

The Chess Collector Magazine

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Editors' Comments

A happy New Year to all our fellow CCI members and friends. At this time of year it is always when our annual subscriptions are due. The Americas are collected locally as well as some European countries that are collected via our local German CCI group. All others pay their fees direct to the UK account. The annual subscription this year is £40, to cover higher postage and printing costs. Please make a transfer to the CCI Santander account:

Chess Collectors International
Account 40446022
Sort Code 09-01-27

Please note that Peter Whitehead is the new Treasurer.

At the beginning of the year, we thought that we were going to struggle to fill the pages of this issue as things had been very quiet. Luckily, several CCI members have now made contributions, and we can start the first issue of 2025 full of interesting items related to our favourite subject – Chess sets! However, we start with a warning about online scams in our members' section! This is followed by news about a new chess website. A short item regarding the famous 'Ager' chess pieces and a major article from Chuck Grau follow on. A full Auction Review returns with some very interesting sets that have been offered for sale or sold at auction and the issue concludes with a review of a collection of chess-related children's stories in Italian.

Finally, it is with great sadness that we need to inform you of the passing of two long-standing CCI members, Gianfelice Ferlito and Hans Krieger. The current CCI-USA Fall/Winter issue contains a moving obituary for Gianfelice and a wonderful review of Hans's life has been provided by Dr Thomsen on page 3 of this issue.

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 Jaques Knight from a very special set that was recently sold at auction in Maidenhead, UK for £26,000 (\$32,350, €31,170). See the Auction review on page 17 for more information and pictures.

Members Section

Obituary: Hans Krieger (1934-2024)

By Dr. Thomas Thomsen

Hans and his wife Marianne were founding members of CCI in 1984.

Hans played chess to a high standard and was a long- standing member of the Hamburg Chess Club founded in 1830 where he served as President. He generously bought a house for the club, the first in its history. Hans was a true collector, and apart from chess sets, he assembled a great collection of chess books which he left to his chess club.

Hans and Marianne's main passion was early Meissen porcelain. They had an important collection of Meissen pieces, dating from the foundation of the factory in 1708 until 1740 that have been part of many exhibitions. Hans was an expert on Meissen chess pieces and wrote a catalogue for Meissen- "Ein königliches Vergnügen (Meissener Schachfiguren aus drei Jahrhunderten)"- which is still in use today.

Hans was always very actively involved with CCI. Starting with the 1986 meeting in London, he attended most international and German CCI meetings. He was part of the organising committee for the international meeting in Munich in 1988, the first one to take place in Germany. In 2005, to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Hamburg chess club, Hans successfully obtained sponsorship from HSK Nordbank to finance the largest and arguably best CCI chess exhibition ever. He was the prime organiser of that meeting which was held at the Museum of Games and Industry in Hamburg. All significant collectors and many museums contributed items for the exhibition which coincided with the 2005 CCI meeting. The HSK Nordbank sponsorship enabled the publication of a splendid 358- page book as the exhibition catalogue written by CCI members Professor Hans Holländer and his wife Barbara. Entitled "Schach Partie Durch Zeiten und Welten", this remains a key reference book for many collectors. In 2012, through his contacts at the famous "Green Vault" museum in Dresden where Meissen is produced, Hans persuaded the Dresden State Art Collections to host an exhibition on Chinese Chess Sets as part of the CCI meeting held in Dresden.

In his professional life, Hans was a successful importer of grain. He was a great friend, reliable and of high ethical standards. He was committed to the old credo of Hamburg traders: "You don't do such a thing".

He will be greatly missed.



Scam Warning for CCI Members

Jim Joannou

Over the last few years, the growth of chess- related Facebook groups has been phenomenal. Our own Chess Collectors International Facebook group now has ~2800 members, while other chess- related groups together total over 75,000 members worldwide! There are specialist chess groups for Soviet & Tsarist sets with ~8800 members, Jaques Staunton sets with over 37,000 members and other groups for selling sets and boards etc. These groups are very popular and provide an outlet where collectors can post pictures and discuss chess designs and origins.

However, such popularity attracts others who are keen to turn a profit by scamming enthusiastic collectors and we now must be aware of possible pitfalls. We have seen a few scammers on these chess-related groups trying to fraudulently offer chess sets to unsuspecting collectors. Some of the Administrators of these groups are aware of this and are sometimes able to delete these unwanted posts.

What to be aware of / look out for:

- 1) The profiles usually do not look fake, but rather legitimate, so the scammers may be using hijacked / hacked profiles.
- 2) The person selling the chess set has usually only joined the group within the last few days.
- 3) These posts often show 1 or 2 pictures taken from eBay or other online selling platforms, or even from other collectors' websites! When asked to provide additional information or more pictures, these requests often go unanswered by the scammer.
- 4) These posts often have a personal story attached to them: 'This used to belong to my grandfather who recently passed away' or 'This has been in my family for three generations, but now it's time to let it go'.
- 5) Scam adverts often have the same "layout", i.e. they have a description / story and the last line contains an amount with a simple "\$" sign. For example: 'I am downsizing my home and I have to sell this chess set quickly. If you are interested, send a PM. \$150.

The picture on the right is a screenshot from a recent scam posting. Here are a couple of points from Holger Langer, who is the Administrator for several Facebook chess groups including our own CCI group.

1. To find out if the pictures were taken from eBay adverts etc. you can use the Google Image search (<https://images.google.com/>). Not always, but often, you will have search results.
2. After banning / limiting advertising for new members in our Classical Chess Sets group, we experienced posts that started as regular, inconspicuous posts showcasing a chess set (usually without a description), but the description was later added or changed into something advertising a sale like the one on the right.



As always, when buying from unknown online sellers, it is 'Buyer Beware'!!

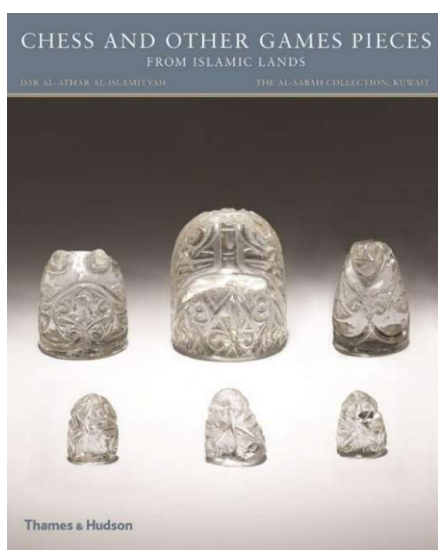
My thanks to Holger Langer for his input.

The ‘Ager’ Chessmen

Jim Joannou

In the July 2020 issue of the Chess Collector Magazine (Ref 1), I wrote a review of a new book that had been published in 2018 called “Chess and other games pieces from Islamic Lands” by Deborah Freeman Fahid (Ref 2). At the time, the picture on the front cover (see Picture 1 below) did not seem significant. However, I recently gave a talk entitled ‘A Brief History of Chess’ at a local history club and, whilst preparing for this, I revisited this book and this time the cover picture did grab my attention and provided some answers to a long-standing mystery!

The author of this book catalogues and analyses the complete al-Sabah Collection, which was mainly unknown in the chess collecting world until this book was published. The ‘rock crystal’, Islamic- style, chess pieces on the front cover are described inside as being 6 of the ‘Ager’ chessmen.



Picture 1: Front cover of the book in Ref 2, showing 6 of the 15 Ager chess pieces in the al-Sabah collection.



Picture 2: A king piece from the Ager chessmen, reproduced with kind permission of Jean-Louis Cazaux (Ref 4).

Rock crystal chess pieces in Europe have been known about for some time (Refs 3 & 4), especially in Spain. The area of Urgell in the Pyrenees has been noted as having the game of chess possibly as early as the 9th – 10th centuries. The style of the carving of many of these pieces indicates a possible origin in Egypt which might imply that they were imported, probably via the trade routes, into Spain. Reference 3 notes eight different texts, mainly from the 10th century, which mention chess and, in some cases, specify glass or crystal pieces. The famous ‘Ager’ rock crystal pieces are amongst those listed.

The complete history of the ‘Ager’ chess pieces will probably never be fully known and there are still missing pieces today. The website (Ref 4) of French chess historian, Jean-Louis Cazaux, was my initial introduction to these pieces and the mysteries surrounding them. He gives detailed descriptions and pictures (see Picture 2 above) of these early Islamic style pieces and a summary of the information from his website on these pieces can be paraphrased as follows:

The existence of the ‘Ager’ pieces (possibly carved in Egypt) is first mentioned in the will of Arsenda d’Ager, wife of Count Arnau Mir de Tost in 1068. Arnau was a Spanish Knight who re-conquered Ager from the Saracens. In 1071, from the will of Arnau himself, it is believed that there were 96 pieces in total

(possibly 3 complete sets?). Over the next 5 centuries very little is known or recorded about them, although Murray (Ref 5) states that in 1547, only 15 pieces remained! (Note: The number of pieces varies depending on the reference source.)

In the early 19th century, it was reported that only 44 pieces remained, and during the 19th century, more pieces were lost as only 14 pieces remained by 1887. In 1907, these 14 pieces were in a private collection and were then sold in a Paris auction around 1981 and purchased by the Emir of Kuwait. However, these were plundered during the Iraqi war in 1990 / 1991, but it was still believed that they remained in Kuwait, although exactly where was unknown.

Until now! And the publication of the book by Deborah Freeman Fahid!!

The book (Ref 2) proves that these presumed- lost 14 pieces have ended up in the collection of Al-Sabah in Kuwait. (Note: Again, the numbers vary as this reference says there are 15 Ager chess pieces in the collection!)

Deborah Freeman Fahid gives a detailed history of these pieces, and the main protagonists involved, as well as providing an extensive bibliography related to the ‘Ager’ chess pieces, on pages 170 – 175 and can be split. in two sections:

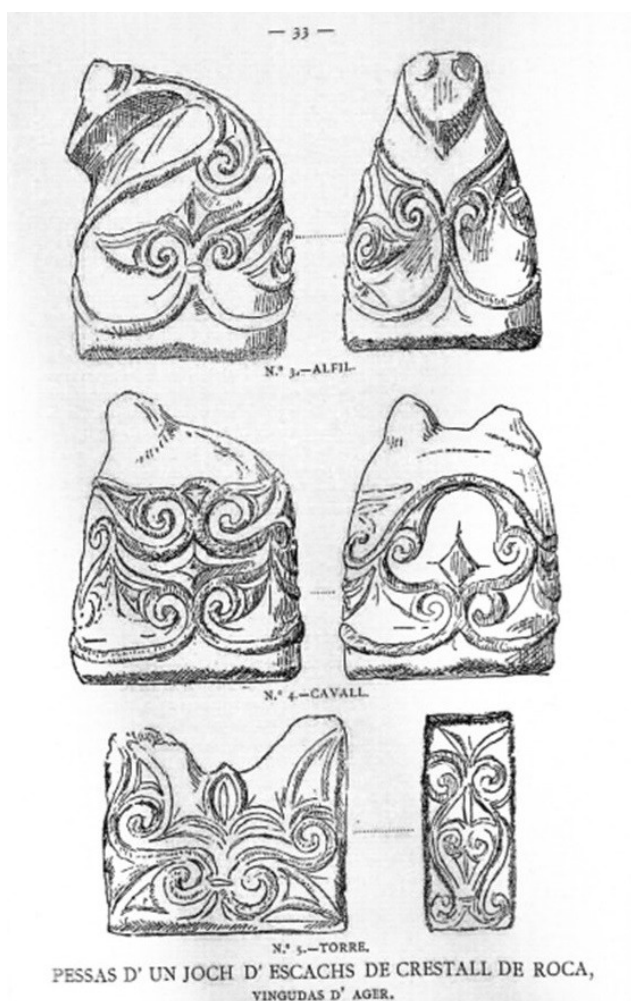
- i) The early years of these pieces in Spain (10th – 11th century)
- ii) The later years from the 19th century onwards.

The extract below (from pages 170 – 172) summarises the period from the later 19th century onwards:

Fifteen rock crystal chess pieces were acquired by The al-Sabah Collection around 1981 from the collection of the Marquis de Ganay in Paris, who had inherited them from his aunt, the renowned collector Martine Marie-Pol, Comtesse de Béhague, who died in 1939. The first mention of ten decorated pieces as belonging to her collection is in Gaston Migeon’s ‘Manuel d’art Musulman’, published in 1907. The ten decorated pieces and the five plain pieces were all described as being in her collection by José Camón Aznar in the 1930s, and it is likely that she has acquired them all at the same time... She may have purchased the chess pieces through a dealer in Paris, but it is also possible that she acquired them in Barcelona while on a sailing trip.... The chess pieces first came to public attention in 1886 when the Catalan Association for Scientific Excursions discovered them in a smaller church nearby, Sant Vicenç d’Ager. They had been moved there from the collegiate church for safekeeping, probably around 1840, during a period of civil war. This remarkable find was reported to a Catalan gentleman, Joseph Brunet y Bellet, who was at that time engaged in writing a book on the history of the game of chess. He first published the pieces in an article for the association’s bulletin in 1887.... Brunet y Bellet was permitted to take them home to make the beautiful line drawings which he published in 1887. (Picture 3 below).

...the next mention of the pieces is in 1907, when they were published by Migeon as being in the collection of the Comtesse de Béhague..... In addition to these fifteen pieces, another 19 rock crystal chess pieces are currently preserved in the Museu de Lleida.... These Lleida pieces, unlike the ones in The al-Sabah Collection, (see Picture 4 below) were not well known until their publication, also by Fité I Llevot, in 1984. They are distinctly different from the pieces in The al-Sabah Collection...and their provenance is considered to be the same.

Finally, a substantial rock crystal king / queen in the V&A (museum, London) has long been associated with the Ager pieces, but there is no clear evidence that it ever belonged to that group.



Picture 3: Line drawings of the Ager Chessmen by J.Brunet y Bellet, 1887 (published as figure 32 on page 171 of reference 2).



Picture 4: A King piece of the Ager Chessmen from the al-Shabah collection (Photo credit reference 2, page 185).

From reference 2, the timelines for the ownership of the Ager pieces over the centuries can be summarized as:

- 1) Arsenda and Arnau Mir de Tost (Testament of 1068 and inventory of 1071)
- 2) Collegiate Church of Sant Pere d'Ager (1072 – c.1840)
- 3) Church of Sant Vicenç d'Ager (c.1840 to 1887)
- 4) Martine Marie-Pol, Comtesse de Béhague (before 1907 to 1939)
- 5) Marquis de Ganay Collection (1939 to c.1981)
- 6) Emir of Kuwait (c.1981 – 1991)
- 7) The al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait (1991 onwards).

References:

1. The Chess Collector Magazine. Vol XXIX No2. 2020. Pg 8. Book Review. Jim Joannou.
2. Chess and other Game Pieces from Islamic Lands. Deborah Freeman Fahid. 2018. Thames & Hudson Ltd. ISBN: 978-0-500-97092-8.
3. The Introduction of Chess into Europe. M.C. Romeo. Private publication.
4. <http://history.chess.free.fr/>
5. A History of Chess. H. J. R. Murray. 1913. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0-19-827403-3

News

The “Beauty of Chess” Website

Hans Czihak

<https://beautyofchess.at>

We do not know what chess pieces Paul Morphy imagined when he played blindfolded against his opponents. In any case, everyone who wants to play chess with an opponent in real life needs a set of chess pieces. The tendency nowadays to play chess primarily online and looking at a screen is worth noting. The pieces shown on the screen are only virtual and they have no material, feel, weight, patina or tangible form, nor any lasting value.

Let us turn to the real chess pieces.

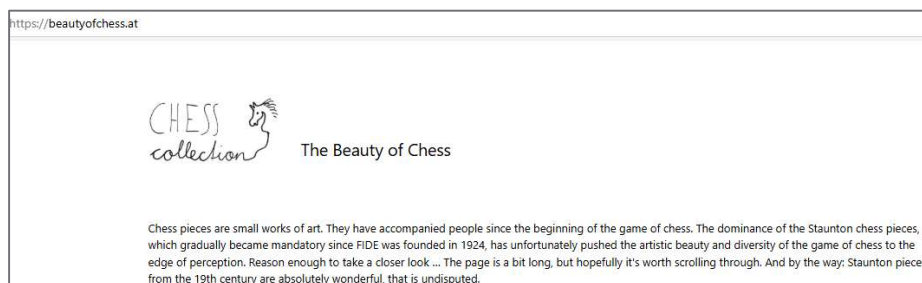
The task here is to design six types of pieces that are distinguishable from one another and whose role is clearly recognizable. How has this task been accomplished in different centuries and in different places in the world? We should not expect clear answers. You only have to take a quick look at Ned Munger’s “Cultures, Chess & Art”, which was planned to be five volumes and left behind a three-volume work, to understand that cultural milieus were always decisive for the design.

Where should one begin? In the cradle of chess, India? And when should one begin? In the 19th century, a time when chess gained widespread appeal through the growing number of chess clubs?

Life takes care of that; you begin where you first encounter the game. In our case, it was an Austrian Biederreimer chess set. This also clarifies the “when”, it dates from the first half of the 19th century, of course. We – my family and I – were so enthusiastic about the original, fragile and playful design that we took a closer look at the cultural history of chess. Finally, after four decades of chess abstinence, I was able to turn my attention back to the royal game. In my youth I had – for lack of a playing partner – studied the history of the chess problem and built a handful of chess problems myself.

When we come to the topic of "beauty in chess", now that the topic of problem chess has been mentioned, we see another feature of the game of chess in addition to the design of the chess pieces: the beauty of the game of chess is also hidden within it. Since each piece has an effect that is regulated as if by magic, a piece in itself is always more than what the eye can see. And suddenly we find ourselves in the middle of an adventure called "chess game" or "chess problem".

A website with the title "Beauty of Chess" can therefore never do justice to the beauty of the game of chess; at best it can be a poor guide to a world in which a new landscape appears behind every hill. May the visitors to this far too long website forgive us for the presumptuousness in the name and still make a few discoveries that will be pleasant for them.





CHES & ART

Upright Styrians

Here we are pleased to present a chess set that was made 2024 by the Styrian amateur wood turner **Helfried Puhr**. Helfried's intention was to create a model based on the famous Lasker-Schlechter chess set from the beginning of the 20th century.

In February 2024, Helfried wrote: "There is a technical problem in the production of the crowns of the king and queen (...). In my opinion, the original ends were made on a Passig lathe. Passig lathes were machines whose spindles regularly moved back and forth during rotation, towards and away from a fixed tool. The cutting edge of the tool was shaped accordingly, as a "shaping iron". As I cannot make the spindle on my lathe "wobble", I am trying to use a device that brings a self-made shaping iron in a suitable shape to the rotating workpiece at intervals.

I know that replicas of the Lasker-Schlechter chess pieces also come with milled ends on kings and queens, but I'm stubborn, either original or nothing."

Ultimately, Helfried managed to modify his machine accordingly. The chip removal was much lower than 5/100 mm per revolution. He also had to convert his machine to manual operation. Long working days were the order of the day...

The result is impressive! The kings are 97 mm high, the material is (European) boxwood for the white ones, Castello (Mexican) for the black ones. The black pieces were colored and oiled with a linseed oil mixture. Helfried glued in brass rollers as weights, the bases are covered with leather soles. Upright Styrian people!

CHES & ART

Dutch

The 'World Chess Hall of Fame' in St Louis, Missouri, USA currently has a chess exhibition called 'Paws and Pawns. Exploring Animal Chess sets.' The exhibition runs until 31 August 2025. The exhibition is described as 'a whimsical and engaging exhibition that showcases more than 50 animal-themed chess sets from around the globe'. More details on the exhibition can be found in the latest CCI- USA issue.

Paws & Pawns
Exploring Animal Chess Sets

ON VIEW: Jan. 30, 2025 - AUGUST 31, 2025

Fig. 1: A chess piece shaped like a cat.
Fig. 2: A chess piece shaped like a dog.
Fig. 3: A chess piece shaped like a bird.
Fig. 4: A chess piece shaped like a cat.
Fig. 5: A chess piece shaped like a dog.
Fig. 6: A chess piece shaped like a cat.
Fig. 7: A chess piece shaped like a dog.

WORLD CHESS HALL OF FAME
St. Louis, MO

The Tsarist Stauntons of Turner Teich

Chuck Grau

In *THE ART OF CHESS PIECES* (1994), Russian historian Isaac Linder examines the evolution of chess piece design in Russia. Linder focuses on archaeological finds from the 11th to 16th centuries, devoting scant attention to the 19th and 20th centuries. Nevertheless, Linder does offer some observations for these periods¹. The 19th century, he writes:

was marked by a serious passion for chess among the nobility and other educated people, saw the production of chess sets, predominantly wood, which were suitable for playing the game not only in a narrow circle, but also in competitions. They have quite an elegant and festive look about them, produced by their two- and three-tiered structure and the precise detailed work on the tower-like rook and the knight with its fine carving of the head and mane. Pieces of this kind belonged to famous players, writers, scholars, and musicians.

The second half of the 19th century, he continues, saw the introduction of Staunton pieces, designed by the Englishman Nathaniel Cooke and endorsed by the English master Howard Staunton. Staunton pieces became the standard set for competitions and remain so. They were produced all over the world, “also in St. Petersburg, where the Geich (*sic*) company produced Staunton-standard chess sets,” including the pieces “that were used in the first three matches between Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov.” Linder offers no photographs of the Geich (*sic*) sets or any other information about the company or its sets.

My own research and collecting interests focus on the rich heritage of Soviet chess sets, which Linder largely dismisses as adhering “to the Staunton design in their main features.” Linder does admit that the introduction of plastic forms opened “amazing possibilities for artists to create chess sets with new forms, styles, and purposes.” “In these sets,” he writes, “we can see the extended proportions traditionally used in the chess sets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.” In my view, while Soviet designs began with the Staunton design, their relationship to it was not simply one of borrowing and evolving, but of a dialectical tension or dialogue with it.

There are many historical, political, and artistic influences on Soviet designs, but any understanding of Soviet designs in their richness demands an examination of the Tsarist designs that preceded them, especially Tsarist Staunton designs. We know that “Staunton” chessmen were sold in Tsarist Russia in the second half of the 19th Century. Figure 1 right, for example, is an ad from Mikhail Tchigorin's chess journal, *Shakhmatni Vestnik*, in 1885, for “Turner Teich” with a St. Petersburg street address.

Teich was a woodturner located at 20 Nevsky Prospekt, a major thoroughfare in St. Petersburg first laid out by Peter the Great, stretching from the Admiralty on the left bank of the Neva River to the Alexander Nevsky Monastery to the east. The avenue is named for Alexander Nevsky, the heroic Prince of Novgorod who defeated invading Swedes in 1240 at the Battle of the Neva and Teutonic Crusaders at the Battle on the Ice in 1242, a triumph depicted in Sergei Eisenstein's epic 1938 film bearing Nevsky's

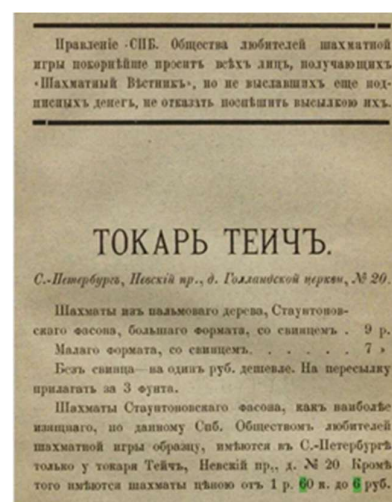


Figure 1- Courtesy of Sergey Kovalenko.

¹ All Linder quotations in the text can be found on pages 191 – 194 of Linder's book, “The Art of Chess Pieces” (1994).

name. By the end of the 19th century, Nevsky Prospekt had become the commercial and financial heart of the Russian capital. Of it, the Ukrainian-born novelist Nikolay Gogol wrote²:

There is nothing better than Nevsky Prospect, at least in St. Petersburg; for the city, it is everything. How it shines— the beauty of our capital! I know that none of its pale and bureaucratic residents would exchange Nevsky Prospekt for any number of riches.

A painting of Nevsky Prospekt, c.1775, is shown in Figure 2 below³, looking east across the Moyka River from the Admiralty- to the right foreground is the Stroganov Palace is on the right in the foreground and 20 Nevsky Prospekt is located across the Avenue to the left.



Figure 2- Nevsky Prospekt

Teich was operating as early as 1887, but its exact dates of operation are not known. In 1885, Teich offered Staunton style chessmen in large and small sizes, with and without lead weights. Teich marketed them as “sophisticated” and reminded customers that such pieces were available “only at Turner Teich”. Unfortunately, the ad shown in Figure 1 contains no photos or sketches of the pieces, so we are left to wonder what they looked like. Woodturning continued at 20 Nevsky Prospekt until at least 1916-1917 (Figure 4 below), but by 1908, the name of the proprietor had changed to Friedrich Vigandi according to the 1908 St. Petersburg Directory (Figure 3 below left). In the 1914 Directory (Figure 3 below right), Vigandi advertised chess sets among his products without describing or illustrating their style.

Токари.
Адриановъ, Пав. Ад. Обводный кан., 62.
«Александръ» (издѣльн), Невскій, 11. Тѣлф.
2915. Влад. Трейбергъ Адльр. Ив.
Бейлинъ, Шимонъ Берк. В. Гребенъ, 2.
Бодровъ, Андр. Сем. Сайкинъ пер., 14.
Борышевъ, Адльр. Евс. Пет. ст., Большой
пр., 61.
Бухертъ, Над. Ив., Симеоновская, 6.
Вариантъ, Карлъ Густ. Апраксинъ пер., 11.
Вигандтъ, Фридр. Марг. Невскій, 20.
Воейковъ, Ив. Ал-ѣв. Сергѣевская, 67.
Гаврилова, Елиза. Вас. Ул. Жуковск., 28.
Гилексъ, Мошва Янк. Богородская, 4—6.
Горюховъ, Дм. Вас. Глазовская, 24.
Городницъ, Мошва Нахем. Вознесенскій, 81.
Греперъ, Герм. Ферд., В. О., 1 лин., 24.
Дементъ, Огес. Демент. Владимірскій, 15.
Дорофьевъ, Адльр. Пет. (токари-дѣльцы).

Вигандтъ Фридр. Марг. (маст.), Нев-
скій 20. Т 9158.
**Биллиардная, токарная
и зонтичная мастерская
и магазинъ**
Ф. ВИГАНДТЪ
Невскій пр., 20. Телеф. 91—58.
Исполняютъ: большую выборку бил-
лиардныхъ шаровъ, ногги, шашекъ,
шашки, домино и разн. другія више-
енныя игры и новинки, зонтики,
троты, ящерицы, плавающие и др.
скульптуры и проч. Принимаются за-
казы на биллиарды и разныя токар-
ныя издѣлья. Исполняютъ аккуратно.
Цѣны умеренныя.

Токари.
«Александръ Т. Д.» (издѣльн) Невскій
11. Т 2915. Влад. Трейбергъ Адльр.
Ив.
Афанасьевъ Дм. Мих. Литовская 190.
Веркуновъ Там. Ив. Б. Охт. Гусева 28.
Водровъ Андр. Сем. Сайкинъ пер. 14.
Воръ Влад. Эд. Шамшева 1.
Вуровъ Адльр. Христ. Ор. Колтовская 1.
Бухертъ Руд. Карл. и Мишель Эд.
Франц. Симеоновская 6. Т 45208.

Вариантъ Густ. Карл. Апраксинъ пер. 11.
Вигандтъ Фридр. Марг. Невскій 20.
Т 9158.
Вильмакъ Мих. Юс. В. О. 11 л. 50.
Гилексъ Мошва Янк. Богородская 4—6.
Городницъ Мошва Нахем. Вознесен-
скій 81.
Грибановъ Ал-ѣв. Родон. Екатеринин-
скій кан. 111.
Гришинъ Як. Вас. Петерг. уч. Ру-
бинская 14.
Грязнова Елиза. Вас. Ул. Жуковскаго
28—12.
Давидовичъ Дав. Моис. Торговая
18—20.

Figure 3- St Petersburg Directories: 1908 (L) 1914(R)

Courtesy of Sergey Kovalenko.

Figure 4- Page 1546 of the 1916-17 St. Petersburg Directory.

² N. Gogol, DIARY OF A MADMAN, THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR AND SELECTED STORIES, page 78 (Penguin ed. 2006, R. Wilks, translator)

³ Figure 2 credit- Unknown author-http://walkspb.ru/ulpl/nevskiy_pr.html, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10597072>.

The record of Tsarist Staunton sets is sparse. There are sets believed to be Tsarist by dealers and collectors, but without any extrinsic evidence of their provenance. Some sets can be dated as Tsarist by their appearance in the photographic record. And yet other sets can be linked to Turner Teich by a combination of photographic evidence and stylistic similarity.

Putative Tsarist Staunton Sets

Figure 5 (right) shows a putative Tsarist set from the collection of Mike Ladzinski. It is clearly Staunton in its basic architecture. Like most Soviet sets, the bishop lacks a miter cut and the king's cross sports a finial instead of a cross. The finial is more ornate than typical Soviet finials, and the beautiful mane carvings are unlike those found in Soviet sets. It is surely plausible that this is a Tsarist set. Still, there is no definitive intrinsic or extrinsic evidence linking it to Tsarist Russia or any particular Tsarist turner.



Figure 5- Staunton Set from the Mike Ladzinski collection

The St. Petersburg Sets

In addition to putative Tsarist sets, several sets can be identified as Tsarist by the photographic record. A handful of photos of the St. Petersburg Tournaments of 1909 and 1914 reveal Staunton-style sets in use. Figure 6⁴ below shows the top 5 players of the 1914 tournament- Lasker (seated left), Alekhine (standing left), Capablanca, Marshall and Tarrasch (seated right). This photograph can be enlarged to show the pieces in detail as shown in Figure 7 overleaf.



Figure 6- The top 5 players of the 1914 St Petersburg Tournament photo.

⁴ Figure 6 Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cinq_premiers_du_Tournoi_d%27%C3%A9checs_de_Saint-P%C3%A9tersbourg_1914.jpg

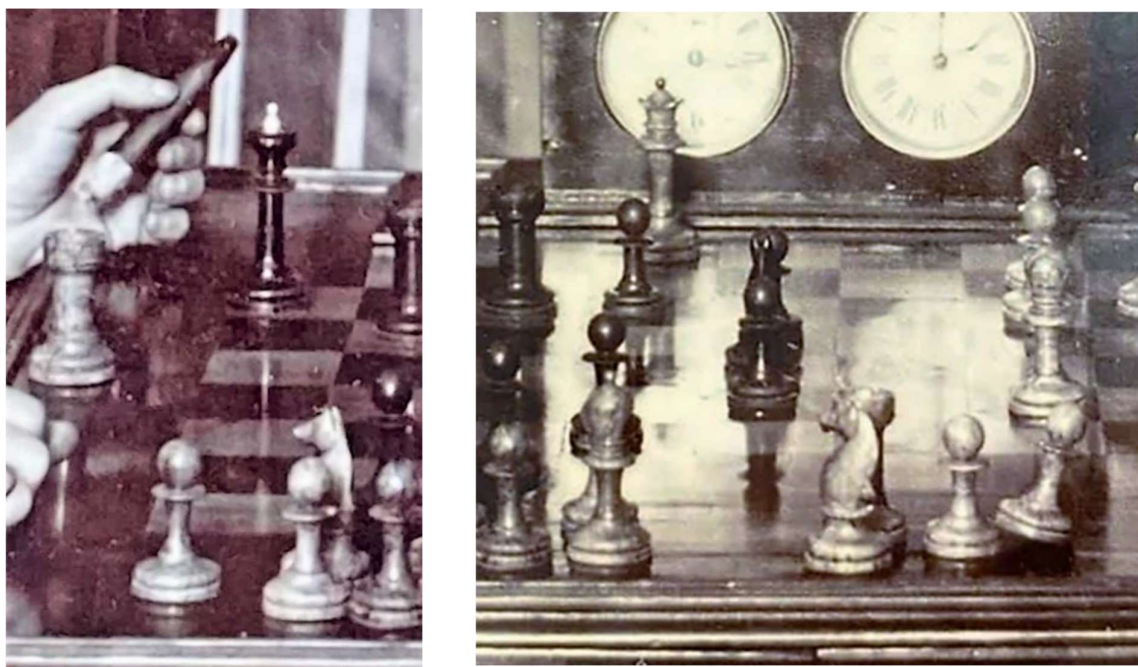


Figure 7- Enlarged versions of Figure 6 to show the pieces in detail.



Figure 8- Karelian Birch chess pieces formerly in the author's collection.

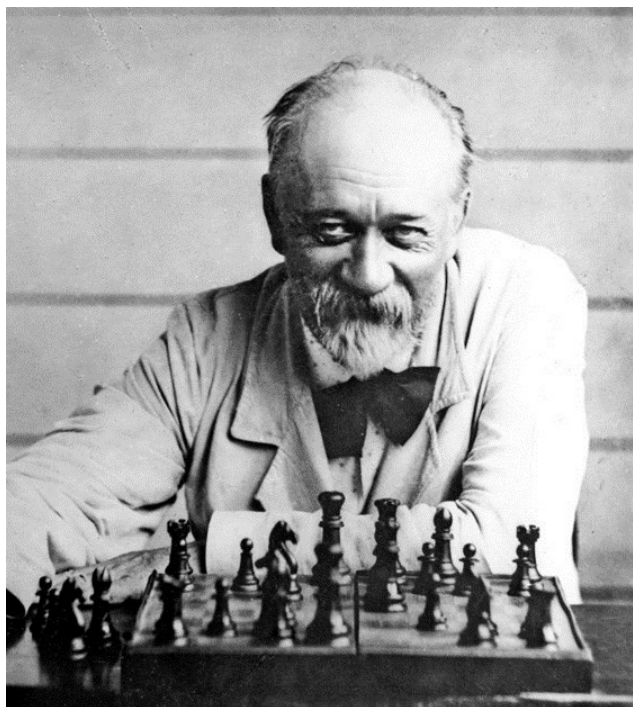
Figure 8 above shows a specimen of a similar set formerly in the author's collection. Usually referred to as "Karelian Birch" pieces, the set is named for the wood from which many were turned, characterized by its bold figure and found only in the Karelian Peninsula north of St. Petersburg. Staunton features predominate, though an opposite-colored finial replaces the king's crown, and the queen's orb is also changed to the opposite color. In some sets, the king's finial is made of bone; in others, wood. In some sets, the king's finial is replaced with a demi-orb. The cuts in the bishop's miter are usually asymmetrical, but those in the black specimen in my photo set are symmetrical. The unusual crown of the king hearkens to those found in some Austrian sets. The sets came in various sizes. Known specimens include 3.75", 4.00", and 4.25" kings. The pictured black king is 3.75".

Hardin's Set

Another beautiful design we can reliably identify as Tsarist can be seen in the photo of Russian attorney Andrei Nikolaevich Hardin (1842-1910) shown in Figure 9⁵ overleaf.

⁵ Public domain photo filed by [Archivo:Андрей Николаевич Хардин.jpg - Wikipedia, la enciclopedia libre](#)

*Figure 9-
Hardin in the
1890s from a
photo by the
local historian
Arnold
Vsevolod
Nikolaevich.*



Hardin was born and lived in Samara, southeast of Moscow. According to Alexandr Yanushvesky⁶:

Andrei Nikolaevich Hardin was passionately fond of chess. He subscribed to a great deal of foreign chess literature and could sit alone at the board for hours. According to him, he learned to play well because, having found himself somewhere in the wilderness and having a lot of free time, he would sit for days reading chess literature and studying the theory of this game. For about a year or a little more, he did not play with anyone, and after this sitting, having met Chigorin, he showed himself to be a first-class player.

Hardin came to play correspondence chess with one Vladimir Ilych Lenin, who became Hardin's law clerk when Lenin moved to Samara. They continued playing chess, often over the board at Hardin's Samara apartment, with Hardin giving Lenin various odds.

Hardin's set is a smaller version of what many collectors call the "Alekhine Set" shown in Figure 10 overleaf. This set now resides in the author's collection and was initially sold several years ago by a dealer in St. Petersburg. The set is tall and heavy, finely turned, carved, and finished. The pieces have a large height-to-base ratio, but their weight keeps them stable in play. The king is five inches tall with a bulging crown characteristic of Tsarist sets and reminiscent of Austrian onion top sets. The queen's coronet eschews sharp points, protecting it from damage during the rigors of play. The bishop's miter is unique, the cut splitting it into two equal halves. The knight's mane flows with detail, and its features are carefully carved. The rook's turret is exaggerated, its merlons tall and distinctly cut. It is a magnificent set, a jewel of the finest craftsmanship a Tsarist workshop could be expected to provide.

⁶ Learning and Playing Chess (26 September 2022), <https://vk.com/@-198251430-hardin-andrei-nikolaevich-samyi-pervyi-samarskii-ekstra-sh>



Figure 10- The "Alekhine Set" which is in the author's collection.

Tsarist Stauntons of Turner Teich?

In researching sets of the Ancient Rus in Isaac Linder's *THE ART OF CHESS* (1994), I noted a photo of a Staunton set he identifies as coming from St. Petersburg in the late 1800s- please see Figure 11 below left.

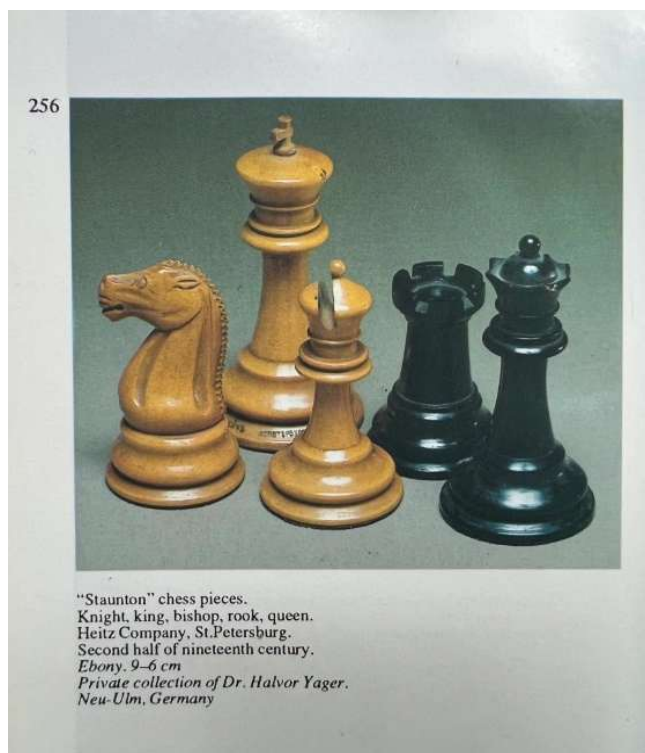


Figure 11- Staunton pieces on page 256 of Linder

These pieces are unquestionably Staunton, even by the strictest definition. The royals and clerics have the "three collar" structure typical of Jaques and other English Staunton pieces. A cross tops the King's crown. The Queen wears a distinct coronet. The bishop's miter is cut. The Knight has the S-shaped Staunton spine, and its ears are pinned back as in Jaques and other English Staunton knights. The rook's turret contains distinct merlons. The bases step up to the stems, which reach a near perpendicular joint with the pedestals. The pieces appear to be turned from boxwood, with a high-quality finish. They even bear stamping on the king's base reminiscent of the Jaques practice.



Figure 12- Enlarged and enhanced photo of the base of the king on page 256 of Linder (1994).

Unfortunately, neither Sergey Kovalenko nor I could find further information on a “Heitz” Company of St. Petersburg. Sergey, however, has enlarged and enhanced the king’s base inscription in Linder’s photo- please see Figure 12 on the previous page. The right word translates to “St. Petersburg.” The left word is incomplete. It appears to say, “...ичъ (еичъ).” Sergey suggests that in its entirety it could read “Токаръ Теичъ,” the same Turner Teich of Tchigorin’s 1885 journal ad. I think this is an eminently reasonable inference. What the relationship is between Turner Teich and the “Heitz Company” Linder references remains to be definitively established. Sergey suggests it could be nothing more than a mistaken transliteration by Linder. I think he is likely correct.

Since parsing Linder’s photo, several similar sets have come to light. Figure 13 below left is one with 9 cm Kings from the collection of Nosh Patel. Its distinct figure identifies it as being made from Karelian Birch. Nosh’s set came without specific provenance indicating who made it, when, or where. Nevertheless, its Karelian Birch suggests the set originated in or around St. Petersburg, and its use of a cross indicates it very likely was made before the 1917 Revolution. It lacks the base stamp of Linder’s King, but is stylistically very similar to it, particularly the knights. These similarities lead me to think that the set more likely than not was made in the same shop.



Figure 13- Tsarist Staunton Set from the Nosh Patel Collection.



Figure 14- Karelian Birch Staunton set from the Robert MacMillan Collection.

Figure 14 above right is a second Staunton set made of Karelian Birch, from the collection of Robert MacMillan, a large, heavy set with an 11 cm King. Like Nosh’s set, there is no provenance linking Robert’s to any particular turner, town, or time. Nevertheless, the use of Karelian Birch suggests that the set was made in or around St. Petersburg, and the bone finial is similar to those found in some of the St. Petersburg tournament sets. The miters of Robert’s Bishops are not as flattened as those of Linder’s or Nosh’s, and other stylistic elements seem to vary. Still, it remains plausible that Robert’s set emanated from Teich or Teich’s successor. Interestingly, the difference in size between Nosh’s and Robert’s sets echoes the large and small Staunton sets mentioned by Teich’s 1885 advertisement.

Ironically, we remain largely in the same place with these Karelian Staunton sets as we are with other putative Tsarist Staunton sets. Hopefully more images of Tsarist Staunton sets will emerge. Perhaps new information will come to light to help us verify sets we claim or suspect to be Tsarist that will allow us to confirm their Tsarist origins and their makers. Better still, we look forward to the emergence of more sets—Staunton and otherwise—verifiably from the late Tsarist period.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Sergey Kovalenko, Mike Ladzinski, Nosh Patel, and Robert MacMillen for their assistance.

Additional Sources (not already referenced in the text)

1. ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA CITY DIRECTORIES (1908, 1914, 1916-17).
2. *Hardin's Set*, <https://sovietchesssets.com/2024/10/14/hardins-set/> (2024).
3. *Tsarist Staunton Chessmen*, <https://sovietchesssets.com/2023/08/17/tsarist-staunton-chessmen/> (2024).
4. *Chess Sets of Major Tsarist and Soviet Events, 1909-1941*, <https://sovietchesssets.com/2022/01/03/chess-sets-of-major-tsarist-and-soviet-events-1909-19419>
5. *Shakhmatnyye Kollektionery: Soviet and Tsarist Chess Sets* <https://www.facebook.com/groups/738734636935127> (2025)
6. *Russian Chess Sets (Tsarist, Soviet and Modern)*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/914205809249868> (2025).

Auction Review

A very early Jaques set was sold by Dawsons Auctions in the UK recently, which has caused quite a stir on Facebook chess groups. One comment, by Jaques expert Professor Sir Alan Fersht, said 'I think this set from Dawsons is the most exciting sale for some time'. A number of views were put forward, but the consensus is that this set dates from 1849 and is likely to be one of the earliest sets made by Jaques, possibly within the first 10 sets ever made. Please see pictures below and on the front cover.

The set was described as 'A Staunton pattern boxwood and ebony chess set, late 19th century, the knights and rooks of both sides with red crown mark, the pieces with no other markings, weighted undersides and many with green registration lozenge label the kings 8.7 cm high, the pawns 4 cm'. The set had some small damages to a number of pieces, but it eventually sold for £26,000 (\$32 350, € 31 170) excluding buyer's premium.



A German early- to mid- 19th Century Selenus pattern bone set, that had previously been auctioned at Bonhams in London, has been offered for sale on eBay recently for £4995 (\$6210, €5990) but nobody

placed any bids, so it went unsold. Also on eBay, a Dubrovnik set (see picture below), described as ‘Jakopovic Dubrovnik Chess Set – Bobby Fischer Chess Pieces’, was listed at £3500 (\$4350, €4200) and was sold for an undisclosed offer.



Despite some very high pricing recently, especially for wooden Staunton sets, there are still some bargains to be found. An Ernst Böhne Söhne, Rudolstadt-Volkstedt porcelain mouse chess set (pictured below), with its fitted case, sold at a UK auction for just £190 (\$236, €228)! Another one of these porcelain sets was recently offered on UK eBay for £6000 but failed to sell.



An F. H. Ayres mahogany and brass bound games compendium (shown overleaf left), which included a Staunton boxwood and ebonised chess set, was sold at auction for just £410 (\$510, €490).



Two 19th century Wedgwood jasperware chess pieces, a king and a queen, sold for £200 (\$250, €240). The John Flaxman designed pieces (shown above right) are reputedly modelled on the famous brother and sister actors John Kemble and Sarah Siddons in their roles as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth respectively. A rare 19th century Indian silver chess set sold for £2400 (\$2980, €2880). The set pictured below included camels, horses and elephants and weighed 1.3 kg.



A Josef Hartwig, Bauhaus- 'XVI' chess set (1924) sold in Munich for its reserve price of €8000 (\$8300, £6667) excluding buyer's premium, which was well below its estimate of €9000 - €14,000. See photo above right.

Book Review by Massimiliano De Angelis



The picture on the left shows the cover of a book in **Italian** which is a collection of chess- related children's stories. The name of the book if it existed in English would be:

“The Chessboard Under the Calicanto Stories and Illustrations”

The book is written by CCI member Giovanni Lorusso and other authors; and its ISBN is 979-1221057614

Please find below a translation of one of the short stories from the book.

MASTRO GEPPETTO, PINOCCHIO AND CHESS

Author: Dunio Piccolin (translated by Giovanni Lorusso)

“Daddy!” - “What is it, Pinocchio?”, master Geppetto replied. “I’ve got a severe headache, father, and nonetheless the room resonates with the annoying clash of a hammer”, Pinocchio stated, “and how cold it is tonight, way more than yesterday!”. “Dear son,” master Geppetto said in turn, “I’ve been sculpting wooden figures all night, using the same wood you are made of, the one given to me by master Ciliegia, but none of them have moved and spoken like you so far”.



“Oh, I see now” Pinocchio exclaimed, “That’s why it’s so cold in here: instead of using the wood to fuel the fire, you’re making useless puppets with it! Do you want me to get ill?”. “I beg your pardon son”, the old man uttered, “Life deprived me of a family, hence when you arrived, I was so overwhelmed with emotions that I longed to create brothers and sisters for you!”. Still irritated, Pinocchio wanted to tell Geppetto that he was delusional, but, while observing the man's bright and sad eyes, he didn't have enough courage to do so and asked instead: "Who are those figures?". “Dear Pinocchio, before you enlightened my life, I had always been alone, working hard to earn my living, and I remember a game I used to play with my own father before falling asleep at night: I remember the little figures called Pawns, the agile Tower and the limping Horse. Then there was the Bishop, who was quite determined in his walking choices, going along a road either totally white or black. All of them loved and protected the King, and took great care of the Queen as well, provided there was scope to do so”. “But it's Chess, father” Pinocchio interrupted, “I don't know how to play it, but I saw some pictures in the Didactic Dictionary you gave me”. Geppetto felt proud of his son, who had perused the Book of Knowledge that he had never been able to read or possess, and, holding only a barely sketched log, stated: "This will be the Queen of Chess". He would have liked to add: "I truly hope that she at least will be infused with life, so to be for you a loving mother and speak to you with all the tenderness I don't have", but he couldn't dare say it...