

## *The introduction of Chess into Europe*

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Based on reliable historic information we know for certain that already in the early days of Islam Arabs practiced Chess in Baghdad, spreading the game throughout all the geographical areas in which their political and cultural expansion was taking place. A characteristic of Arab literature of the time is that the stories about the origin of the game cannot be clearly distinguished from the legends.

What seems to be clear, is that Chess quite probably entered southern Europe under the leadership of the Arabs. The Arabs, themselves had learned to play the game during the conquest of Persia, already during the times of the Caliph Omar, between the years 638 and 651 of the Christian era.

From the moment when Islam assumed the game as its own, Chess started to spread in all directions: in the Western World, within the vector of dissemination that interests us, one of the focal points of dissemination of Chess arrives to the **Caucasus** by way of the commercial routes. Another focal point connects with **Byzantium**. And the third will reach the extreme ends of the **Western Mediterranean**, including the Iberian Peninsula.

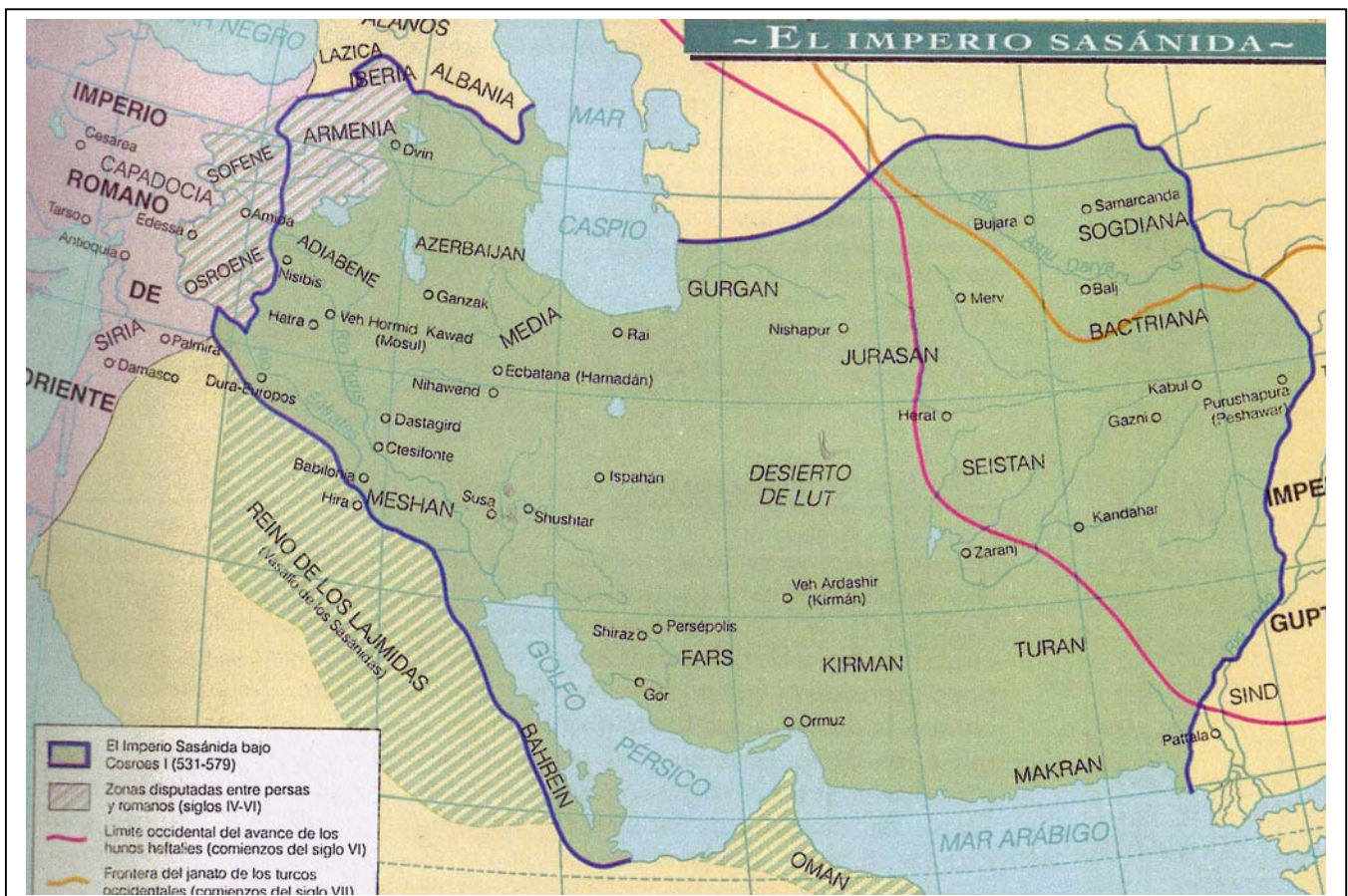
Proof of the process is not particularly steadfast in that pertaining to its first stage of transmission, being mainly based on the complete global historic context, in strewn archaeological findings, in philology and in the testimonies of the Arab historians of somewhat subsequent periods. Due to

the circles in which it develops and the characteristics concerning the knowledge associated to the same, Chess appears in the Muslim culture during its first periods under a somewhat disturbing aura, and the reticence that the orthodox and traditionalists had towards Chess appears to be partly based on this association (1).

Arab literature about Chess started to see the light about two centuries after the birth of Islam, and the initial moment of the game's embryonic gestation takes place quite a time afterwards.

Even so, its definitive historical beginning and the exact moment of its birth as a social and cultural phenomenon can be established as of the end of the 8th century, when Chess starts to shine in its own light within the Islam domains of the East, being documented for the first time in its original format along with a series of texts, technical expressions, collections of problems and names of champions.

The high percentage of Chess players of Persian origin is to be highlighted in view of the personal references made in the first Baghdad based texts. As of that moment and for many centuries to come Chess becomes one of the emanations that enjoy an aura of wisdom in the Muslim culture, and indeed without the Islamic motor as a driving force, neither Persian Chess nor the knowledge related to the same would have been so profusely disseminated to other geographical-cultural scopes.



The **first Arab reference** in the East, without being absolutely certain, dates from the year 720. The **second** most probable reference dates from the year 750, while the **third**, this time completely solid, is found in the year 791, already fully immersed in the Abbasid period. (2) It is during the bloody war (between the Omeyyans and Abbasids) that Chess somehow appears as a throwing weapon.

Testimonies about primitive Islamic Chess were drawn-up during the Abbasid period. The Abbasids won the civil war against the Omeyyans, which led to the heyday of Sanskrit and Persian translations and likewise to the initial birth of Chess literature within a tacit permissiveness, although reticence of diverse Caliphs towards Chess is more than perceptible. The period of the Caliph Al Mammun, son of Harun ar Raschid (813-833) is the one that corresponds to the great Chess players and first writers of the Court, being likewise the period when Chess reaches Spain under the leadership of the Persian singer Ziriab, arriving from Baghdad, It is the rebirth of images, which were described by the Hebrew chronicler Hunayn ibn Ishaq.

Baghdad continued to gradually fall into decadence as a cultural focal point of Islam until the Ottoman Conquest, with its rector role being distributed throughout various geographical points. Among these the most important is Al Andalus, the Arab name given to the Iberian Peninsula region that was subjected to Muslim domain.

It was the Malik School that reigned in Al Andalus, corresponding to the most rigid attitude towards Chess, *ast according to what was sustained by*

*Malik himself*, the game was considered to be even more reprehensible than games of chance, “because it exercises even more fascination over the believer”.

### **Dissemination**

It is from Baghdad that Chess is disseminated in all directions: towards the East, where primitive forms of *Chaturanga* represented its breeding ground, finally grafting into many of the national modalities of Chess of each one of the Asian countries (4). The Arabs call a complete family of games *Shatransh*, each with game boards in different shapes and sizes, with the basic shape that dominated all others being a result of evolutionary “Darwinist Laws”, which establish a predominance of the most suitable form in order to adapt to a certain scope. Islamic Chess is the only one of all Chess games and archetype Chess games that thanks to “mutations” is universalised within the course of a secular process, earliest stage of which is condensed in the Mediterranean cultural centres.



**As outlined by Murray, none of the Asian modalities of Chess was universalised because the culture that produced them was likewise not universal.** The lack of specific literature in these countries has forced each generation to rewrite the technical laws of the game and, consequently, evolution and progress based on accumulation of experience was halted.

Apart from China and Japan, on the Asian side Persian Chess was also transmitted to the Caucasus, penetrating in the territories we now call **Russian** by following the route of the commercial caravans, quite probably in very early periods (*Linder en Chess in Old Russia*). Some philological and archaeological traces remain of this. Regarding **Nordic Europe**, the Norman invasions in the Mediterranean appear to have played their own particular role.

An abnormally high number of Medieval Chess pieces from Nordic Europe exists, which have been conserved right up until our days, and the presence of “Alquerque of Three” boards in Norman lands suggests that some board games were part of a direct cultural exchange with the Viking seafarers of the Mediterranean. Prof. Daniel Finke revised later-dated and more



confusing testimonies. From these documents it can be gathered that Chess was introduced in places such as Iceland in the 12th century.

The most fruitful vector of dissemination for the game's evolution is the one directed towards the Western World, because it coincides with the important current of historical progression.

***Byzantine empire during the Comena's dynasty***



**From Persia to Baghdad, and from there to the extreme ends of the Mediterranean, Chess spreads throughout Europe and after the transformation of some of its regulations, a circumstance that takes place in Spain in the 15th century, it continues to spread throughout the world.**

It is to this line of propagation that dissemination of the game is due in Western Europe, along with diverse knowledge included in the same carrier, and the of the same, more or less profound, are perceived since the initial implantation of Chess.

**Byzantium** is quite possibly included amongst these references, as is the case with the south of Italy; however, it is in Andalusia where implantation is particularly strong.

It is at some intermediate point of the extensive Christian Empire in Byzantium that Chess is established in documentary fashion as **Zatrikion**. Philological evidence has established, that this is actually the Greek rendering of the Persian word **Chatrang** and not of the Arab word **Shatransh**. That is to say, Byzantium assimilated the term that defines Chess in accordance to Persian influence and not Arab, therefore, in a very early period, quite certainly before the 9th century, and perhaps even before the Sassanid Empire was conquered by the Arabs, as has been suggested by

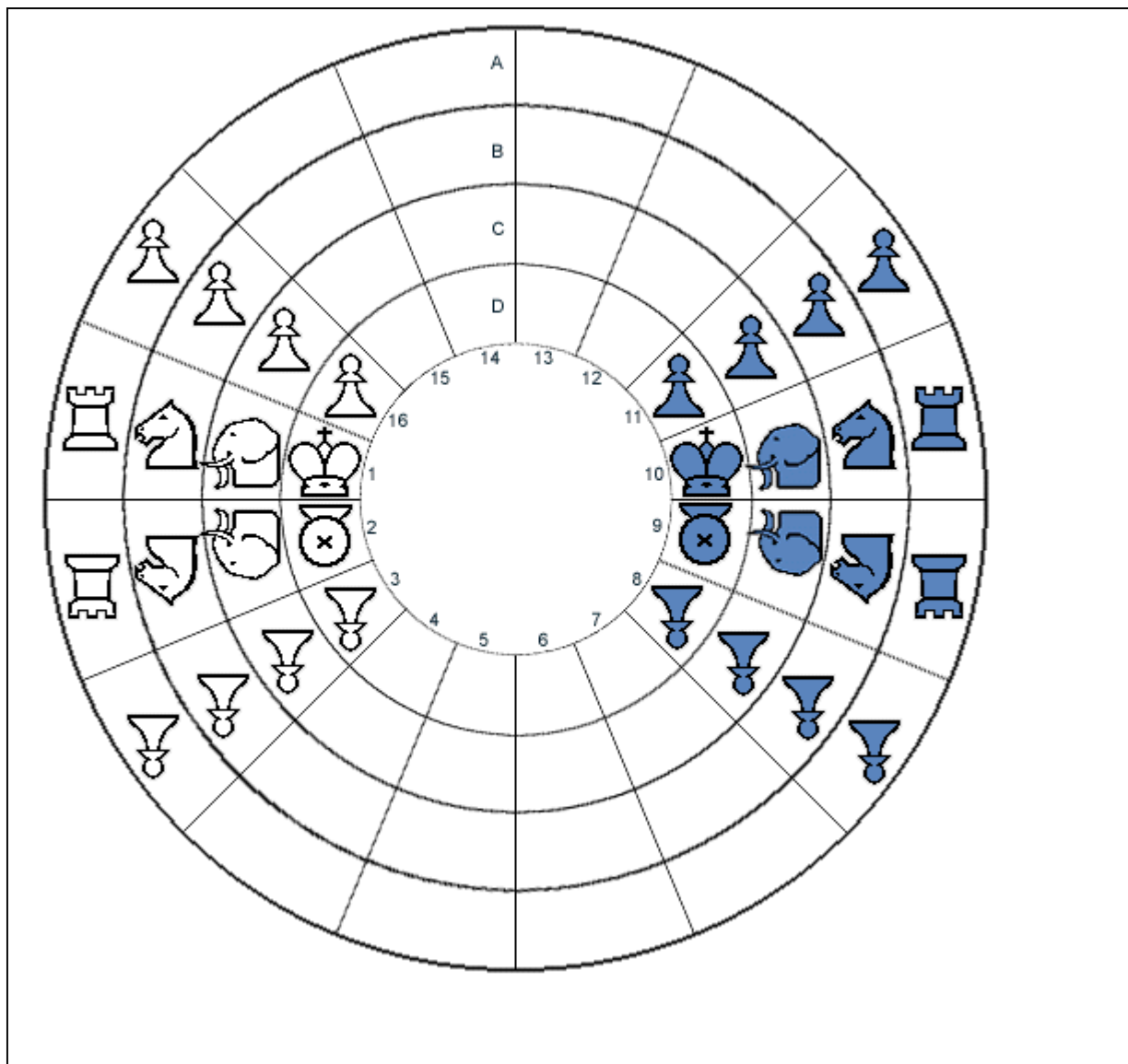
some authors such as Murray. The **first text** in which reference is made to the technical nature of the game suggesting its practice in Byzantium arises from an Arab source and would be exactly a letter from the Emperor Nicephorus to the Caliph Harun ar Raschid.

The daughter of Emperor Alexis I (1081-1118), Ana Commena, in her laudatory epic “The Alexiad” mentions that *Zatrikion* was habitually played in her father’s court and that the origin of the game was “thanks to the Assyrians, who brought it to our land”.

Towards the middle of the 9th century, the Chronicler **Al Masudi** makes an interesting description of common Chess games, in which a compelling comment is found (6), which describes six varieties of Chess in accordance to their format and number of cells. Variety num. 4 is of particular interest, in which “*Round Chess attributed to the Byzantines* is mentioned, *and their concern, along with that of the Persians and the inhabitants of India, due to the “underlying reasons of Chess”*”.

The round board outlined as num. 5 of those described by Masudi as “zodiacal” serves for a Chess modality derived from India, which was used for astrological divination in one of its evolutions. Curiously enough a similar variant is likewise described by King Alfonso X on sheet 96 b of his “Book of Games”, dated 1283, in the chapter corresponding to “The Game of Squares” with a complete description covering ludic astrology, accompanied by a game of “astrological tables” found on sheet 97 b (U. Schädler, Sphären-, „Schach“. Studien zum sog. „Astronomischen Schachspiel“ bei al-Masudi, al-Amoli und Alfonso X, in: Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften 13, 1999/2000, 205-242)

Therefore, different variations of chess type games existed in different countries, some of which have nothing to do with a game of war. The conclusion that Chess was deeply rooted in Byzantium towards the 12th century is reinforced by recent discoveries about the origins of the so-called “Charlemagne Chess Pieces”, matter that will be dealt with further along.



*Zatrikion The Byzantine chess*

The importance of Byzantium as a point of irradiation of Islamic Chess towards Europe must not be exaggerated, as neither the number of documents nor their quality can make it hold a starring role, which on the other hand would be contradicted by the entire general historical context. **Byzantium was a relatively isolated redoubt of the important currents of cultural exchange, which fundamentally cross through Al Andalus.**

When it comes to **Italy**, the situation is even weaker than that of Byzantium, as Chess was introduced here at a much later date and it is documented for the first time only in 1061AD. On the other hand, "Arab domination of Sicily was not by a long shot as long as Spain's, never reaching the same splendour and grandeur.

The assumption of a “Roman introduction” of Chess arose in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on archaeological findings of Chess pieces at Venafro and in the catacombs of Saint Sebastian in Rome.

En 1941 the German archaeologist Heinrich Fuhrmann published the finding of three lost pieces in his “Archäologischer Anzeiger”; a) 19 made of bone with ivory topping from Venafro. b) 8 made of bone and ivory found in the catacombs of Saint Sebastian in Rome. C) 9 rock crystal pieces taken to the Islamic Museum in Cairo from an unknown Egyptian location.

He proposed a dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century of our era, assuming the pieces to be part of some sort of *ludus latruncularum* (8). During the 1950s, after the Second World War, Prof. Adriano Chicco once again undertook the matter of the possible existence of Chess in Rome, a question that was put forward as a dilemma: either the dating was incorrect, or the pieces perhaps belonged to a different sort of Chess game.

A. Sanvito then undertook a study of the group of pieces found in Venafro and the Catacombs of Saint Sebastian, concluding that 1) The pieces were indeed Chess pieces, and 2) there were serious doubts about their dating, of the Roman or later Roman period. In his revision Sanvito dated the 9 rock crystal pieces in the Cairo Museum to the Egyptian Fatimid period.

The south of Italy does not become important as a centre of Christian-Arab cultural exchange until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, during the Sicilian reign of Frederick II. By this date, however, the weight of the entire process had already been relieved onto the Iberian Peninsula.

## **Iberian Peninsula**

**Approximately one hundred years elapsed between the dates of the Muslim invasion (as of the year 711) and the entry of Chess towards the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and more than two hundred years since its appearance in the Iberian Peninsula after its implantation in Persia.** This may appear to be a rather long period of time for a game such as Chess, which historically has been characterised in most countries by its powerful capacity to become a tendency and by its swift dissemination.

However, transmission of a game demands propitious circumstances, amongst which can be found peaceful cohabitation at an everyday level, quite frequently shared amongst the two cultures. There said conditions



appeared much later on, as war circumstances makes an early transmission unthinkable, as much for chess as for other eastern knowledge (9).

The main lines of the three phases to be considered can be traced from Cordoba: **implantation** of the Arab *Shatransh* amongst the Andalusian Muslims, **dissemination** of the game to peninsular Jews and Christians and other paths of **promulgation** to other European countries.

As far as initial implantation in the 9<sup>th</sup> century is concerned, documentary support does exist that more than amply eliminates any doubt: Mohammed I, Emir of Cordoba (852-886), was already a passionate player of Chess, enjoying the game with his servant Aidun, “who was a first class Chess player”, according to Ibn Hayyan’s testimony.

Since the times of Abd al Rahman I, the Immigrant, Cordoba had become a refuge for Omeiyans when the Abbasid Dynasty was established in Baghdad. “The good feeling in Cordoba, as in other smaller courts that were created around the province Governors, consisted in imitating absolutely everything that was taking place in Baghdad”. (Henri Pérès, “Esplendor de al- Andalus” Madrid-Hiperion 1953 pag 22)

| Soberanos omeyas de Córdoba y su relación con el ajedrez |               |  |
|--|---------------|--|
| Nombre del Emir o Califa                                 | Periodo (A.D) | Relación con el ajedrez  |
| Abd al-Rahman I  | 756-758       | Primer Omeya llegado a Córdoba. Ajedrez no conocido                      |
| Hisham I   | 758-796       | Ajedrez no conocido  |
| al-Hakam I   | 796-822       | Introducción demostrada con Ziriab                                       |
| Abd al-Rahman II   | 822-852       | Intensiva orientalización. Yahya b. Yahya Ziriab en la Corte             |
| Muhammad I   | 852-886       | Juega ajedrez con su esclavo Aidun                                       |
| al-Mundir  | 886-888       | Ajedrez ya introducido   |
| Abdallah   | 888-912       | Ajedrez ya introducido   |
| Abd al-Rahman III  | 912-961       | Ajedrez ya introducido. Contacto con condes catalanes y con Centroeuropa |
| al-Hakam II  | 961-976       | Gran biblioteca con muy probables tratados de ajedrez                    |
| Hisham II (último califa)                                | 976-1013      | Guerra civil. Contacto con condes catalanes                              |

It can be safely affirmed that Chess was introduced in the Iberian Peninsula before the year 848, since this was the date when a well known author died in Cordoba, Yahya ben Hahya, who mentioned Chess for the first time in Al Andalus in his works. The text, althoughs not very widely spread, 2is important for the introduction and dissemination of Chess throughout the Western Islam World” (R. Wieber, “Das Schachspiel in der arabischen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts”, Page 65).

The first problem encountered by the keen war game we call Chess was of an ideological and religious nature.

The condition of a true believer necessarily demanded concordance with Islamic Law in each and every one of daily life activities, separating them into five different degrees of legitimacy, which, therefore, also included

games and of course Chess, although with an uncertain and doubtful limit between what permitted was and what was forbidden, which was never precisely defined, resulting in Chess being subjected to intense scrutiny regarding its legitimacy and indisputable admission,

With the game only being permitted as an image to prepare war strategies and certainly not as a mere game. (10).

The Koranic legitimacy of the game was already under legal-theological controversy before its peninsular introduction, in like manner to its situation in the entire Muslim world. In his book "*Kittab al Muwata*" Yahya ben Yahya, follower of Malik's Theological School, comments the Islamic attitude towards games and the advice received from his master in this respect (11).

The Islamic legal-theological term used to classify an action not only as forbidden, but also as deserving of punishment is *Haram*. Wieber in his work comments that the passage mentioned by Murray has been incorrectly translated, and that the adjective given by Yahya to Chess is "*makruh*", advised against, which actually represents a lesser degree of disapproval. The Andalusí way of life was a mixture of cultures, with the subsistence of Christian-Roman rites and beliefs, eastern or esoteric implantations, "however, always disdaining what Cordovan Ibn Hazm called the religion of elderly women."

Levi-Provençal, one of the greatest specialists in Muslim Spain, outlines that Chess was introduced by **Ziriab** in Cordoba, Ziriab being a Persian musician and singer of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, who arrived in Algeciras from Baghdad towards the year 821. Thus, Chess reached the peninsula thanks to this musician of Persian origin who came from Baghdad. According to Dozy in the Introduction of Al Maqqari's *Analectis*, Ziriab reached fame as a musician in the Court of Harun ar Raschid, to the point of awakening the envy of his master Ishaq al Mawsili, who warned him that "there is not enough room for the two of us in the Court". Fearing for his life, Ziriab fled to the Maghreb where, thanks to his fame, Emir Al Hakam I offered him hospitality to establish himself in Cordoba. It was just after reaching the city that he learnt of the Emir's death, but that his successor Abd el Rahman II was willing to uphold the same generous conditions of Ziriab's contract.

Ziriab is the first real live character that can be linked with the introduction of Chess in the European continent in a documentary fashion.

Ziriab's true name according to Levi-Provençal was "Abul Hassan Ali ben Nafi", having been born in Mesopotamia in the year 783.

He was a freedman of the Abbasid Caliph al Mahdi. His nickname of Ziriab was a result of his dark skin, and according to his biographers habitually designated a certain bird of black plumage". The French Arabist compares him with Petronius and Brummel because of the tremendous influence exercised in the tendencies of the Court during the emirate of Abderraman II (822-85), period characterised by its following of the Baghdad model, with intense activities in sciences and arts.

As a character of enormous fame, Ziriab exercised important influence in the Cordovan Court, as was likewise the case with his daughters Ulayya and Hamduna (born in Baghdad). His slaves Gazlan and Hunayda and his pupil Muta also held an important role in all that related with fashions and the introduction of new ideas. As a singer, in a society such as the Andalusian, wholeheartedly immersed in poetry and music, Ziriab appears as an important dominating figure amongst his contemporaries.

Some of the tendencies he implanted included a cultural and political content, as was the case with the promotion of white-coloured gowns for the summer, matter about which an abundance of references can be found, and in view of the fact that we are dealing with a Persian Chess Player, interest is thus more intriguing. (12). The implicit symbolism of the colour white, which was the colour of mourning in the East and in some Hispanic-Muslim geographical areas, as opposed to black, found its particular political opportunity as soon as it was introduced by Ziriab.

Polo was another game that was introduced along with Chess. Game of Persian origin, reminiscences of it can still be found in the folklore and celebration of some religious festivities of a Zoroastrian lore such as the *Day of Nayruz*, which takes place at the beginning of the year and the "*Mihrayan*" during the summer solstice, the same represented by dancers with wooden horses at their waists.

Thus Chess appears in Cordoba at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century in a clearly defined ambience: surrounded by an aura of intellectual and social prestige and walking hand-in-hand with other novel knowledge, its practice in the Court of the Caliphs was surrounded by waves of esoteric orientalism and Persian fashion, characterising the period.

If Chess was consolidated in Al Andalus despite the onslaught suffered from its religious enemies, it is in good measure precisely because of the

aura of prestige it irradiated, which even today continues to be present in the popular attitude that exists towards Chess.

It is more than doubtful that Chess was to have been to the taste of the masses, at least in its early period. It is through historians such as Al Jusani that we know that the Hispanic-Muslim people resisted the fashions of the East for a long time, to the point of mocking those accepting these tendencies (13).

- **Disciplines according to visir ben Sahl (f.850)**
- **Chess**
- Knowledge of music.
- Fight with lance.
- Horsemanship.
- Poesia.
- Play Arch.
- Knowledge of arithmetic
- Knowledge of genealogy.
- Knowledge of History.
- Storyteller

The elite tendency to consider Chess as a convenient subject in the **education of the nobility irradiated towards the Christian Peninsular Courts**. In his famous treatise “Disciplina clericalis”, Alfonso I of Aragon’s Jewish physician Moses Sefardi (subsequently called Petrus Alphonsi since his baptism on the day of Saint Peter in 1106 in tribute to the monarch), enumerated the activities (*Probitates*), he considered indispensable for the education of the

young nobility. To play Chess (*scacis ludere*), is one of them.

Part of Chess’ elite prestige is based on its association with the bundle of wisdom that is jointly transmitted with the same.

This wisdom must have also appeared in Cordoba approximately at the same time as Chess. “The nine figurines with which it is possible to count boundlessly”, were brought from Persia and India to Baghdad, where in the year 820 they appear in Al Juaritzmi’s treatise, and supposedly they were introduced in Cordoba by the famous and versatile Abbas ben Firnas (fl. in 274/887). Example of this is the famous “problem of the grains of wheat”, very difficult to resolve without using Arabic numerals, given the astronomical amounts to be handled.

- **Disciplines according to Petrus Alphonsi (s.XII)**
- Equitare(horsemanship)
- Natate (swimming)
- Sagitare (play arch)
- Cestibus certare (pelota play)
- Aucupare-( hunting bird)
- **Scacis ludere (play chess)**
- Versificare (write in verse)

When the Caliphate of Cordoba disintegrated towards the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, following the Civil War, each one of the fragmented **Taifa**

**Kingdoms** created their own Court. “The period of the Taifas was one of maximum splendour in Spanish science, fostered throughout the entire breadth and length of our geography with astounding intensity. The Kings boasted of their writers and sages and, since they were lacking in economic power to assimilate all the fugitives from Cordoba, they embraced some more than others in accordance to their selective likings”(“La cultura hispano-arabe en Oriente y Occidente” Juan Vernet Ed Ariel Barcelona 1978, p 38)

It is in particular in the Court of Seville and specifically during the flourishing period of the poet king Al Mutamid, during the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when Chess reaches its golden periods. *The ambassador and scheming Courtesan Ben Ammar appears in the collection of ballads playing a famous match against Alfonso VI of Castile sometime around the year 1078 (14).*

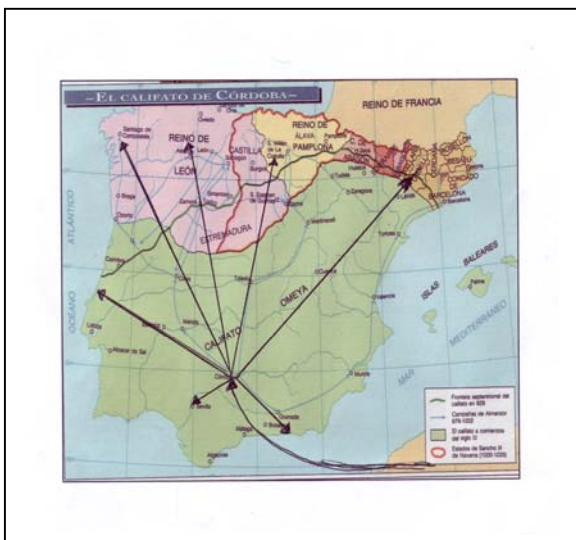
Many references to Chess players capable of playing blindfolded exist, proving the high level that daily practice of *Shatransh* actually reached, despite the lack or scarcity of technical texts. Playing blindfold has also been documented in Baghdad, guaranteeing a category similar to that of our current grand masters.

### **Christian Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula**

Archaeological and written sources demonstrate that Chess had crossed-over from the Arab-Andalusian world to the Hispanic-Christian world before the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Chess pieces of abstract Arabic shape have been conserved to date, having been implanted in four significant points in Christian Spain very early on:

the Mozarabic and then Benedictine enclave of **Peñalba de Santiago** in Leon, the Galician Benedictine Monastery (originally Mozarabic) of **Celanova** in Orense and the one in La Rioja, **San Millan de la Cogolla**,

likewise originally Mozarabic and later on Benedictine, and finally the Catalan Countship of **Urgell** in the Pyrenees. (15)



### **The most ancient European Chess pieces**

(Peñalba, Celanova, San Millan de la Cogolla, Urgell )

Mozarabic enclaves existed in larger cities such as Toledo, Cordoba and Seville, where prosperous communities



were created, governed by their own heads of state and subject to the Visigoth Legal Code. The Mozarabics suffered persecution at certain times, in particular during the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Due to this reason the Mozarabics moved to the north of the peninsula, taking the architectonic style of Cordoba with them, with their horseshoe arches and ribbed vaults. They were quite probably the ones to also bring the rock crystal Chess pieces that are in Celanova and San Millan de la Cogolla, and with absolute certainty the Chess pieces now found in Peñalba de Santiago. (“H<sup>a</sup> de los mozarabes en España”, Ed Turner Madrid 1983, Fco J. Simonet)

The County of Urgell and in general the entire Catalan Pyrenees region is to Chess (*Escacs* in Catalan) what Cordoba is to *Shatransh*. These are the two western centres of early implantation, one Muslim and the other Christian. References to Chess pieces and texts are already present in Urgell towards the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, although the initial stages of introduction of the game could have (must have) taken place quite probably before this time, between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this case the intermediate transmitting role must quite probably be attributed more to the Jews than to the Mozarabics, as components of embassies and commercial missions between the Christian and Muslim Kingdoms (16).

With the exception of the ivory pieces in Peñalba de Santiago, the material used in all cases is translucent rock crystal, which indicates a foreign origin, since this type of rock crystal cutting of pieces for different uses is considered by the official experts as a typical production of the Islamic Fatimids that had settled in Egypt (17).

**However, rock crystal was very abundant in Al Andalus, and Al Himyari mentions a site located about 40 miles north of Badajoz (Levi-Provençal “Peninsule Iberique”, pages 3-6).**

In all four cases the design of the pieces is abstract, following the well-known Islamic pattern, which along with other information, indicates that the pieces were not produced within a Christian environment, but in fact imported from Muslim areas (18).



Which are the oldest Chess pieces in Europe? This fascinating question can now be answered with almost complete certainty. In the Leon town of **Peñalba de Santiago**, in the region of El Bierzo, close to Astorga, four small ivory pieces have existed for centuries,

pieces that have been carefully guarded, considered as precious and magical relics belonging to the Founder Saint of the monastery that is currently in ruins. According to the dates, **these would be the oldest pieces in Europe**, independent from the fact that they are dated at the same period as the founding of the monastery (year 900), thus as would be logical they probably date from years before, transmitted by way of the Mozarabics from the Andalusí Muslim areas.

Peñalba means “white rock” and “*de Santiago*” indicates that the village is found along the legendary *Camino de Santiago* (Saint James Way) in a ramification of the ancient “Ruta de la Plata” (Silver Route). In the times of the Mozarabics this famous Roman road became a trade route and pilgrimage route, joining ports in Andalusia with those in the north of the peninsula, passing through the Bishophood of Astorga where Peñalba de Santiago is found.

The impressive ruins of the Church-Monastery of Santiago, built in the year 900 by a canonised Mozarabic, Saint Genadio, are found right in the middle of the town. Saint Genadio, Bishop of Astorga between the years 898-920, followed the instructions of his friend King Alfonso III of Leon, for whom he also exercised as confessor. Saint Genadio is the **first Christian Saint related with Chess**. He died in the year 936 and he is buried in the counter apse of his beloved church in Peñalba, where he had lived for the last sixteen years of his life. Earlier on in his life he had been the Bishop of Astorga, although later on he basically became into a hermit, whit his favourite place for meditation being a cave that was close to the



Oza River, the waters of which miraculously enough and according to local legend, “do not murmur as they pass in front of the cave”

The lovely landscape that surrounds the mountains where the Oza River is born is called “**El Valle del Silencio**” (The Valley of Silence) (19).

The “*Bolos de San Genadio*”, known as “the pieces of Saint Genadio”, are still considered nowadays by local folklore as miraculous talismans. According to tradition, these are the remains of the

complete set of Chess with which Saint Genadio would occasionally pass the time, playing with his monks during the last years of his life,

recommending them as an aid for concentration and a vehicle to approach God. The ivory Chess pieces are a testimony in their own way of this spiritual connection.

Saint Genadio's pieces are basically ignored and unknown to most historians of Chess, given that they are not included in Kluge-Pinsker's extensive catalogue about the subject.

As Bishop of Astorga, Saint Genadio was closely connected with the Mozarabic communities of monks, and several churches dating from the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century still remain. This is the case of the one neighbouring with the village of San Miguel de Escalada, which dates from the year 913 (M. Gómez Moreno "Iglesias Mozárabes", page 215). A later date sculpture of Saint Genadio from the 16<sup>th</sup> century can also be found.

### San Rosendo de Celanova

Another Mozarabic Saint related with Chess is Saint Rosendo (907-975), who founded the Monastery of Celanova in the province of Orense in the year 936, (likewise along Saint James Way).

Celanova and San Rosendo are practically one and the same thing. The village is born out of the influence of a Monastery, San Salvador, founding of the Saint in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, specifically in the year 936. As of that moment the Monastery became the motor of the rural economy of these lands. A Mozarabic Chapel has been conserved from its very beginnings, representing the Monastery's initial nucleus, dedicated to Saint Michael and unique in the region.

Saint Rosendo was born in the Villa of Salas in the year 907. He was the Bishop of Mondoñedo, however, appreciating silence and solitude far more than power, he founded this monastery that had Franquila as its first Abbot, with Saint Rosendo retiring to the monastery in the year 944. Ordoño II forced him to abandon the monastery when he appointed him Governor of Galicia and later on in the year 970 Administrator of the Compostela Diocese. In the year 974 he returned to Celanova, dying there three years later on March 1<sup>st</sup>.



The Monastery accepted Benedictine Rule. Kings, the nobility and private individuals made the monastery wealthy with numerous donations and privileges, and by the 11<sup>th</sup> century that which had started as a humble “cella nova” had turned into the most important Abbey of Galicia.



During the Middle Ages these lands became a route of pilgrimage for the Portuguese who travelled to Santiago de Compostela, thus by using the ancient Roman road they constituted the Portuguese span of Saint James Way, turning it into a centre of reference.

In 1506, by way of a Papal Bull granted by Pope Julius II, they adhered to the Benedictine Monasteries that depended on San Benito el Real in Valladolid, which insured a return to their glorious past, although it also represented a loss of independence.

Along with the rock crystal pieces found in San Millán de la Cogolla and Urgell, the Celanova lot is one of the most ancient material residues of Chess corresponding to the High Middle Ages. The Chess pieces have been transferred to the Diocese Museum in the capital of the province.

The Celanova pieces, a total of eight, are more rustic than those pertaining to the other lots and, therefore, quite probably the oldest. Camón Aznar assigns them to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, because there is a letter of donation to the Monastery that is dated in the year 938.

The one that stands out the most, because of size, is the unmistakable Rook. There is also a Bishop, a Knight, three Pawns (recognisable by their smaller size) and another two pieces, which are somewhat larger and that could correspond to two Queens.

### **San Millán de la Cogolla**



Another Benedictine Monastery of Mozarabic origin is San Millán de la Cogolla, cradle of the Spanish language and occasionally nicknamed the “Escorial of the North”.



Once again we find ourselves with a Mozarabic link, solidly appreciable, because the initial nucleus of the small chapel of San Millán de Suso, recently restored, is also Mozarabic. The most modern of these is Yuso, which is where monastic activity is basically concentrated in current times.

This is where a reliquary that was plundered by Napoleonic soldiers is conserved. The soldiers only took the ivory pieces that decorated the small chest, without even noticing the rock crystal pieces that were found on its top case.

There are five rock crystal pieces in the reliquary of San Millán de la Cogolla. These are four Pawns, although two are of different size, which are completely surpassed by one huge rock crystal piece, which represents a beautiful Knight with its characteristic frontal protuberance, exquisitely



cut on the lateral sides with ornamental motifs that are typically Islamic.

These have been better dated than those in Celanova and even than those in Urgell, given that their donation by Sancho III of Navarra in 1033 is correctly

recorded (Gómez Moreno. “Ars Hispaniae”, volume III, page 341). These would thus be the **third oldest in all of Europe**. Quite probably they were part of a complete set, which has been fragmented, as has been the story of so many others.

The current reliquary of San Millán is a later construction of the original that dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Use of rock crystal objects as incrustations in reliquaries and cult objects is not a rare thing amongst medieval cathedral treasures.

## Urgell



The Christian Catalan Countships of the Pyrenees were an important cultural bridge between Islam and Central Europe. The Pyrenees region and its monasteries was an active intellectual centre since the Visigoth times and its importance grew even more after the Muslim invasion of 711. This is when they became a point of exchange, both cultural and commercial. The bordering Spanish Mark (*Marca Hispanica*) pertaining to the Charlemagne Empire was the initial place where knowledge was transferred between Islam and the Christian Kingdoms. Chess and abstract rock crystal figurines could have represented an early introduction in the Spanish Mark, because other branches of knowledge included with the game, such as mathematics and astronomy, appear duly documented in this Pyrenees region before the year 1000 (20).

Count Ramon Borrell I († 993) had visited the Cordovan Court of Abd el Rahman III and established alliances. His firstborn son (likewise called Ramon) inherited Barcelona upon his death, while Urgell corresponded to his second son Armengol (Ermengaud or Hermenegildo).

The relationships of both Catalan Counts with Cordoba continued to be close.

Regarding the implantation of Chess in Urgell, proof of a physical nature such as the pieces, is in fact complemented by data that more or less proves the point: these being the first European documents in which Chess is mentioned on the one hand and traces of this game in the heraldry of the House of Urgell and that of their relatives on the other.

In most of the cases the pieces are made of translucent rock crystal, which seems to lead to a foreign origin, given that this type of pieces are considered a typical production of the Islamic Fatimids that settled in Egypt (21).

However they were not only cut in Egypt, as a famous Cordoban character called Ibn Farnas introduced the art of cutting rock crystal in the Caliphate Court of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and given the close relationships of Cordoba with the Christian areas that held the Chess pieces that are now conserved, an Andalusí origin appears to be quite probable because it is in fact the easiest way to explain their origin.

The design of the pieces is abstract, following the sculptural pattern that is considered specifically Islamic. This is the case of the three peninsular monasteries, indicating that the pieces were not produced in a Christian

environment, but in fact imported from Muslim areas. At any rate this is the general historical context. Far away from the Muslims of the South there was neither Chess nor any tradition of rock crystal cutting.

When Chess came into being far removed from Muslim influence in some points of Europe, the pieces were no longer abstract, but representational, and even in comparatively unpolished cultures such as the Isle of Lewis, the Kings, Knights or Soldiers were represented as small, more or less refined sculptures.

The most interesting and abundant of the three lots is the one in Urgell. Of the 17 pieces that are still conserved in the Diocese Museum of Lleida, 8 are Pawns, 1 is a Rook, 3 are Knights, 2 are Bishops and 3 are Kings (22).



The Pawns differ slightly in shape and size. One of the Pawns is larger than the others, which leads us to believe that it either belonged to a different set or that this particular “Pawn” was in fact an “Alferza” (when a Pawn reached the far side it became an “Alferza”, an archaic Chess piece that no longer exists, which took a position beside the King), similar to the one found in Jorassan, which now forms part of a private collection in Germany. The base of the pieces still show traces of reddish paint, perhaps corresponding to the type of resin that was used in Egypt since the remote times of the Pharaohs.

The Tower or “Rook” is perhaps the most beautiful piece, with a typically rectangular shape and a deep triangular incision on its upper part.

The darkest piece of the lot is made of smoky rock crystal. This could suggest that the two sides of Islamic Chess, red and black, are actually represented in the Lleida pieces. The red is obtained by adding a reddish resin to the base of the pawns. The black by using another type of rock crystal that is darker (23).

A series of documents appear in Urgell somewhere around the year 1000 AD, these being of a testimonial nature, which turns this region into the richest in Christian-European early written text findings about the implantation of Chess in Europe.

**Eight Christian documents remain from the entire 11<sup>th</sup> century that make some sort of reference to Chess, six of which are from areas**

**neighbouring with Urgell**, which represents an overwhelming proportion, thus considering the area as the main centre for convergence of information about peninsular Chess.

### *Documents*

#### TESTAMENTOS Y DOCUMENTOS DEL SIGLO XI RELACIONADOS CON EL AJEDREZ

| <b>Documento y personajes implicados</b>           | <b>Fecha aproximada</b>      | <b>Area geográfica de referencia</b>   | <b>Contenido ajedrecístico</b>                                 |
|--|------------------------------|--|--|
| Testamento castrense del conde Armengol I de Urgel | <b>1008 ó 1010</b>           | Condado pirenaico de Urgel             | Donación de juegos de ajedrez al convento de San Egidio        |
| Testamento de Ramón Levita                         | <b>1045</b>                  | Badalona. Menciones frecuentes a Urgel | Legado intrafamiliar de juegos de ajedrez de hueso             |
| Testamento del clérigo Seniofredo                  | <b>1045</b>                  | Urgel                                  | Donación de ajedrez al convento de San Julián de Bar           |
| Testamento de Ermessinda, viuda de Ramón Borrell   | <b>1058</b>                  | Pirineo catalán                        | Donación de ajedreces de cristal a San Egidio de Nimes         |
| Carta del cardenal Pedro Damiani al Papa           | <b>1061</b>                  | Italia                                 | Rechazo al ajedrez y su práctica por los clérigos              |
| Inventario de Arsenda, esposa de Arnau Mir         | <b>1068</b>                  | Ager, condado de Urgel                 | Donación de ajedreces a su marido y preservación de los mismos |
| Inventario de Arnau Mir de Tost                    | <b>1071</b>                  | Ager, condado de Urgel                 | Ajedreces de marfil, plata y cristal                           |
| Manuscrito de Einsiedeln (anónimo)                 | <b>Alrededor del año 950</b> | Monasterios del lago de Constanza      | Explicación en latín de las reglas del ajedrez                 |

Chess sets were found amongst the belongings of both Catalan Counts, Ramon Borrel of Barcelona and his younger brother Armengol of Urgell. Sufficient importance was granted to these sets on a symbolic or material level for them to be remembered in their wills. Both Counts jointly

participated in the military expedition against the fundamentalist faction of Cordoba, during which Armengol found his death. And in both cases the Chess sets ended up in the Benedictine Monastery of San Gilles (San Egidio) in Nîmes, in the south of France. The connecting path with Europe traced by these lines is suggestive to imagine the transmission of Chess.

The name that was used in the wills to designate the Chess sets is "*escachos*", which is also the first time in Europe that Chess is designated with a word that is different to the Arab *Shatransh* or the Greek *Zatrikion*. The etymology of the new term has been established over the basis of the word *Shah*, the King in the game of Chess that the Arabs designated with their Persian term. In Latin the sibilant sound of "sh" does not exist, reason why "*Shah*" turns into "*Scac*", thus resulting in the origin of the game's denomination in most European languages. This interpretation arises from Murray and it has been traditionally accepted as a definitive dogma. It is to be highlighted that in Arnau Mir de Tost's inventory covering the Urgell pieces, the word that is employed is "*Esgabs*".

### ***Testaments***

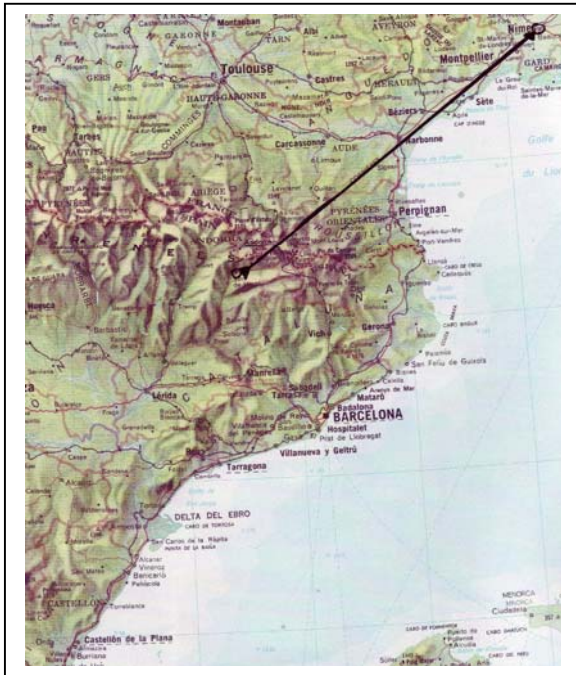
#### **Armengol**

The first documentary testament about Chess in the Countship of Urgell dates from the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, as a consequence of a military circumstance to which we have already made reference. Count Armengol I, founder of the Urgell lineage, dispatches from Tujent (close to Puigcerdá) in the month of July of 1008, or more probably in the year 1010. There is a military will in which he donates a Chess set to the "Abbey of San Egidio" shortly before parting for Cordoba with the military expedition that finally costs him his life. This circumstance, along with the characteristics of the original writ and the annotations found in the margins, made Von der Lasa place the date of 1010 as the authentic date, the same being the moment when the expedition took place. His theory was also based on the fact that the will had a military and informal nature, as if it had been drawn up just shortly before parting (24).

The text referring to Chess clearly reads: "*Et Sancti Egidii cenobii ipsos meos escachos ad ipsa opera de Ecclesia...*". The importance of this sentence lies in the fact that it has been considered as the oldest text in all of Christian Europe in which Chess is referred to, the same using the term "*escachos*", which is more than enough proof. The meaning of the word "*opera*" has been discussed, although if we take into account Von der Lasa's authorised opinion about Chess sets, then these must have been destined to the conventual treasure.

## *The long way from Urgell to Nimes*

### **Seniofredo**



This is likewise the case with another testimony dating from 1045 in which a Priest from Urgell called Seniofredo donates another Chess set to the Church of San Julián de Bar.

### **Levita**

One of Armengol's four testamentary executors was a Jew who signed as "Siegfredus Levita". The name of "Levita" is parented with the author of the following document, which is the third oldest in Europe in which Chess is mentioned. Once again it is a

testimony dated October 22<sup>nd</sup> of 1045 and drawn-up by a certain Ramon Levita, resident of Badalona, who bequeaths the following to his brother: "*ipsos escachos et tabulas de osso qui ibidem sunt*".

### **Ermessinda**

Another Catalan text dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century is a testament that is related with those described above. It corresponds to the Countess Ermessinda, widow of Count Ramon Borrell (972-1017) of Barcelona who survived the Cordovan expedition and, therefore, brother-in-law of Armengol who died. Ermessinda handled administration of the domains during the more than 40 years that she survived her husband, apparently with notable energy, because Von der Lasa mentions that she even requested help from the Normans of Sicily to fight against the Saracens.

The circumstances surrounding the mention of Chess are rather special, because Ermessinda died without leaving a will and two or three days after her death two executors called Guillermo Amat and Guillermo Guifredi Levita were asked to act as witnesses to her last will. The two executors drafted the will, outlining what they recalled. Thus Ermessinda's will was drawn-up in the third person. The testament is dated in the year 27, corresponding to the year in which Henry of France was reigning, that is to say, 1058, mentioning in the same the donation of another Chess set to the Abbey of San Egidio: "*Et Sancto Egidio Nemausensi suos eschacos*



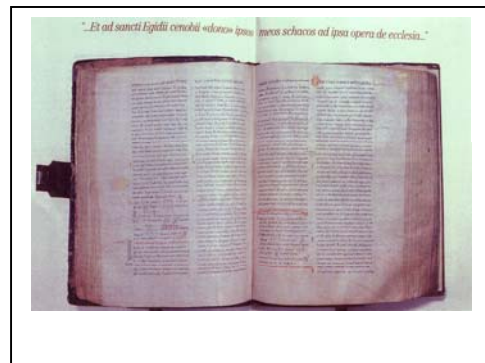
*christalinos ad tabula...*". On this occasion it was specified that said Abbey is the one in Nîmes and that the Chess pieces are made of crystal, accompanied by a chessboard (*ad tabula*). The chessboard is made of a solid material, quite probably already coloured in alternating black and white, because as such it appears on the coat of arms and crests of the House of Urgell. Around the 950 AD in Einsiedeln's manuscript mentions the coloured in chessboard as "someone's" recent invention that facilitates the game.

## ***Testaments of Armengol I***

### **Arsenda**

In the case of the testament dated in the year 1068 and pertaining to Arsenda, wife of Arnau Mir de Tost (a relative of the House of Urgell who held the domain of the Villa and Castle of Ager, along Saint James Way), the same specifies that following:

*"Tabulas nostras et excachos vadant secundum mandamentum seniori meo"*, underlining that after her death the boards were to remain at the disposal of her husband and lord, even if he had to sell her precious Opossum fur coats to retain the same. This attitude suggests a link with Chess that goes beyond the merely material. As far as the Chess pieces are concerned that Arsenda so carefully disposes of, their trace can be followed in documentary fashion and it is even possible that the lots that have reached our days were originally part of these sets.



### **Arnau Mir de Tost's Inventory**

Arsenda's husband, Arnau Mir de Tost, already a widow in the year 1071, decides to draw-up an inventory of his assets prior to going on pilgrimage along Saint James Way, given that the trip was both long and dangerous, to the point that he did not actually survive it. The following Chess sets are mentioned amongst the inventoried assets:

*"Et tabulas argenteas cum illorum tabuler XIII parilios. Tres d'esgabs vivoril. Et alios tres parilios de cristallo."*

Mention is made in the same to 13 silver sets, with their corresponding boards, which have disappeared, along with three "*d'esgabs vivoril*" or ivory Chess sets (*vivoril* = *vivorii*. "*Ivori*" means ivory. The word "*esgabs*"

appears to be a corruption of “*escacs*”). Apparently this final crystal lot is the origin of the Chess pieces that are still conserved at the Diocese Museum of Lleida (25).

### ***Einsiedeln's Manuscript***

The first European text to undertake a technical description of the game of Chess with educational purposes is called “Einsiedeln Manuscript”, after the Benedictine Abbey of the same name (Ms. 365) where it is preserved. Situated in Switzerland, somewhat geographically removed from Lake Constance (Bodensee), it belongs historically to the so-called circle of Bodensee Monasteries (Sankt Gallen, Reichenau, Buchau) with which, as shown by the medievalist Arno Borst, “the quintessence of Benedictine monasticism” close relationships were maintained during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The height of its spiritual prestige as a Benedictine reformist centre takes place between the years 970 and 1020, and this is the period in which apparently the Chess text was drawn-up (according to U. Schaedler, the recent research earlier: H. Gamer, *The earliest Evidence of Chess in western Literature: The Einsiedeln Verses*, *Speculum* 29, 1954, 734-750: 900-950.)

The text consists of a 98-verse Latin poem, under the original title of “*Versus de scachis*”, which occupied both written sides of a sheet, used along with other loose sheets to make up a composite volume, catalogued in the Abbey’s archive as “Einsiedeln 365”. Prior to this the sheet with the Latin verses had been employed to bind other manuscripts, in such a manner that the part containing verses 68-98 was in view, which motivated a Scribe from the time to copy it again with the title of “*De alea ratione*” (26).



In fact, Einsiedeln’s production was preferentially characterised in the historical situation of its time and it is under this context of current times that presence of a subject such as Chess can be explained, subject that was certainly a novelty between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A characteristic of the Abbey of Einsiedeln was the continuous production of books, with the intervention of diverse monks in each of the works corresponding to the “*scriptorium*”. This also took place with the Chess text, which was newly copied by other hands, then being incorporated to Einsiedeln’s Manuscript 125 (Saint Jerome’s treatise about Isaiah, dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> century).

Dating of the Chess poem has varied, as new investigations even attribute it to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with the beginnings of the Abbey and the extensive mandate of the Abbot of English origin, Gregory (950-997), thus resulting in the oldest of all Christian documents about Chess.

**The first ten verses justify the game as mental recreation, in which neither evil is to be found (*ne dollus ullus inest*), nor false oath, nor physical risk (*non laceras corpus membra vel ulla tui*), also underlining the advantage that the game could be played without dice.** The justification sounds like a necessary argument in the austere reformism of the Einsiedeln Abbey, a model that was imitated throughout the area, even more so when the Church reproached games of chance such as dice.

**The alternating coloured cells are mentioned for the first time** in the following ten verses, with said cells not being commonly used, but only by some players (*Sunt quibus has placuit duplici fucare colore*) **as an advantageous invention to improve calculation of the plays.** Two sides are described in verses 21-44, which are red and black, along with **the pieces and their movements.** The names of the pieces are important, because along with the King or “Rex” **the “Alferza” has been feminised, being denominated as Queen “Regina” for the first time.** **The Bishop is called Count “Comes” and further along in some verses we find the Old Man “Anciano”. The Horse or Knight is called “Aeques”, while the Tower or Rook is called “Rochus” or Marquis “Marchio”.** The movement of the pieces is identical to the Arab Chess, as is the case with the main rules of the game. **Progression of the Pawn “Pedes”, which transforms into a Queen upon reaching the eighth row, is conditioned to the player losing the original Queen.**

Nomenclature of the pieces seems to be stripped of its Arab terminological influences, which makes us suppose that transmission to Einsiedeln and Bavaria not only originated from Spain, but also from Italy as the Italian path seems to also intervene.

**Other Chess pieces in Europe**

We can state that before the year 1000 there were no Chess pieces in Central Europe, and that **abstract, Islamic style pieces** are the oldest on a chronological level. Those conserved in cathedral museums, churches or monasteries are made of noble materials such as rock crystal or ivory, while those extracted from common people archaeological findings are made of wood, bone or tusk.

The rock crystal pieces in Osnabrück, (Köhl) and Halberstadt are part of the group that experts have classified as “Fatimid”, attributed to the North of Africa, or as we have already covered when speaking of the Urgell pieces, the pieces may correspond to a Cordovan craft.



Fourteen pieces remain in the treasure of the Osnabrück Cathedral (in the 17<sup>th</sup> century they were 25 or 26 pieces according to information left behind by a French Abbot that visited the location) and from their characteristics it can be seen that they belong to three different Chess sets. This appreciation is not only due to their size, but also because of the type of ornamental carving found on the lateral sides, with ribbing in “palisade” fashion. The remaining reddish tincture on the base of some of the Chess pieces reveals an attempt to differentiate both sides, as is the case with the Lleida pieces. The Knight preserved in the Schnütgenmuseum at Cologne could be one of the pieces that are missing, as is the case with the King in the treasure of the Halberstadt Cathedral.

In another two ancient lots most of the Chess pieces are made of wood (and some are made of bone or tusk). These date from the beginning or middle 11<sup>th</sup> century. *Dating has been verified in both cases by way of dendrochronological investigations.* These are still abstract pieces. The colours that distinguished both sides have disappeared over time and with the frequent use made during generations. In both cases the site that held them basically revealed a peasant social stratum, although revealing remains of knighthood exploits can also be observed.

A group of 7 figurines which belonged to at least three games, different in size (according to Kluge-Pinsker, Catalogue A6), have been found in Charavines (Isere), on the left bank of Lake Paladru, and are now conserved in the Musée Dauphinois at Grenoble.

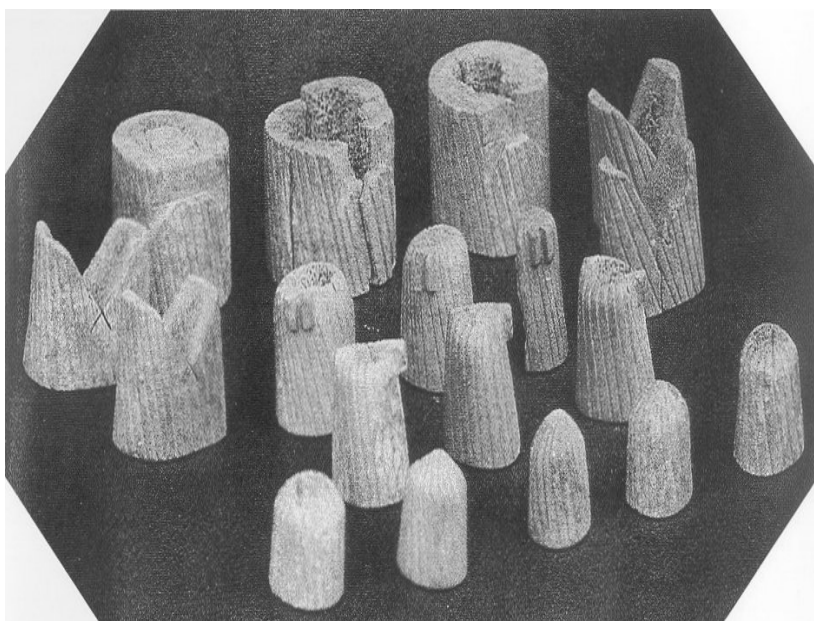
Three wooden, abstract pieces were found on the left bank of the Rhine, in Haus Meer, close to Neuss (North Rhine-Westphalia), now conserved in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn (Kluge-Pinsker Catalogue A32). a Bishop, Knight and Rook belonging to two different sets.

Other Islamic pieces, at least in Germany, that do not appear in Kluge-Pinsker's extensive catalogue (personal communication made by Helmut Faust in 2001) have common characteristics such as the Islamic design of the pieces and use of local material, these dating from approximately the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In 1997 a Bishop made out of tusk was found in the Romrod Castle, close to Frankfurt, measuring 18 mm (this piece is not mentioned in the Kluge-Pinsker Catalogue). The National Germanic Museum of Nuremberg holds a Bishop, Knight and Pawn in its Hall 16, which are made from deer antler (Catalogue num. A30), found in the Castle of Heidenschloss. There are another 13 figurines made of bone and corresponding to an Islamic Chess set from the Adelsdorf Castle that can be found in the same museum, (Catalogue num. A29). An ivory Rook from the Lützelhardt Castle in the region of Stuttgart, is conserved in the local museum of the city of Lahr. And from the same region, specifically from the Baldenstein Castle, there are 9 pieces made of bone and tusk that belonged to four different Chess sets, these being conserved in the Regional Museum of Stuttgart with Catalogue num. A19.

### Italy

The first written document in the Italian Peninsula referring to Chess is the famous letter dated in 1061 from Cardinal Pedro Damiani addressed to the Pope expressing his shame and rejection against the fact that some of the clergy members were playing Chess.



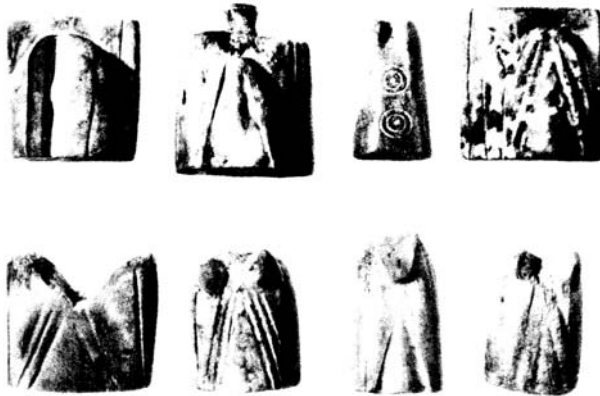
With regards to the controversy surrounding the **Venafro pieces**, recent efforts made by Italian historians have been aimed at admitting an acceptable date.

Gathered together in a supplement to “L’Italia Scacchistica” in June of 1994, can be found the revision of the foreign historians, apart from technical details concerning the radiocarbon dating of the pieces. can be found the revision of the bibliography,

Franco Pratesi’s interpretive dating, the reasons of Dr Alessandro Sanvito about *the Islamic design of this pieces*, and appellations to groups of foreign historians, apart from technical dating details concerning the radiocarbon dating of the pieces.

This dating method has established a date of origin of the pieces somewhere around the year 980, which discards the hypothesis“ of their Roman origin”

The eight bone pieces found in the Catacombs of San Sebastian near Rome do not have a precise dating, although their Islamic style, by comparison, places them in any period between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Four ivory pieces are conserved in the Museo Nazionale de Bargello in Florence, which are similar to the St. Denis set.



A 2

In the Saint Savino Church in Piacenza, consecrated in the year 1107, there is mosaic floor in which a Chess problem is represented, or quite probably, a game between two players. The context of the Chess message has been analysed by comparing it with adjacent

scenes found on the mosaic, (which also display a dice game). Apparently the message is a moral one, aimed at a public that was well versed in the game of Chess. (W. Tronzo, Gesta 16, 1977, pages 15 ff., A. Chicco L’Italia Scacchistica. a. LV, 1965, p. 76).

Despite the fact that mosaics with Chess motifs do indeed exist, all that can in fact be demonstrated came from the middle of 11<sup>th</sup> century.

### France

Written testimonies date from the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, consisting in a reference to two historians of the First Crusade, Fouché de Chartres and Robert de St. Remi, who mention Chess as one of the pastimes of the expeditionary forces. The first of them also reads that during the blockade



of Antioch (1097-1098) Peter the Hermit found the Turkish General Karbuga playing Chess when he met with him to negotiate.

**The Monastery of San Gilles was the third focal point of Christian Pilgrimage, after Rome and Saint James Way.** It formed part of the roads of communication with Rome and the extreme ends of the Mediterranean and, therefore, it must have been involved in the road used by the Crusades.



It was also connected with the Benedictine Chain pertaining to Saint James Way, and with the roads leading to Central Europe that followed the Rhone

upriver. The pieces donated in the Urgell will to the Monastery of San Gilles have not left a trail behind, although in theory they could have ended up forming part of one of the treasures of other monasteries, at least in part.

The so-called **Charlemagne pieces or St. Denis Monastery pieces** correspond to a lot of 16 ivory Chess pieces from the French Abbey of St. Denis, These pieces fascinated collectors and archaeologists alike and as legend goes had been related with Charlemagne. They are currently conserved in the “*Cabinet des Médailles*” in the National Library of Paris. (A recent extensive study about the pieces can be found in A. Kluge-Pinsker, pp 17 ss).

According to tradition they belong to a set of Chess, which along with other gifts, had been sent by Caliph Harum al Rashid to Charlemagne.

Already in 1860 Duncan Forbes, supported on Fr. Madden’s opinion, indicated that these pieces could not have been part of the gifts made by the Caliph to Charlemagne, among other reasons because the pieces are not included in the detailed list of gifts specified by German historians and because the presence of a “Queen” as the important piece in this lot would make the hypothesis unviable, given that **the Saracens never used a Queen in this game.**



The sixteen pieces all belong to the same type, being a clearly Byzantine nature, and the stylistic studies carried out by Kluge-Pinsker and Pastoreau convincingly related them with the ivory factory at Amalfi-Salerno (27).

Dating of the pieces has been established between 1080 and 1095, almost two hundred years after the death of the characters of the legend, with their tremendous size exacting a board with a length of at least 1.20 m.

### England

Chess, or on a minimum level the 8x8 chessboard, must have been present in England by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, because the Norman Kings used the same as an abacus or instrument for calculation, thus controlling the Kingdom's accounts. This is where the term "Exchequer" arises, term that is still in use today for the Minister of Finance, the same in fact being a corruption of the word "Eschequer" or "Eschiquier", quite probably of Norman origin.

### The attitude of the Church towards Chess

In like manner to the other two important monotheist religions, the tone used by the Christian Church's hierarchy when referring to the game is one of rejection, or at least of distrust.

The reaction is similar in the Byzantine Church (28).

A more than different attitude is that of Christian monks from several convents, in particular pertaining to the Benedictine order, which appear early on and demonstrate a positive acceptance of Chess.

We have already commented that the Benedictine Abbey of **Einsiedeln** drew-up the **first educational treatise about Chess in Latin, describing the names of the pieces and the chessboard as a recent invention used by some players to facilitate calculation of the moves.**

The Abbey of **San Egidio in Nîmes**, likewise Benedictine, receives a number of donations of Chess sets from Catalan Counts from the Pyrenees region by way of repeated testamentary dispositions, which in fact represent the oldest European documents that are conserved that make mention to Chess. The convent of **San Julian de Bar** also received a Chess set. And in the case of the Benedictine Abbey of **Reichenau**, close to Lake Constance, a series of mathematical and astronomic Arab texts that serve to elaborate a treatise about a board game somewhat more complicated than Chess are used, this being “Rytmomachia” (described several centuries later in Gustavus Selenus’ treatise).

The **Cologne Cathedral** had held three Chess sets, which have currently disappeared, one of which was from Nordic Europe and the other two from the Iberian Peninsula.

The **Abbey of St. Denis** in France held the Charlemagne pieces right up until their recent transfer to the “*Cabinet des Médailles*” in the National Library of Paris.

The abbey of **San Mauricio** in the Valois conserved diverse Muslim Chess pieces in their treasure (one of the richest of Christianity) (29).

The first written treatise in England is the one called by Murray **Poem of Winchester** (a Latin poem written by a Winchester Monk), dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (30).

The complete title given by Hyde is *De Sahiludio: poema tempore Saxonum exaratum*. It can be found in the Bodleiana Library in Oxford, jointly bound with an aggressively anti-Vatican criticism titled *Contra simoniacam Romam*.

Alexander **Neckam** (1157-1217), Abbot of the Augustine Monastery of Cirencester, during the later years of his life wrote *De Naturis Rerum*, in which a brief educational chapter about Chess can be found following a chapter on dice (*Ludus scaccorum*), which starts with Ulysses’ attachment to the game. Van der Linde reproduces the complete Latin text (I, pages 147-148).

*The pieces are “Rex”, “Regina”, “Senex”, “Miles”, “Rochus” and “Pedes”. With regards to “Roque”, he mentions that it had been called “Janus Biceps”, reason why the piece had been designed with two heads.*

For Neckam the invulnerability of the King is a consequence of his privileged dignity, which impedes his capturing (*cujus est privilegiata dignitas, ut capi non queat*). To reinforce this fact Neckam makes reference to a historical episode: during a skirmish close to Gisors, in the year 1110, Louis VI of France was almost made prisoner. An English Knight placed his hands on him and shouted that the King had been captured. “Ignorant and insolent Knight: not even in the game of Chess can the King be captured!” said the Monarch... *Et gladium vibrans, ictu fulmineo corpus militis in duas divisit portiones.*

The Franciscan William de Malsmesbury also mentions Chess at some point in the year 1140, the same in a marginal context.

### *The Isle of Lewis pieces,*



The so-called Lewis chessmen, found in 1831, are along with the French St. Denis pieces part of one of the most important representational treasures of the iconography of Chess pieces. The original 78 piece lot was already distributed in

the 19<sup>th</sup> century between the Museum of Edinburgh, the British Museum and private collections. All the pieces are made of walrus tusk and they are attributed to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Some theories exist that connect the style of carving with Iceland.

### *Nordic Europe*

Norman invasions in the Mediterranean appear to have played their own role in that pertaining to Nordic Europe. The Nordics had their own regional board game that was called “*hnefatafl*”, exact nature of which has not been elucidated, although in the literary passages in which it appears it has occasionally been flippantly translated as Chess.

Supposedly Chess had already been introduced in places such as **Iceland** by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, game that gradually displaced “*hnefatafl*”, exact nature

of which has not been elucidated, although in the literary passages in which it appears it has occasionally been flippantly translated as Chess. Hnefatafl is not played on an 8 by 8 board, but always on odd boards of 7 by 7, 9 by 9 or so squares. The theory is very plausible that it is practically identical with Finnish “*tablut*”, so we know it rather well.

Supposedly Chess had already been introduced in places such as **Iceland** by the 12<sup>th</sup> century and gradually displaced “*hnefatafl*”

Prof. Fiske bases the introduction of this date on some of the Icelandic names given to the Chess pieces such as “*hrokur*” for the Rook and “*biskup*” for the Bishop or Knight (“*bishop*” in English) and on the fact that towards the middle of this century three prominent Icelanders visited England. The matter is questioned in part by Murray. (At any rate, Chess became unusually popular in Iceland and even nowadays this country represents the most important Chess dominion in the world in proportion to its population of 300,000).

On the other hand **documentary testimonies** are later-dated and confusing, having been revised by Prof. Daniel Fiske. Chess appears as a motif in diverse mythological sagas of diverse dating, but beginnings since in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The “Snorri Sturluson” Saga (Olafs Saga Helga), written towards the year 1230 is accepted as a first reference (31).

An abnormally high number of **medieval Chess pieces from Nordic Europe** exist, which have been conserved up until our days, and the presence of Norman “Alquerque of three” game boards suggests that some boards games formed part of the direct cultural exchange with Viking seafarers of the Mediterranean.

Two Chess figurines have been recently discovered in **Lund** (Sweden) in the urban centre constructed by King Knut the Great in 1020. The abstract throne of the two figurines might be representing either a King or a Queen, although one is made of rock crystal, while the other is made of wood. These have been dated in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and they are conserved in the Kulturhistoriska Föreningen för Södra Sverige (Kluge-Pinsker, Catalogue A41).

A 4 cm high figurine made of walrus tusk was found in **Roskilde** (Seeland, Denmark), which represents an armed guardian or sentry holding a sword and shield and covered with a coat of mail. It is dated somewhere between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, without its exact date being known. It is conserved in the National Museum in Copenhagen (num. 13111).

Chess pieces dating from the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century or early 12<sup>th</sup> century have been found in **Poland**. These were found in the ancient urban centre, discovered in the wooden houses of the city of Sandomierz and they are conserved in a Museum in Warsaw (Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Historii Kultury Materialnej). The material is deer antler and the design is typical Islamic abstract. All the pieces are present, as is the case with both sides, one with 12 pieces and the other with 16 (Cat. A38).

The first written reference in **Hungary** is relatively subsequent to that of its neighbouring countries. In the year 1335 King Robert sent a “*tabulae pro scacis*” as a gift to the King of Bohemia. In Czechoslovakia a dictionary dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century provides a complete list of regional terms for Chess with its precedent Latin distortions.

In the far **Baltic**, the colonies founded by the Teutonic Order and subsequent Hanseatic commercial ties could and must have included Chess. The only written accreditation is the permanence of a manuscript on Chess based on the allegories of John of Wales that is held in a Monastery in Reval (**Estonia**), and information that a trader from Riga (**Latvia**) was nicknamed “**Shajmat**”.

## Notes

- (1) *The knowledge related with Chess was reinforced by the numerous Arab translations of Greek and Persian texts about astrology, mathematics, dream interpretation, predictions and magical arts in general, "the amalgam of which with those from the Arab or ancient traditions slowly became natural in Islam as is summarised by Father Pareja.*
- (2) *"Byzantine influences, which from a cultural point of view had been hegemonic under the Omeyyans, were then substituted during the Abbasid period by others of an Iranian type, given that the force of a new dynasty resided in Persia". "La cultura hispano-arabe en oriente y occidente" Juan Vernet Barcelona 1978 p 16)*
- (3) *Chess was played on a regular basis in the Court of Al Mahdi, despite his reticence, and a poet of Persian origin called Abu Hafs was nicknamed in the same Court as "As Shatrangi, the Chess Player", because of his skills and capacity to play blindfolded.*

*The Caliphate of Harun ar Rashid (786-809) has found its place in history with a seal of cultural splendour. The attitude of the Caliph of the "Thousand and One Nights" to Chess cannot be evaluated with this text because it was written at a later date and with a legendary nature, as is likewise the case with the brief historical*



mention made in the letter from Emperor Nicephorus. However, four mentions exist that relate the Caliph with Chess and that prove a rather ambivalent attitude on Ar Rashid's part. On the other hand his three sons and successors were fond lovers of Chess in varying degrees.

Two significant anecdotes are conserved about the **first**, al Amin (year of death 198/813) referring to his love of the game. One of them portrays him playing Chess during a military campaign, postponing an audience with an important messenger until his game had been finished. In another he wins the match while playing with a Courtesan who had wagered his overcoat, finally presenting him with his own as a gift.

With the accession to the throne of his **second** son Arun ar Raschid, Al-Mamun (year of death 218/833), fanatical follower of the Mutaziles and Shiites, (**Shiites defended the legitimacy of Ali, son-in-law of Mohammed and his descendents, while the Sunnis supported the Caliph Chain that arose with the Omeyyans**) the course of the political-religious doctrines took a change and the Caliph himself declared by Decree that Ali was the most excellent of creatures after Mohammed and that the Mutazil Doctrine of the Koran was the only true one. Al Mamun played Chess with a passion, and he enjoyed the company of good players, such as those called Rabrab, Jabir al Kufi and al Ansari. An anecdote makes reference to the fact that he would distress them with his presence, reason why he said: "Chess and reverence are not a good combination. You must behave as if you were alone." According to his most famous sentence, Al Mamun's enthusiasm for Chess does not appear to have been corresponded with success in his game:

**"It is indeed curious that I who have dominated the world from India to Andalusia, am unable to dominate a two-cubit by two-cubit long chessboard".**

- (4) In some it is difficult to distinguish between embryonic elements from the games that arose in Persia and those overprinted by the Arab "**Shatransh**"
- (5) (The oldest known in Uzbekistan is based on a Persian model dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> century).
- (6) "Hindues, Greeks, Persians, Byzantines and other peoples that played Chess have described the different shapes, movements and rules of the game, as well as its peculiarities and the placing of the pieces". ( Al Masudi *The Meadows of Gold*, Kejan NY 1989)
- (7) **As is demonstrated by Masudi's text, the game that the Arabs designated with the word "Shatransh" does not refer to a unique model, but to a complete family of board games that, despite being related between each other, are in fact a result of diverse natures, with Islamic literature presenting Chess not as an isolated sample, but surrounded by a multi-coloured group of variations that offer interesting material for reflection in order to approach the cultural ambience of the origins of Chess.**
- (8) Abundant bibliography exists about Greek and Roman board games, although none that actually establishes their identity with Chess.

- (9) *“The first century of Muslim occupation (our 8<sup>th</sup> century) was absolutely poor and sterile from a cultural point of view, given that **the invaders, men of war, were practically illiterate**, matter that subsequent historians such as Ibn al Outtiva or Ibn Tumhus never attempted to conceal”. Practically the same documentary gap exists in Arab literature covering the Eastern domains during the 8<sup>th</sup> century, as was the case in Al Andalus. (“El Esplendor de Al Andalus”, Henri Pérez, Hiperion 1953)*

*Already since the independent Caliphate of Cordoba, the role played by the Arab-Andalusian culture in the transmission of Chess to Europe, surpasses by far any other place, both in documented antiquity, as well as in volume and weight of the whole of information. **In like manner to the East, texts in which Chess is unequivocally mentioned do not appear in Cordoba until the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the Andalusí capital started to become the cultural focal point of the Islam that rivalled with Baghdad.***

- (10) *Five orders or “al-hakam al hamsa”:*

1. **Fard or Wajib:** necessary actions, omission of which is punishable and execution of which is deserving of reward. The obligation may be either individual or collective.
2. **Mandub, Mustahab:** recommended actions, execution of which is deserving of reward, although its omission does not imply punishment.
3. **Yaiz, Mubah:** actions that are morally indifferent.
4. **Makruh:** reprehensible actions that are not subject to punishment.
5. **Haram:** forbidden actions, subject by law to penalisation.

- (11) *“I heard Malik say that there is nothing good about Chess. He considered it “haram”. I heard him denounce the game of Chess and other vanities as “haram”, quoting the Shura X, 33: “when truth has been outraged, what remains if not error?” (“La religiosidad musulmana” P.Felix Pareja Madrid 1975. pag 71)*

- (12) *White was the emblematic colour of the Omeyans (by opposition the Abbasids of Baghdad adopted black as a sign of mourning for the martyrs of the Prophet’s family). In Andalusia, Abd al Rahman I, the Immigrant, the first Omeyan, was also the first to fortuitously adopt white, tying a turban to the lance while in battle.*

- (13) *Wieber details the ten disciplines described in the East by the Vizier Ben Sahl as “the ten refined arts that correspond to an elevated education”, with Chess appearing amongst these. Chess is included in these chivalrous disciplines in the company of **musical training** (specifically Husri mentions the lute), **lance throwing, horseback riding, poetry, archery, knowledge of arithmetic, genealogy, history and the art of narration**. The list of said ten qualities varies slightly from one source to another. (“Das Schaspiel in der Arabischen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Hälfte des 16 Jahrhunderts” R. Wieber 1972)*

- (14) *In a text that appears in the final pages of the Arab Manuscript of Manchester (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries), Abul Abbas ben Juraj (1139-1232) provides the names of the most prominent Chess players in his days of Al Andalus (Man. in Murray)*

- (15) *Mozarabics carried out a considerable task of transmission between the Muslim world and the peninsular Christian Kingdoms (in particular in Castile and Leon). The word Mozarabic comes from “musta’rib, meaning Arabised) and it designates those Christians of Visigoth lineage that lived under Muslim domain between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. On a religious level they did not convert to Islam, although they did adopt the Arab language and culture. Their situation in Andalusian Islam was similar to that of the Jews: forming a separate community, locally regional and paying a special tax in exchange for not serving in the Muslim armies.*
- (16) *A group of Jewish merchants, fearful of the Berbers and Cordovan fundamentalists, was in charge of convincing the Catalan Counts so they would organise the ill-fated military expedition. According to traditional label, gifts formed part of the protocol of said embassies, and it can be suspected that this could have been the origin of some of the valuable Chess sets that appear in the Urgell possessions.*
- (17) *The dissident Fatimid Dynasty governed Egypt between the years of 969 and 1171. Rock crystal objects belonging to its Caliphs have been conserved, or documents that mention them. Experts in the matter such as Lamm (from whom the Camón Aznar information is taken) attached the art of carving hard stones to a remote Egyptian tradition connected with the Hellenic and Mesopotamian culture. (“Mittelalterliche Glässer und Steinschmitter beaten aus den Naher Osten” C.J. Lamm, Berlin 1930)*
- (18) *Once Chess arises far removed from Muslim influence in some points of Europe, pieces are no longer abstract but representational and the Kings, Knights or Soldiers are represented as small sculptures, more or less elaborate (the better known pieces from amongst many examples are those called the “Charlemagne Pieces” from the Abbey of St. Denis in France or the Isle of Lewis Pieces).*
- (19) *The legend tells that the noise of the river was a hindrance to the Saint’s meditation, who ordered it to be silent, a silence that gave place to the name of the Valley.*
- (20) *The first wave of Arab sciences translated from Latin irradiated to Europe from the Pyrenees monasteries. The geographic path that was followed was that of the Rhone Valley towards the Rhine Valley, which was the same route used by the Jewish Merchants to acquire slaves in the Verdun Market, slaves destined to castration in the Eunuch factories of Almeria and Lucena. Some monasteries, fundamentally Benedictine, appeared as intermediate links in the lines of Chess dissemination, which superimpose on the cultural ones in general: San Egidio in Nîmes, Einsiedeln in Switzerland or Reichenau in Germany.*
- (21) *Experts in the matter attach the art of carving hard stones to a remote Egyptian tradition connected with the Hellenic and Mesopotamian culture, culture which was then revitalised during the period of Fatimid domain in Northern Africa.*
- (22) *The style of the Urgell-Lleida pieces is the same as other Islamic crystal pieces that are distributed throughout Europe, such as those in the Osnabrück Cathedral.*

*The Rooks “roques” in both lots are almost twins in that pertaining to their configuration, as is likewise the case with the enormous rock crystal King found in the Halberstadt Cathedral.*

- (23) *The Knights have a cylinder for a base, with lateral incisions. The head shows a protuberance that projects forward, which abstractedly recalls the head of the animal. Differences in size suggest that the pieces belonged to at least two different sets.*

*The Kings are represented in crystal block form, recalling a throne or seat, this being due to the deep perpendicular incisions on their upper part.*

*The two Bishops also belong to two different sets. Their shape is cylindrical, with two protuberances in the upper part, which is narrower, recalling the two tusks of an elephant. (R. Calvo IGK presentation Amsterdam 2001) In 1994, the Professor Hollender had another theory*

- (24) *The objective of the risky expedition was to support the Cordovan Hispanic-Muslim faction in the fierce Civil War (the word used by Arab historians being “fitna”, Arab word that is difficult to translate, often used to refer to Civil War) that confronted them with the African Berbers. In fact, the manner in which Armengol’s will is drafted suggests that it was dictated by someone who considered that death was imminent.*
- (25) *Arnau Mir de Tost, of the Urgell Family, was Lord of the Ager Villa, deep in the heart of the strategic valley found northeast of Lleida, which in Medieval times was part of the Jacobean routes. Arnau Mir de Tost constructed the San Pedro Collegiate Church, nowadays in ruins, and quite likely this is where the three complete crystal sets mentioned in his will were held (a total of 96 pieces). In the year 1547 the Abbot of Ager, Juan Sobrino, made an inventory, mentioning: **“a wooden box with 44 crystal pieces, said to be Chess pieces. Who donates them is unknown, and it is thought that they were donated by the Count of Urgell”**. Centuries later only 44 pieces remained of the original 96, these being the same 44 pieces that the traveller Villanueva saw in Ager towards the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (“El ajedrez” Brunet y Bellet, Barcelonna 1890 pag 215), commenting in passing that these were not the only ones existing in Spanish churches. Transcription of the mentioned inventory made by Juan Sobrino is owed to Villaneuva, transcription that is now impossible to locate.*

*The pieces were seen by Brunet i Bellet in the year 1887, who in vain attempted to purchase them from the Parish Priest Francesch Mora. Shortly after, when Brunet had already published the description of the more elaborate lot of about 10 pieces, these appear in Paris in 1907 in the catalogue of the Countess of Bearn, Madame Béhague. The antiquary from Barcelona, Mr. Fontdevila, born in Ager, intervened in the transaction. From the 34 pieces remaining in Ager, 17 disappeared and the other 17 are those still remaining in the Diocese Museum of Lleida, which have already been commented. Comparatively this is the crudest lot, although perhaps it may also be the oldest.*

*The 10 pieces that were taken to Paris were auctioned off in 1980, having been acquired by the Emir of Kuwait, who placed them in the National Museum of his country. During the Persian Gulf War Iraqi soldiers expropriated these pieces and*

*they were only returned to Kuwait in 1992. The Islamic circle traced by the pieces is thus completed, having lasted almost exactly a millennium from the moment they were forged in rock crystal by an anonymous Muslim silversmith.*

- (26) *Given the extreme care that characterised Einsiedeln's scriptorium, the initial vicissitudes of the sheet with the poem may suggest a somewhat contemptuous treatment of a matter such as Chess.*
- (27) *Brunet y Bellet ("El ajedrez" investigaciones sobre su origen Barcelona 1890, pp 233ss) erroneously accepted the theory of its origin in Byzantium, due to the small chapels where the main figurines were found, its round arches, ornamentations, the general style of the figurines and their robes, all of which more or less indicate the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, suggesting that the game could have been sent by Empress Irene, who reigned from 797-802 or by her successor Nicephorus, with whom Charlemagne had held friendly relationships and embassies. "The pieces, due to their size, skill and beauty, must have been destined to a noble personage. It is to be supposed that they were presented to Charlemagne by a sovereign of the Lower Empire, rather than being a gift from a Moor Prince to Spain or from Caliph Harun al Raschid who made far more generous gifts to the Emperor of the West" (Fr. Madden Archeologia, vol. XXIV, London 1832. Publication of the Society of Antiquaries of London).*
- (28) *Towards the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Monk Juan Zonares mentions that the Clergy that plays Chess and drinks wine must be relieved of their posts and the Italian Clergy argued in vain that one thing was dice, expressly forbidden, and another quite different was Chess, tacitly tolerated. (Murray, "A History of Chess" pp 166-167)*
- (29) *Even so compulsive gamblers do appear on occasion, as is the case of King Louis of France. In the year 1250, in the vessel that was taking him from Egypt to the Holy Land, he threw a game of Chess overboard, along with the game of dice that his brothers were playing and in 1254 he forbid all games in his kingdoms, without excluding the game of Chess. ( « Histoire de St Louis »: Jean de Joinville , Ed N de Wailly, Paris 1881 LXXIX, reference in « L'Echiquier de Charlemagne » Adam Pastoreau, Adam Biro Paris 1990 pag 19-23) )*
- (30) *The translation of Winchester's poem reads: "he who wishes to play the game of war must order the pieces on the plains of the "board". First the King ("Rex"), to his right the Queen ("Regina") and then the Barren ("Calvus") as the Guardian... following the Man on Horse ("Equestris") and the two-faced Rook ("Bifrons Rochus") at the end of the line... the Pawns ("Pedestris") the battle they start. Straight forward they walk, never recoiling, and in diagonal they capture. The Barren Headed Leader in diagonal he moves to a third square. As the Thief he is, he is the one to lay an ambush. The Knight ("Eques") takes the Knight, the Pawn the Pawn, the Rook the Rook, but the Barren Heads agree to never each other harm. Nor may a Queen interfere with another, as dedicated they are to the service of their King as guardians. The Queen she governs two diagonal squares in all directions. When the Pawn the final line he reaches, his name is changed, being called "Ferzia", adopting the movements of the Queen. The King is invulnerable.*

When attacked “check”(“scachum”) is to be uttered. Then to another cell he must move, and if not possible then checkmate(“scacha-mattum”) it is”.

- (31) In the “**Bragda-Magus Saga**” two descriptions of three-match Chess games are found, which include some technical terms already instituted in Icelandic Chess. In one of the narrations, King Jatmundur confronts Jarl Hirtungur, wagering the ransom that had been delivered for the captive princess. The King lost the three matches, one by “hroksmat”, (check with the Rook), another by “pedsmat”, with the Pawn and the third by the most humiliating of all checkmates, the “frestertumat”, which was executed with the King’s Pawn.

In the other story King Lodovikus bets three gold rings against the 16-year old son of Röngvald in exchange for his father’s head. Once again the King loses the three matches and in a furious fit of rage he beats the young boy with the bag containing the Chess pieces, to the point of making the boy bleed. Röngvald’s older brother, who was called Vingvard, then kills the King with his battle axe.

Other Icelandic sagas dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century are the “Kroka-Refs Saga” which speaks of a list of gifts sent by King Harald of Denmark from Greenland in which a Chess set made of walrus tusks is included, adding that the board served to play both Chess and a board game called “hneftafl”, quite probably because each game was played on one side of the board.

The “Viglungar Saga” and “Hervarar Saga” already occasionally refer to technical details (“A history of Chess”H.J.R.Murray pp 444).