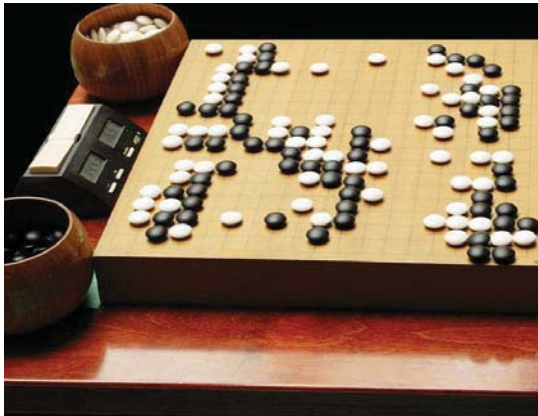


The Origins of Chess

Dr. Nicolas Spficas

The origins of various games are very important, because they reflect each society's culture. When it comes to chess especially, they are of even greater importance, given that it is the most popular game in the world.

Many decades of books, essays and studies have been written about its invention and origins. Chess copies real life and by playing one tries to understand it better. Friedrich Schiller's opinion is that man only feels complete when playing, maybe because competition is part of his nature. Other games also correspond to models of reality, like e.g. Weiqi (known in the West as Go).



This game's purpose is to improve the understanding of the force of water and to emphasise the need to be awake in controlling the flood. Inventing a game has never been an isolated incident. It is more of a social than individual triumph. And the difficulty of its conception is found in the archetype. It is easier to invent something that has an archetype, like squash.



The game imitates the way the prisoners in America played, who, due to lack of opponent, hit the ball at the prison yard's barbed wires.



Exactly due to lack of a certain archetype, chess has had many variations. Each variation had its own name. Today we tend to relate those similar games to find their origins.

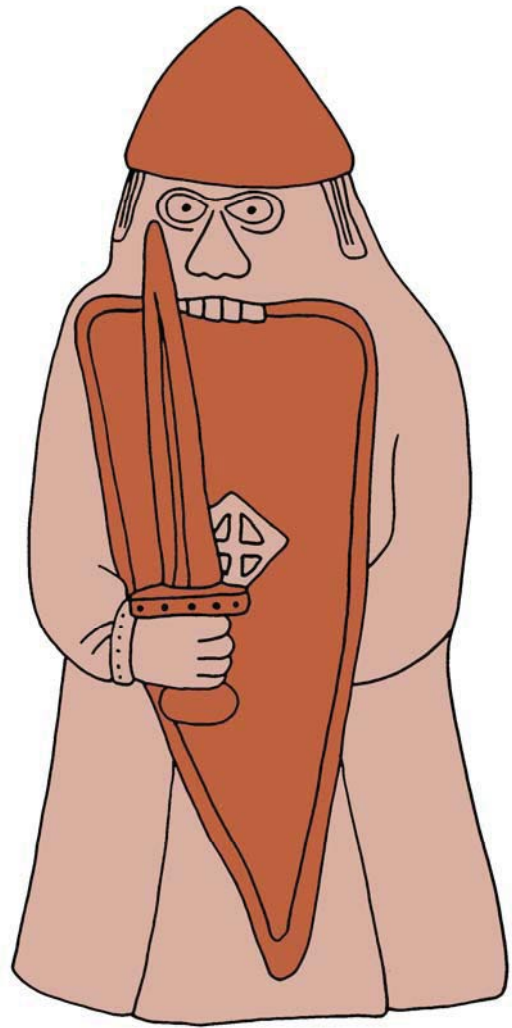
In all ancient cultures we find war board games which are nowadays a part of everyday life, with the difference that during centuries they transformed from war games to spiritual activities.

Historically, chess is classified as a war game and is considered a game of battle without blood, a spiritual conflict between two opponents, where each one controls a small size force. The two sides are of the same force in a battlefield of 64 squares. Over time, this war game has evolved into an art with the form of a game and includes every athletic feature.

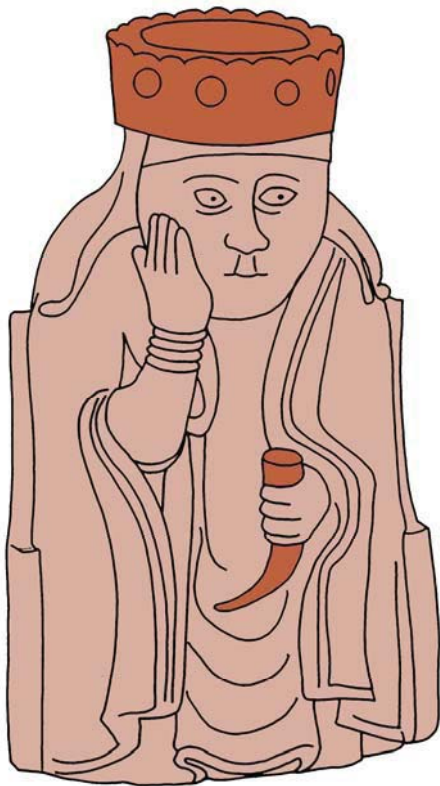
Each side consists of sixteen pieces, a king, a queen, two rooks, two bishops, two knights and eight pawns. In formal chess games the chessboard and the pieces must adhere to certain standards, considering the material, colour and dimensions. However, beyond competitive chess there is a variety of pieces and figures that reflect each society's history and culture. Moreover, in western cultures, the opposing side was mainly the country's enemy. In this picture



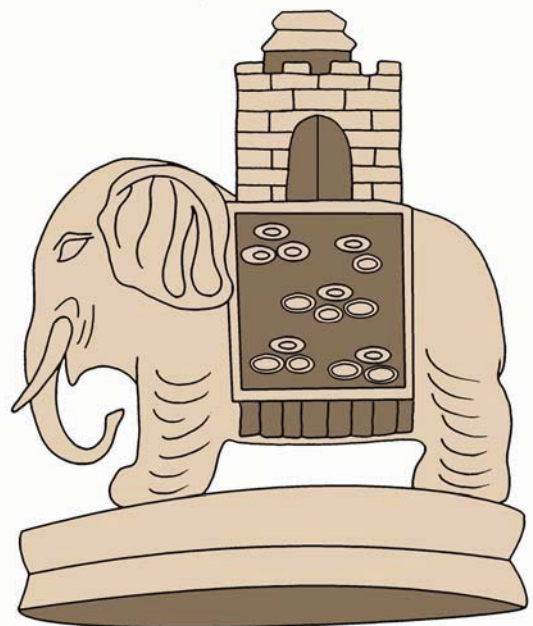
we see a King from Rajasthan. This one



This picture



shows a Scandinavian Queen made of ivory from a set known as 'Lewis' which is dated at the end of the 12th century. From the same set is the Scandinavian Rook.



shows an ivory Bishop from North China dated around 1790 and this one



shows an ivory Chinese Knight. The next picture



shows a Gallic pawn manufactured at the beginning of the 19th century.

There is historical evidence that a premature four part Indian Chess four-handed, meaning with four sides, was not similar to the one routed in Persia. At four-handed, each side consisted of eight pieces (a King, an Elephant, a Knight, a ship and four soldiers) in distinct colours. However, this game is considered as the only close variation of two-handed, meaning two sides, which shows some similarities to modern chess.

In the sixth century a premature form of chess was already known to northwest India as Chaturanga, when chess was spread in Persia. This premature Sanskrit name of the game means four 'angash', four forces-sides, which consisted, in the Indian army, of Chariots (represented by the Rooks), Cavalry (Knights), Elephants (known in the West as Bishops) and soldiers (pawns). This army structure was used by the Indians to represent the game. Alexander the Great faced these four forces of the Indian army in 327 B.C. when he invaded India. Specifically, sovereign Poros's army consisted of 1.000 chariots, 3.000 knights, 130 elephants and 50.000 soldiers.

After the Arabs conquered Persia, chess, then known as Chatrang, spread to the whole Islamic empire under the Arabic name Shatranj. In the eighth century it was known at Medina and Mecca, and then spread to Syria and North Africa.

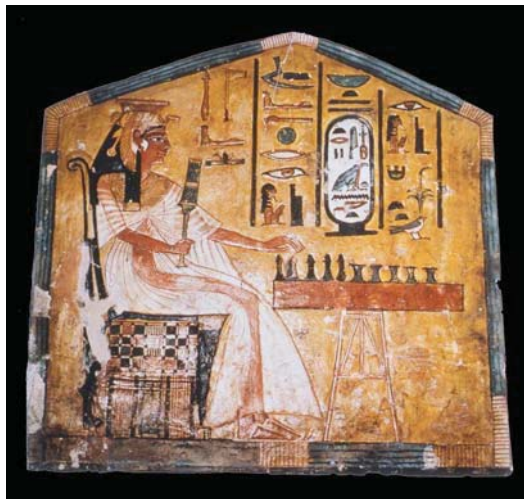
From North Africa chess spread to Spain through the Moors and to South Italy and Sicily through the Saracens. It spread widely in Western Europe and by the eleventh century it was already known in England. During the first half of the twelfth century chess already appears in artwork in Italy and France

Gareth Williams suggests that beginning from India the game was known in Mongolia in the seventh century and from there spread to Russia.

From India it also spread to Sumatra and then to Borneo and the Himalayas. He also believes that the similar Chinese chess is probably a variation of the Indian and that it was known to Japan through Korea in the thirteenth century.

Several researchers have investigated board games of ancient times. The most complete study about chess variations is the one by Harold Murray which in approximately 900 pages deals not only with its origins, but also its evolution. From her point of view, Colleen Schafroth considers that the true origins of chess are yet unknown until more archeological or historical evidence arises. David Li in *The Genealogy of Chess*, through Western bibliography and with certainly deeper study than Williams and Schafroth, mentions that other countries also claim its origins, but that is less likely.

The writer estimates that in the most primitive form of chess, the two armies' sides must include the Elephant and the Knight. Many ancient games like Egyptian senet



and the game 'pessoi' in ancient Greece were games requiring skill, like checkers and/or speed like backgammon, so we should not relate them to chess. Unfortunately the board games that appear in figures on ancient Greek pots do not provide information regarding their rules of play.



The making of the legend of the origins of chess is due to the fact that the researchers, like the players in the Islamic world, wrote widely about games and biographies of excellent players and presented great chess problems of their time, which affected the Western culture, without minding the origins of the games. The same happened in the West, where the Arabic chess work was continued from the end of the thirteenth century, people working on the games, chess problems and endgames - which are based on Arabic Mansubas - that attracted attention and helped in chess study composition. Mansuba in Arabic means 'something made', meaning a preconstructed position having an instructive goal.

During recent decades, many historians have studied the origins of chess and several countries, among which Greece, claim their roots. The prime reason for which is that the country that created chess must have had a developed army, therefore a formed society and a certain cultural development.

Very soon chess became a source of inspiration in every form of art; at first in literature and painting and then in music, sculpture, theatre, dancing and cinema. During the twentieth century, after accepting the speed of light and the theory of relativity, the game has penetrated modern science, as a close relation was detected between measures of matter, time and space with the corresponding chess measures expressed by the great chess player William Steinitz: material, time and space.

The history of chess follows its time, affects it, and is affected by it and changes. The moves, the theory and the time of thinking of the game, vary according to the social, political, industrial and technological evolution and are adapted to the demands of the players and also the spectators. This makes his old royal game, among other things, contemporary, resulting in an increasing number of admirers each day.

Officially the first World Champion is the Austrian born William Steinitz who won the title on the 29th of March in 1886 and held it until 1894. Thirty years later, specifically on the 20th of June 1924, the International

Chess Federation was founded, known as FIDE (Fédération Internationale des Echecs), which is the world governing body of chess.

Although the Greek Chess Federation (ESO), the highest administrative form of Greek chess and a factor in the game's mass spread, was founded as recently as 1948, as Turkish dominance delayed the country's cultural development, today the chess level is internationally recognized and appreciated. The President, Georgios Makropoulos and the Federation's people have contributed greatly to the evolution and promotion of the game. We should also mention that at the beginning of 2007 it consisted of around 250 active chess clubs.

We can divide the history of Greek chess into three periods: The first one was before the ESO foundation, which unfortunately consists of very few and scattered pieces of information in non chess sources, from which we are unable to form a full picture.

The second period covers the time from the ESO foundation to the fall of dictatorship and the third one after the political changeover, continues until now and is considered to be the most productive one.

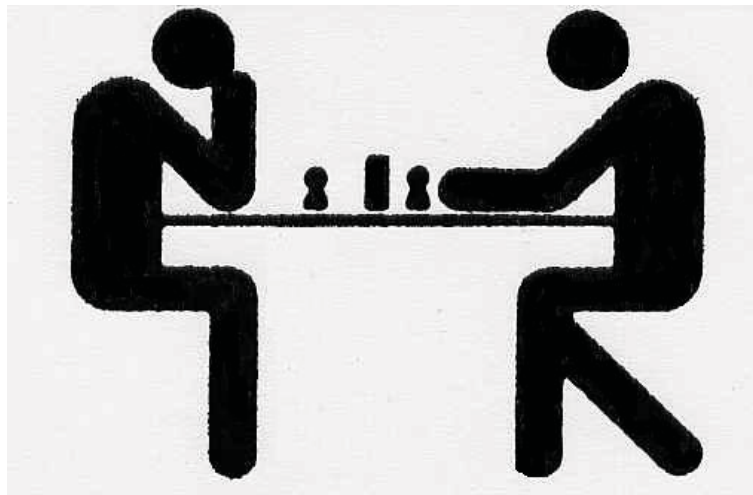
The first Greek tournament is found in Piraeus in 1926, while the first strong tournament and first national championship, was organised in Athens, at the beginning of 1934.

During recent years, the number of players in our country has increased significantly and the quality level appears to be constantly

improved. Championships between chess clubs are part of the main organization, accompanied by open tournaments, some of which have formed a tradition, local individual championships in big areas as well as the closed Greek Championship. In many cities there are chess clubs with classes for children and systematic training.

Determining factors in the rise of Greek chess are, among other things, the growing Greek chess bibliography, the visits of World Champions to our country (Fischer, Karpov, Kasparov, Spassky and Smyslov) and the foreign coaches of our national team. We should mention that the two chess Olympiads in Thessaloniki, in 1984 and in 1988, have been top events and they have contributed greatly to the sport's rising development.

The players' results, both men and women, in chess Balkaniads, in the Europeans, and also in the last World Team Championship have shown that Greek chess is internationally respected. The results of the young age groups are also worthy of note and our opinion about the future is exactly the same as the one stressed by Christos Kefalis: Greek chess faces the challenges of spreading chess among the youth, becoming part of the school curriculum, finding financial funding, refreshment of clubs afflicted by recession and the cancellation of state funds, organization and improvement of structure (coaches, bibliography etc.). Establishing success and further improvement depend on solving these.





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Lesson 1st* Category: Basics * Title: Learning Chess - Origins & Myths - The Chessboard

Learning Chess

Chess is not just any board game. It is a spiritual sport which reasonably is considered the expression of spiritual athleticism for centuries. It is maybe the only human invention, that really gets away from the tyranny of luck and grants the glory of victory only to superior intelligence. We would offend chess if we called it just a 'game'. The way it has developed, it is also a science, an art.

If we wished to define the identity of chess, we should present it as a game-sport, with scientific structure, with fine art features, which stresses cultural and recreational components, with strong social interest and a very important influence on education. So, chess is all these combined, but it is even more. It is a way to live.

Chess theory consists of a whole philosophy, which teaches how to face even the most difficult of situations, always depending on our abilities, as they have been cultivated through chess. This is why millions of people around the world, learn to play chess and never abandon it.

Chess, as a sport and science, offers the most in the teaching process and spiritual development, at each level of education.

- Teaches us to work in a resourceful and scientific manner.
- Teaches self-control.
- Nurtures moral values, such as determination, diligence, assiduity, self-criticism and objectivity.
- Advances social integration, through working in groups, taking responsibilities and imparting knowledge and experience.
- Absorbs aggression and helps in understanding and getting familiar with methodical ways of thinking.
- Improves the length of mental concentration and working.
- Develops critical thinking, as the chess player works on observing, comparing, classifying, prioritising, assuming and predicting, analysing and verifying.
- Improves the abilities of memory and creative imagination.
- Develops logical-mathematical thinking and ability in problem solving
- Teaches attaining desirable goals, through the development of individual skills, without the interference of any kind of luck.

Studies in American universities have shown that the students who play chess have a higher performance in their finals by about 17%! For all the reasons mentioned above, many Ministries of Education in various countries grant the champions of the Youth Individual Championships bonuses for their studies.



Origins & Myths

There are many stories about the origins of chess, most of which are not true. There is some portion of truth in those myths, but often there is also a lot of imagination of the people that made them up.

One of the best stories is about a wise Brahman and his Maharaja, who lived in India. The Brahman was called Sissa and by order of the Maharaja, designed a game similar to real battle. This game looked like a false war and was played on a piece of wood, just like modern chessboards.

The Maharaja was so excited that he told the Brahman he could have anything he asked for. To the Maharaja's great astonishment, Sissa did not ask for gold, valuable stones or anything with great value in his kingdom. Sissa just wanted to have some rice, which was and still is part of the basic nutrition in the countries of Eastern Asia. All Sissa wanted was to be paid using the battle field on which the game he created is conducted. He asked for one grain of rice on the first square, two grains of rice on the second square, four grains on the third, eight on the fourth and so on constantly doubling the quantity.

The Maharaja was very pleased; because he thought this way he would have a beautiful game at an exceptionally low cost. He told Sissa to go down to the palace store and get paid by his servants immediately. Then Sissa explained that this was not possible, because the total amount of rice grains needed to pay him was 18,446,744,073,709,551,615.

This amount of rice did not exist, not only in his kingdom or the other kingdoms of India by that time, but not even in the whole world! Even if it had existed, the whole of the king's riches would not be enough to buy that much rice.

The story tells that the Maharaja did not know what to admire the most, Sissa's invention or his cleverness in being paid! He gave him a big farm and enough presents to live comfortably for the rest of his life. He, however, did not want to leave his Maharaja and stayed with him to advise him in times of trouble.

The game made by Sissa was the ancestor of chess. After a few changes in the way the pieces move, which took whole centuries to be accepted, modern chess appeared around 1500, now with many millions of players and fans. Even if Sissa did not actually exist, the ideas of his story are still alive.

