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ARTICLES

A CHESS LEGEND

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Independent board game researcher

Introduction

In 1913, the chess and board game researcher Harold Murray claimed: “especially from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, chess attained to a popularity in Western Europe which has never been excelled and probably never equaled at any later date” [5, p. 428]. In the 16th c. chess sharply lost its position, Murray remarked elsewhere [5, p. 442]. The cause of the decline could be the changes in the circumstances of life, especially the greater popularity of playing cards, that should satisfy the needs of the time better than board games. Cf. Eales 1985:79-80. This interpretation does not tally with the facts: for example in France the board game draught was in the 16th c. very popular [15, pp. 90-91].

A rather sudden decline presupposes rapid cultural changes in the culture of Western Europe. Such a rapid change never took place. It is true, peerage had lost the dominant medieval position. But the fall of nobility as a factor of power in favour of the rich citizens was already keeping on for some centuries. And it is also true that the scientists of the 16th and 17th c. showed a great interest in the lost culture of the Greek and Romans. But this interest had never been totally absent, it trickled through in the medieval literature of Western Europe.

It is possible to dissolve the antinomy, I believe, by exposing some results from an investigation that ranges over almost forty years.

But let me first explain why the author of this article occupies himself with the past of chess. For I am a Dutchman who seldom plays chess but who is addicted to draughts (checkers), during close on sixty years!

My grandfather was a keen chess player, member of a club. When I had reached the age of six he taught me the rules of continental draughts, the variety played in The Netherlands. In his eyes, draughts was a simple kind

of chess – a sad misconception; David Parlett [7, p. 242] opens his chapter on draughts with the words: “Draughts would be universally recognized as one of the world’s great games were it not eclipsed by the social hegemony of Chess”. For my grandfather draughts was a leg up to the real game: chess. “When you are eight I’ll teach you the wonderful of the kings”, he promised me. How much I disappointed him! This wonderful game of the kings turned out to be boring, whereas draughts was fascinating. And chess compositions were as boring as the game itself; how spectacular were the draughts compositions in the paper, with their complicated captures. I started to compose draughts compositions myself. But to do him a favour I occasionally dropped in on my grandfather’s for a game of chess.

For my study I read Dutch medieval romances of chivalry, for the greater part translations from French. The knights played tables and chess, not draughts. Why not? Was it not yet invented? Who had studied the history of the game? I biked to the library in Rotterdam and found a history written by H.J.R. Murray [6]. On pages 72-83 he unfolded his ideas about the genesis of draughts. Was his hypothesis plausible? It was needed to put it under the microscope, but that was not so easy, for to manage it I had to study the history of chess. And soon I found myself occupied with a game I had not bothered about since grandfather’s death. If only he had known!

To the source

Where does the notion come from that in Western Europe between 1200 and 1500 chess has been an immensely beloved game? From the first generation of chess historians. To get to grips with their way of reasoning we should imagine ourselves back in the second half of the 19th c.

About 150 years ago, a quest to the origin of chess started. The 19th c. is the age of the rediscovery of the Middle Ages. In the 16th and 17th c. the medieval culture had fallen into discredit. The medieval culture was barbarian, uncivilized, uninteresting, unimportant, declared scientists; the classical times had been far more valuable. In the 19th c., this image turned. Literary men studied medieval literature, linguists medieval languages, archeologists remains from the Middle Ages, historians tried to reconstruct the ages that had gone. Together with kindred souls, Antonius van der Linde found that many a medieval author had written a work mentioning chess. How beloved that game had been! Eagerly successors as Murray shared his enthusiasm. And with the same enthusiasm generations after Murray adopted his view: in medieval Western Europe chess had been unprecedentedly popular. How-

ever, the two mentioned giants focused on chess; too little did they realize that chess was played together with and beside other board games, too little were they attentive to possible mutual influence. Younger generations of chess historians built on Murray's monumental, imposing work, as much as possible treading in his footsteps. But they adopted his main shortcoming too: the lack of attention to other board games. Moreover, they were not attentive enough to the newly developed scientific methods they could apply to get to better grips with the past than was granted to Murray in his time.

Exactly one century after the publication of Murray's impressive "A history of chess" (1913) I put remarks on this outlook. Showing respect for an outlook is not parroting it, showing respect is investing time, is scrupulous study. And a critical approach is necessary, for from three nonliterary sources we must conclude that in the Middle Ages chess has definitely not been the most popular board game. I discuss successively the medieval composition of the population, the medieval puzzles and the medieval gaming board.

Medieval composition of the population

There is no indication that in the Middle Ages chess was played outside the nobility and higher clergy, said Richard Eales. In numerical terms the last mentioned classes represented only a very small section of society. Nobility represented in numerical terms only a very small section of society. Eales [2, p. 57] states: "Aristocracy and gentry families amounted to much less than one per cent of the population, even with a generous allowance for their domestic households and retainers. The game may have spread more widely among the clergy, but it is unlikely it reached the mass of parish priests (...) The active clergy did not make up more than two per cent of medieval populations." On the same page Eales warned: "The social appeal of chess should not be exaggerated". Exaggerated? I do not understand why Eales did not add the sentence: 'These figures make clear that in the Middle Ages chess was far from a beloved and frequently played game'.

Eales' opinion is not generally shared. Parlett [7, p. 301] quoted the researcher Antje Kluge-Pinkske, who suggested (in 1994) by recent archaeological finds that in the 11th and 12th c. chess (and tables) played an important role in the daily lives of many people also outside the stratum of society indicated by Eales.

Medieval puzzles

Two Italian puzzle men recorded chess, tables and morris puzzles, namely Nicholas de Nicholea, working under the pen-name Bonus Socius, and a citizen of Bologna [7, p. 301][Murray 1913:618-620]. The presentation of the puzzles do not give us leave to suppose that the collectors preferred chess above the two other games.

In three chapters Murray [5, pp. 564-735] dealt exhaustively with the chess sections, trying to find answers to questions such as 'What is their origin?' and 'What is their value?' Eales [2, p. 69] was far from excited about the level of the chess problems: "The problem collections themselves were based on Muslim models, and though they evolved with changes in taste and fashion, they rarely showed any signs of technical advance on their eastern prototypes".

Murray [5, pp. 702-703] devoted some words, hidden in an Appendix, to the tables and morris problems. They were not based on earlier examples, as the chess problems, but were of European origin. "At first sight, a dice-game does not appear very suitable for the composition of problems", Murray opined. He liked the morris problems better: "Some of the problems are very ingenious, and I think that they leave a more favourable impression of the ingenuity of the medieval composer than is the case with the problems of chess or tables".

It is not a careless assertion, I think, to propose that medieval residences were not exactly crowded with young men assiduously composing chess problems.

The medieval gaming board

A lot of bills, inventories and last wills drew up in France until c. 1525 mentioned a gaming board. Seven citations.

- (1) ii tabliers de fust garniz de leurs tables et d'eschez, achatz en la rue Neuve-Nostre-Dame et d'livrz en la garderobe du Roy [1352, purchased for king John II the Good]
- (2) Deux tablettes de ciprs, ouvvrz et garniz de tables et eschaiz from Pierre Cardeau [1382, purchased for king Charles VI the Well-beloved]
- (3) Un tablier d'argent dor, ployant par moyti, fait par dedans de pices de nacle (= nacre, mother-of-pearl) et garny de tables et d'eschaz [1416, property of the Duke of Berry, son of Charles V]

The common gaming board was flat, made up of two hinged panels, on one side inlaid or painted with a tables pattern and on the other side with a chequered 64 squares pattern. See Stoep 1984:34-36 for more medieval descriptions of this kind.

The name TABLIER was also used for boards from a different kind. Three descriptions, taken from Stoep 1984:34-36.

In 1502, Anne of Brittany married king Louis XII of France, and clerks registered her possessions. She was the owner of a box covered with green leather, embellished with leaf silver. In this box crystal chess pieces were kept. The chess board was described as follows:

- (4) Ung tablier de crystal garny d'argent dor, pour servir auxd. eschs, estant en ung estuy couvert de vert
(A crystal gaming board decorated with leaf silver to serve for the aforementioned chess pieces, housed in a green case)

Inventory Baux castle 1426:

- (5) Grand tablier double, marquet par dedens, pour jouer aux tables et cheacs
(Big folding gaming board (box?), the inside inlaid, to play tables and chess)

In 1524, Margaret of Austria possessed

- (6) Ung tablier garny d'ivoire, eschequet d'un cost blanc et noir, et de l'autre cost, pour jou au plus de poins, et il y a une petite quehue de serpent de mesme, pour jou aus-dit poins.

One side of the board had a chequered pattern, the other one a game "au plus de poins", i.e. a game where the players tried to make as many points as possible. To play this game a serpent tail was needed.

Margaret also owned

- (7) Ung tablier de bois carr, garny d'ivoire, l'eschequier de mesme au prcdent (...) et de l'autre cost pour jou au marrelier
(a square wooden board, the chessboard the same as the aforementioned board (...) and the other side designed for the playing of morris)

Applying the figure of speech we call *pars pro toto* I can say more about the quotes (1)-(7).

In The Netherlands chess as well as draughts enjoys some popularity. Chess players and draughts players use the same flat board. On one side this board has 64 squares to play chess and on the other side 100 squares to play draughts. The board has two names: chess players call it chess board, draughts players call it draughts board. Both groups avail themselves of the *pars pro toto*, i.e. they use the name of the part of the board that is important for them.

We can use the *pars pro toto* when interpreting the descriptions (1)-(7). If these boards served exclusively for chess, we might expect the *pars pro toto* CHIQUIER. In (4)-(7) the name TABLIER is used in its neutral meaning of 'gaming board', I think. In the Middle Ages TABLIER meant both 'gaming board' and 'board for tables'. We can (1)-(3) read as 'board for tables', but given the interpretation of (4)-(7) 'gaming board' is more obvious.

A second contradiction

In the Introduction I indicated an antinomy in Murray's work. I point to a second contradiction: nonliterary medieval sources tell us that in this time chess was certainly not the most popular board game, but in literary medieval sources chess has a dominant position. This induces me to the question to what extent it is permitted to pronounce upon reality on the basis of literature.

It might be useful to reveal my background. In the 1960s and 1970s I studied Dutch literature and Dutch linguistics. The teacher historical literature brought her students in touch with the past, starting with the 11th c. And immediately with France, for the greater part of the medieval Dutch literature are translations from French works. As the French culture also radiated to great cultures as Spain, Italy, England and Germany, medieval Dutch literature was in fact European literature.

Literary theory

The teacher general literature brought up the problem how the world of literature relates to the real world. Murray and his predecessors were unaware there was a problem. The contradiction I made mention of demands us to solve the problem.

A general answer on the question whether literature is a mirror of reality cannot be given: the reliability of literature as a reflection of reality differs per genre, per author and per book. The work of Emile Zola and of Charles Dickens for instance tells us more about the social reality than the western, the doctor novel and the fancy novel from our time. But... In the hands of a novelist a doctor novel can outgrow into a work of art. He could show in a probing way how the relation of a doctor and a nurse leads to difficulties because on the shop floor of a hospital they have a different status.

Chess plays a role in two important medieval genres: the didactic poem and the roman of chivalry. To what extent can we consider them as a mirror of medieval life?

The medieval didactic poem

The poet of today who often dares to incorporate images borrowed from colleagues asks for scathing criticism: that is theft, he is expected to devise original images.

In the Middle Ages the poet's task was less demanding: poet's task was less demanding: a poet frequently borrowed images. An often borrowed image was a game of chess.

In the medieval world life on earth was not more than a preparation to the hereafter, the eternal life under God's protection. It was hard working, for the devil and his henchmen always lay in ambush to tug the human into hell. God was just, did not distinguish between poor or rich, slave or ruler: the social differences that existed on earth fell away in heaven. The poem with this message is called *didactic poem*. During a game of chess, i.e. during life on earth, there is inequality, a king rules over all the other pieces on the board. But Gods promises consolation to the poor soldier who is put in for a whim of his sovereign: after the game a hand sweeps the pieces in one bag, in death every distinction falls away. See for extensive quotes [5, pp. 496-563].

The first example he mentioned dates back to the 11th c., South Germany. Eagerly other authors of a didactic poem adopted the allegory of the chess game, varying and elaborating it.

The question is, of course, if we may adduce these poems as a proof for the popularity of chess, like Murray did, although he admitted [5, p. 529]: "the writer's interests were always engaged more with the allegory than with the game", but he added: 'Still, the [chess moralities] are not without importance in the development of chess in Europe'. Not without importance.

Easily said, difficult defended. Murray did not try to find a strong argument but made some propositions, cautiously writing: “(the moralities) may have...”

There is reason for caution, I believe, because the genre demanded only a little knowledge of chess. For the writer, who repeated images of his predecessors. And for the reader, for whom the message is clear without knowing anything about chess.

The medieval romances of chivalry

In my youth I read with red ears about the adventures of the white cowboy Old Shatterhand and his Indian blood brother Winnetou, made up by the German Karl May. And later in the cinema I enjoyed the western. At least four times I saw the epic *Once upon a time in the West*. This masterpiece –as it is in my eyes– shows with some realism the struggle to open up the American West for the white man by building a railway. The average western has the standard scheme of the good cowboy putting up a fight against the bad guy.

The western did already exist in the Middle Ages: the romance of chivalry. The Old Shatterhands of that time fought against Saracens, or against a fire-drake, or against a bad magician. Just like the cowboy the knight is a flat character, with standard qualities: he lives in a castle, wages war and matches himself against other knights in a tournament, to relax he hunts for deer and birds. And every author lets him play tables and chess. Such repetitions contribute to the understanding of the listeners –the texts were meant to be recited–: an experienced audience was expecting knights to play “*eschecs et tables*”. There is a relation with the concept of *local colour*. A writer colours the places he evokes in with particular properties; every child knows from fairy tales that a king lives in a castle.

In the literary analysis, a commonplace, a fixed expression, is called a *topos*. The word *topos* was taken from the ancient Greek, who discerned the *topos* already in the literature of their time. A commonplace from a funeral oration is “We are ashes and dust”.

In the didactic literature the image of chess was repeated, varied and extended, and the same happened in the romance of chivalry. When the woman was introduced –for some ages the romance was only populated by men–, the knight got a new task: to do deeds by order of a noblewoman, as frighten an unwelcome young man. In dozens of variations lovers seized any pretext to meet each other, and chess could be an alibi. A condition

was, of course, that the two knew the rules, and the authors solved this problem introducing chess as a part of the upbringing. A similar process of development is found in the romance of chivalry of our days.

The literary theory says that we may not see a topos as a representation of reality. Compare the function of chess in the narrative arts of our time. If next year ten filmmakers shoot their principal characters playing a game of chess, they have absolutely not the intention to tell their audience about chess as a pastime, the number of players, its position amidst other board games. One movie director for instance suggests his characters are intelligent thinkers, another will use pretty designed chess pieces because of their elegance, and a third emphasizes the luxury of an interior by means of a valuable chess set on a decoration coffee table.

The sixteenth century

In the early 16th c. the didactic poem and the romance of chivalry disappeared. Van der Linde, Murray and their successors understood the content of these genres as a faithful representation of reality. As a consequence they found a serious regression of chess in the 16th c. This is unjust: chess only appeared in the literature, it does not prove anything. In the 16th c. chess was a minor board game, Murray observed. He is right, but I add; in the 16th c. chess was as unpopular as in the Middle Ages. I shall found this claim by means of linguistic tools.

Linguistics

My study of my mother tongue comprehended in addition to literature two other main subjects: reading and writing (structure of texts, style, argumentation) and linguistics. To acquire a picture of medieval draughts –and at the same time of chess, see the Introduction– I used both the tools developed by the literary theory and the tools developed by linguists.

Etymology is a branch of the linguistic tree. In the years I discovered Murray's work linguists initiated me in the principles of etymology. Each teacher warned his students for the many pitfalls. It is a tricky subject, many a linguist slipped up by explaining the origin of a word too easily. It is definitely necessary to study a word thoroughly in its linguistic and historical context. Sniggering they gave us examples of blundering colleagues who had insufficiently studied one or even both contexts.

To my surprise, the strongest pillar under Murrays proposition about the birth of draughts was his explanation of the French game name (JEU DE) DAMES. In other words: he used etymology to pronounce upon a board game in the past. Murrays approach, however, was an example of the way one should not do an etymological investigation. Therefore is idea of the genesis of draughts was by definition unreliable. There was no alternative but starting an own inquiry into the origin of the French game name (JEU DE) DAMES, in the hope I could use it as a starting point for further research.

Three days off

During the summer holidays of 1975 I withdraw for three days in the library of Rotterdam, consulting all available dictionaries from the 16th, 17th and 18th c. The result? Except for a sole 18th c. lexicographer, no one supposed that the French game name JEU DE DAMES literally meant “game of the chess queens”. The French game name JEU DE DAMES was almost unanimously translated by Latin LUDUS DUODECIM SCRUPUS, literally “game with twelve pieces”, a proof that it is not right to take it for granted chess played any part in the genesis of draughts.

Bilingual dictionaries of the modern languages gave me headache. Three examples. The Dutch word DAMBORD, nowadays meaning ‘draughts board’, was translated by English CHESS BOARD. The French game name JOUER AUX CHECS, nowadays meaning ‘to play chess’, was between 1550 and 1700 defined by lexicographers as ‘to play tables’. And the Italian game name MARELLA was connected with ‘draughts’ and with ‘morris’. Therefore an inquiry into the history of draughts was impossible without studying, besides chess, tables and morris too.

Linguistics and the history of chess

Murray published his wrong explanation of the French game name DAMES in 1952. He summarized a longer reasoning in his unpublished manuscript “Preliminary investigations into the history of draughts” (1916). By the way, he also blundered with his etymology of the Spanish game name ALQUERQUE [5, p. 613]. See for my proposal Stoep 1997:158-159, Stoep 2007:174-175.

In Murray's defense we can put forward that etymology was in 1916 still in its exploratory stage. In three publications from much later time, however, chess historians allowed themselves to make an etymological proposition within five minutes, their legs on the table and a pint in their hand. In the late 15th c. the new chess queen made its appearance. In France the piece was called DAME, in Spain DAMA. Obviously, 'chess queen' was a new sense of an existing word. From which word? Pretty guesses replaced profound study. Jacob Silbermann en Wolfgang Unzicker [7, p. 301][1977 I:40-42] supposed that the French name DAME for the chess queen was a homage to Joan of Arc. Ricardo Calvo [1, pp. 82-89] and Govert Westerveld [17, p. 217] took their chance on queen Isabella of Castile. Joachim Petzold [8, p. 153] [9, pp. 4-9], embroidering on an 18th c. proposal [Golombek 1976:79], opted for Mary, the mother of God, as the paragon; a well-nigh blasphemous proposition. On psychoanalytic grounds and investigator conducted to Catharine Sforza as a model [2, p. 77].

Except for the chess grandmasters Silbermann and Unzicker these men moved in an academic setting; why such an amateurishly approach if they could easily ask a linguist for advice?

My research took me nearly forty years. They led up to a dissertation in 1997; in Dutch, with summaries in English and French. My finding: the French game name (JEU DE) DAMES and the Spanish name DAMA for the chess queen go both back to the medieval French word DAM, meaning 'dam, dike, wall'. This etymology guides the investigator searching the origin of draughts or the origination of the new chess queen into quite another direction than earlier explanations.

In my 1997 thesis the main subject is the linguistic method and result. It stands to reason: I had to prove to the University of Leyden I was capable of an independent investigation. Nevertheless the Subject index fills nearly two pages.

The Word index runs to nearly six pages. It does not only include living or dead words from the jargon of draughts and chess players but also words used by players of tables, morris or alquerque. Like a human being a word is born, changes by the experiences it goes through and dies ultimately. The society where a word lives is called a *word-field*. To thoroughly understand a word we must have a view of the entire word-field. Word-fields in other languages too, for the French game name DAMES was borrowed in other languages. For this reason, the Word index mentions words from fourteen languages.

There could be readers asking for more clarification about the word-field. Well then, a word-field can be compared with a closed family, a family

excluding everyone outdoors. If the manager of a company dies, his successor will be a member of the family. In case children lose their parents, other members of the family will take care. Only when it is inevitable there will be made an appeal to an outsider, for example in case of a heart attack. A word-field is a closed family too.

By means of a game name belonging to the French word-field *Board game*, I explain what the study of a field contributes to our knowledge of board games.

Above I referred to the enigmatic French game name JOUER AUX CHECS. Between c. 1000 and c. 1500 and from c. 1700 up till now this name meant 'to play chess'. Between c. 1500 and c. 1700 the name meant 'to play tables'. Why? Well, in the 15th c., the medieval French game name for 'to play tables', JOUER AUX TABLES, died. The death of a human being induces us to a question: what happened? The death of the name for tables in France c. 1500 induces us to a question: what happened? Did tables fall into disuse? Could the medieval variety have been surpassed by a new variety? No matter what may have happened, it means a signal to the investigator of board games: he knows he should make inquiries, and where and when.

At any rate, French players of tables needed a new name. They looked around inside the board game word-field and encountered the name JOUER AUX CHECS. The main sense of JOUER AUX CHECS became 'to play tables'. The name kept its sense 'to play chess', but evidently this sense was seldom used. Which means we can draw this conclusion: in France between c. 1500 and c. 1700 chess was a seldom played game. Which proves that the study of a word-field augments our knowledge of tables and chess.

The outcome of this linguistic research corresponds to Murray's observation that in the 16th c. chess lost or had lost its mighty position.

The full report of the French word-field Board game is to be found in Stoep 2007:101-116. This book is a continuation of my thesis, but differs essentially. Just like in 1997 I provide insight into the courses I take to find out the etymon of a word. But I discuss the consequences of an etymology for our view on the genesis and/or the evolution of several board games. Surveys on board games describe chess as a game enjoying a great popularity in the Middle Ages. I came to an entirely different view: draughts has been much more popular, chess was not more than a minor game. At least in England and France, and in Spain in the late Middle Ages. For lack of data I know little or nothing about other medieval civilizations.

How could it be possible I get to outcomes that are conflicting with everything we believe to know about board games in bygone times? The cause is a painful structural fault made by chess historians. Their aim is one board game: chess. In the past this game has been tremendously popular, they conclude, other board did not come near it. Such a conclusion implies a judgment about these other games, but without having studied them (!). And what's more, as a consequence of this unsatisfactory approach you easily come to false claims. An example. The chess historian Richard Eales draw the conclusion that chess acquired its present status of intellectual game in the 18th c., when chess was a pastime for intellectuals [2, p.106]. These intellectuals, however, played draughts too [15, pp.94-96], so that Eales' claim must be wrong.

Medieval chess in England

After what I wrote about the concept *word-field* it may not surprise English board game terms were a subject of my study. Among these terms the word CHECKERS – I ignore variants as (AT THE) ESCHEKKER. Until the 14th c. this game name meant 'chess', literally "game at the chequered board". Anywhere in 14th c. Europe a player of board games transferred the game we know under the name of Alquerque –and that without any doubt was played with promotion [15, pp. 138-140] – to the chess board. English players called this "new" game CHECKERS. It caused a communication problem, for if your neighbor invited you TO PLAY CHECKERS, did he want to play chess or draughts? The language user clears such an ambiguity away by choosing another word for the least used sense and keeping the most frequently used sense. The least used sense must have been 'chess', for chess got a new name, borrowed from French: CHESS.

Conclusion: that in 14th c. England CHECKERS in the sense of 'draughts' was more frequently used than CHECKERS in the sense of 'chess' means that in this age chess was a game of less importance than draughts [16, pp. 27-29].

Medieval chess in France

In medieval France draughts has been a popular game, so much that it became proverbial. I don't base my case on one proverb. No, from the 11th until the 15th c. a complex of expressions was inspired by the wrong or right move of a draughts piece [15, pp. 149-154]. I gathered almost 70 metaphors, spread over 22 different idioms [15, p.150]. The expressions might have been used earlier, but data before the 11th c. are lacking. The many vari-

ations prove there was a continuous touch with the game itself, they are not fossilized. For comparison: STALE-MATE is an example of a fossilized metaphor. Once, a writer with knowledge of chess wrote: “The votes are equally divided, no decision could be made. There was an impasse, a stale-mate”. STALE-MATE is one of the thousands of words an Englishman learns in the course of time; he does not need knowledge of chess to understand it.

Medieval chess in Spain

There can be no doubt chess was a popular board game in the ancient Muslim world. See for instance the attention for chess in the manuscript on board games in 1284 made for king Alfonso x of Castile, a time when the Moors still had a powerful position in Spain. In the German translation by Ulrich Schdler and Ricardo Calvo [11] chess demands 130 pages, the other games 132. In Spain in the late Middle Ages, chess seems surpassed by draughts. Could there be a relation with the decreased influence of the Moors in favour of the European influence?

According to chess historians from our days it was Spain, late 15th c., which welcomed the new chess queen with its greater range [17, p.219 for example]. I analysed that the name for this piece, DAMA, derives finally from a term used by French draughts players [15, pp.38-47]. The linguistic approach has spin-off for our understanding of development in the past: it is tempting to argue we should seek the explanation of the extended range of the chess queen in the long range of the king in Spanish draughts [15, pp.43-44].

Note

In his review of “The anatomy of chess”, 2004:136, Ulrich Schdler asked critical questions about the genesis of chess. Applying linguistic methods, I put the genesis of draughts between 0 and 500 AD, in a civilization in the Roman sphere of influence (By the way, in Stoep 2007:209-215 I placed the genesis of draughts in ancient Greece, but neither the civilization nor the time seems tenable). In the Middle Ages and in later centuries draughts has evidently influenced upon chess, especially related with the promotion. In a culturally leading civilization as France for example the great popularity of draughts continued after the Middle Ages [15, pp.90-96]. Only after the 18th c. chess succeeded in escaping from this influence. If we assume that chess also before 1000 was influenced by draughts –but is such an anachronistic assumption reasonable?– we might expect chess owes its promotion to draughts.

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Board Games Studies was first published in 1998, an initiative inspired by the colloquia on board games held at Leiden University, the Netherlands, in 1995 and 1997. Five institutions affiliated themselves with the journal: the Institut für Spielforschung und Spielpädagogik in Salzburg, the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden, the Russian Chess Museum in Moscow, the British Museum in London, and the Department of Computer Science at the University of Maastricht. The journal, which was published by CNWS Publications in Leiden on a yearly basis, was partially funded through the assistance of patrons and boasted a modern layout, trilingual summaries and color plates. The broad ambition of this journal required a continuous commitment from the editors, who reviewed contributions in German, French and English, provided translations of summaries for each article and, in several cases, collaborated extensively with authors to develop manuscripts that were to the academic standards of the publication. The journal had a trial run of three years, after which the format, content and review process was evaluated. The authors of the articles integrated wide-ranging literature necessary for a comprehensive understanding of particular games. Contributions from different disciplines — including psychology, computer science, philology, classical archaeology and history — allowed for a better historical and systematic understanding of board games to emerge. Starting in 2000, a section with a translation of primary sources was added. Book reviews and research notes further complemented the multi-faceted contents. Its first ambition, to serve as a platform for the publication of board games research, was met quickly, while gradually the journal gained prominence among researchers by publishing seminal historical overviews. The colloquia continued from 1995 onwards, moving from a biennial to a yearly schedule. The host institution was expanded beyond Leiden to universities and museums throughout Europe as well as Jerusalem, Philadelphia and, in 2013, the Azores. The colloquia continue to gather an enthusiastic group of scholars, players and collectors. Despite the institutional affiliations and a group of patrons, the production of the journal became financially and logistically problematic with CNWS no longer able to serve as a publisher. Reluctantly, the paper version of the journal was discontinued after volume 7 was published in 2004. The possibility of an online version of the journal had been explored with the online publication of the first issues, a decision that greatly assisted the dissemination of knowledge accumulated in those early volumes. The next step, an online journal that operates again as a platform for recent board games research, was not far away but required the skills and enthusiasm of previous and new editors to materialize. In these last fifteen years, the study of board games has gained momentum and this journal will not only showcase new results but, most of all, will encourage and publicize the work of the dedicated researchers in this field.

Alex de Voogt



To the authors

Board Game Studies is an academic journal for historical and systematic research on board games. Its object is to provide a forum for board games research from all academic disciplines in order to further our understanding of the development and distribution of board games within an interdisciplinary academic context. Articles are accepted in English, French, and German and will be refereed by at least two editors under the final responsibility of the Editorial Board. Please send your contributions in any editable format (Word, L^AT_EX, rtf, ...) with a matching PDF file. Please send all the illustrations in separate files.

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