. Its resistance to termites has made it popular in house building since colonial times. It was traditionally used in agroforestry as part of the integration of trees, forage and livestock onto a single piece of land as well as to delineate boundaries and to provide both shade and ornamentation. This is a very high- quality wood which has been extensively used in carpentry, cabinet making, for vehicle parts (such as carriages and axles), musical instruments (such as violin bows), and fishing rods amongst other artefacts. It is excellent for honey production, and its bark was used in medicine. This type of wood has been protected from exploitation by the Ecuadorian Department of the Environment since 1999.



Wood from the Ecuadorian Guayacán tree has also been used in the manufacture of chess sets as shown in these photos. This wonderful set was acquired in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, in the early 1980s and came without box or board. The king is 10cm high. The chess pieces are not weighted, but they are well- balanced and baized. The knight sits on a turned pedestal, its mane delicately carved. Such sets are not produced or found nowadays, which suggests that it is older than it seems. The set most likely dates from the 1950s – 1960s. The maker of the pieces is an unknown artisan, most probably an inmate of the former García Moreno Prison in Quito according to the now- deceased psychologist Jorge Flachier who retired 15 years ago after working there for more than 33 years as an official in the Social Rehabilitation Centre.



The García Moreno Prison was designed and built by Thomas Reed and Francisco Smith following the model of the prison of La Santé in Paris to implement what French historian Michel Foucault has since called the “Watch and Punish” penal system popular at that time. It was inaugurated in July 1875. From the outset, workshops were provided to give opportunities for inmates, and as late as 2002, chess pieces and boards were still being made as part of a training program for up to 30 inmates with their products being purchased by the local authorities.