



WHO were the first people to play chess? Unfortunately, the answer cannot be given, for the origin of chess is lost in obscurity. Among famous people credited with its invention are Japheth, Shem, King Solomon, Aristotle, Semiramis, and Zenobia, but in all cases the authority rests on fable or their knowledge of similar games.

Undoubtedly games of skill resembling chess existed many thousands of years ago. Painting in Egyptian tombs show early examples, while ancient Sanskrit records show that in India and Ceylon a game resembling chess was known to the Hindus. Probably the best-known fable relating to the game's invention is the story that the minister of a Persian tyrant made up chess to show his master how dependant he was on his court. His own power was hardly greater than that of his poorest subject—the pawn.

Van der Linde, in 1874, published an exhaustive work on the history of the game in which he credited the Hindus as the originators of chess. According to the Hindu religion war is criminal and the punishment of the warrior in the next world much worse than that of the common murderer. Hence chess was invented as a substitute for war.

Generally the authorities agree that chess is a descendant of the early Indian game played in the 7th century. It was introduced into Europe via Persia, after its conquest by the Arabs. From Persia came the terms check and check-mate (Persian "Shak mat"—the King is dead.) The old theory that the Crusaders brought chess back with them has been discredited by the discovery of a manuscript proving that it was known in Europe before the First Crusade. Probably the Byzantines and the Spanish acquired the game directly from the Arabs, and the Crusaders increased its popularity.

Modern chess probably started in France and thence made its way to

Spain, where appeared, in 1560, Ruy Lopez de Segura, considered to be the first analyst of the chess world, and whose favourite opening, the Ruy Lopez, is still one of white's strongest resources. At the same time, there was an Italian school, and its leading masters, Leonardo Da Cutri and Paolo Boi, visited Spain and defeated their Spanish antagonists. Popular openings in Italy were the Giuoco Piano and Sicilian Defence, still popular, particularly the latter, with modern players.

In the 17th century, there was only one player of note, Giacchino Greco, whose wild counter gambit is still a problem to chess analysts. The middle of the 18th century inaugurated a new era in chess. Francois Andre Damian Philidor (1726-95) was the leading player of the period, and the first really to merit the title of "grand master." He visited many countries during his career, winning every match and seldom losing a game.

His style gave chess a new lease of life, and as well he revived blindfold play, playing three strong players simultaneously without sight of men or board in the St James Club, London. Philidor was a Frenchman, and France was the leading chess country during his life and that of his successors. Deschappelles (1780-1847) and Louis de La Bourdonnais kept Paris in the chess

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 ♦ This is an introductory ♦
 ♦ article to a Chess Column ♦
 ♦ which will appear regularly. ♦
 ♦ This column will not feature ♦
 ♦ problems but will concentrate ♦
 ♦ rather on principles of play ♦
 ♦ and illustrative games from ♦
 ♦ the major tournaments, which ♦
 ♦ can be played over by those ♦
 ♦ interested on their own ♦
 ♦ boards. This article is written, ♦
 ♦ and the column will be con- ♦
 ♦ ducted by a well-known New ♦
 ♦ Zealand player, a provincial ♦
 ♦ champion before coming ♦
 ♦ overseas.
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