

GREAT MOVES:
Learning Chess Through History
From Lucena to Morphy

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Part I.

Chess: Origins and Development

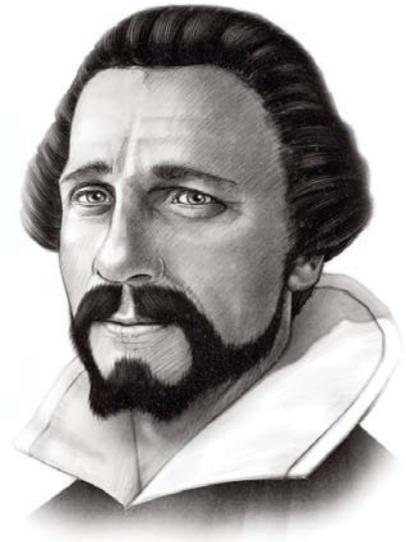
The Beginning of Modern Chess: Luis Ramírez de Lucena (Spain, c.1465-c.1530)

The beginning of modern chess coincides with the beginning of an era known as the Renaissance, a word which literally means “rebirth.” After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, Europe entered a period of almost five hundred years of wars, famine, and disease that destroyed over half the population of the continent. Around the year 1000, small nation-states were organized around a feudal system where land was owned by lords and worked by peasants in exchange for a portion of the crops. Knights provided security which allowed the peasants, for the most part, to remain in the fields even in times of conflict. Over time, greater food production led to a higher level of prosperity for all, even though the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the very few. Although the term “middle class” would not be used until the mid-1700s, merchants, accountants, lawyers, clerics, and other professionals became a distinct group in society, still ranked below the nobility, but significantly more affluent than the peasant class. Driven in part by greater numbers of people entering the middle class, the medieval era evolved into the Renaissance with an increasing demand for education and a philosophy focused on the great potential of the human spirit.

Renaissance writers began creating works for the masses; one of the best-known writers in history is William Shakespeare, whose plays are still performed today. Renaissance artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael celebrated the beauty of the world. Leonardo da Vinci was not only an acclaimed artist, he was an inventor whose sketches of parachutes, helicopters, and tanks would not be realized until hundreds of years later.¹

The early Renaissance is often called the Age of Discovery because of the advances in navigation. Great expeditions were searching out new lands, from Christopher Columbus’s three voyages to the Americas in the 1490s to Ferdinand Magellan’s attempt to circumnavigate the globe beginning in 1519.

The Renaissance was also a period of scientific revolution. In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus put forward the radical notion that the Sun was the center of the solar system with the Earth revolving around it. Previous thought was that the Sun revolved around the Earth. Even though his contention contradicted the teachings of the Catholic Church, Pope Gregory XIII believed the young Polish astronomer was correct and used



Luis Ramírez de Lucena

¹ Da Vinci provided some of the illustrations for a manuscript about chess authored by his friend, Luca Pacioli, around the year 1500. A mathematician, Pacioli is known today as the “father of accounting.”

PART I. Chess: Origins and Development

Copernicus's theory to support his introduction of the Gregorian calendar that we still follow today. Other leaders did not welcome these new ideas. It took the discoveries of the Italian astronomer Galileo in 1608 and the publication of *The Laws of Planetary Motion* by the German Johannes Kepler in 1609 to validate what Copernicus had put forward more than sixty years earlier. Later in the century, in 1687, Isaac Newton published his research on gravity and the three physical laws of motion that further changed the way humans understood the universe.

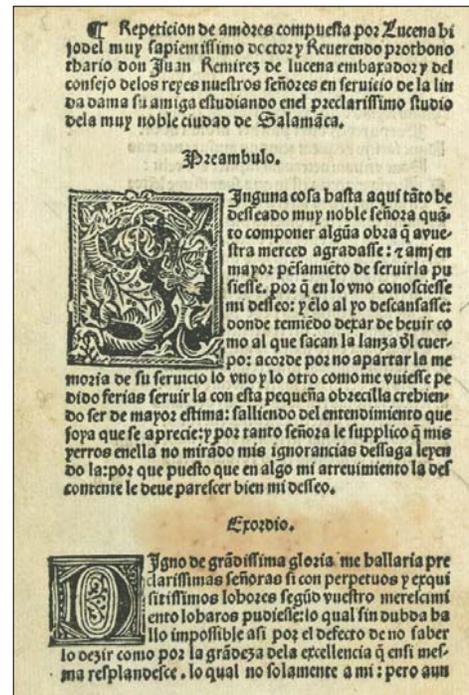
The fact that these ideas were published in books and became readily available to a wide audience helped the Renaissance to spread across most of Europe in a relatively short period of time. Some of the most popular books during the Renaissance were about chess.

The oldest surviving printed book specifically of chess instruction was written by the Spaniard Luis Ramírez de Lucena. Published in 1497, the book was called *Repetition of Love and The Art of Playing Chess*¹ and was dedicated to Prince John of Spain, who had died earlier the same year. Prince John was the son of Ferdinand and Isabella and, like both of his parents, was known to be an excellent chess player.

King Ferdinand II (1452-1516) was an avid chess player and a chess patron, as was his wife, Queen Isabella (1451-1504). Many credit her with increasing the power of the queen to the all-powerful piece we know today. Previously, the queen could move only one space on a diagonal. It was during Lucena's time that the idea of the queen's moving freely across multiple squares became widely accepted, the legend being that Queen Isabella wanted her power represented on the chessboard.

In *The Art of Playing Chess*, Lucena described the differences between the old chess, as played primarily by the Arabs, and the new rules as they were evolving into modern, or European, chess. One of the changes he noted was the queen's increased range of movement.

The rules of chess were not the same from nation to nation. In many countries, a pawn that made it to the other side of the board could be promoted but only to the same piece as the one on its original file. Thus, a pawn that started in front



This opening page of Lucena's book was printed on a Gutenberg-style press using movable type with a woodcut process for the ornaments.



Queen Isabella once led her own troops on the battlefield when a rebellion broke out while King Ferdinand was away. Famous for funding Christopher Columbus's voyages, Isabella's early education included mathematics, music, and chess.

¹ *Repetición de Amores y Arte de Ajedres.*

The Beginning of Modern Chess: Luis Ramírez de Lucena

of either rook could only be promoted to a rook, and *only* if that rook had already been captured. Similarly, a queen's pawn could become a queen only if the original queen had been captured. Most people thought having two queens on the board at the same time was disrespectful; a king could only have one wife at a time. It wasn't until the late 1700s that most European nations accepted the rule allowing multiple queens on the board.

In his book, Lucena analyzed 11 different opening positions and provided 150 other positions, mostly from the endgame. He said he collected these in Rome and across all of Italy, France, and Spain. Lucena also gave an interesting tip on how to win a game of chess: he recommended drinking water, not wine, during a game. Some of his other advice may not sound very sportsmanlike today. He suggested playing your opponent after he had just eaten a full meal and, when playing during the day, seating your opponent so the sun would shine in his eyes.

~ To Do ~

1. Why was it important to ensure that peasants remained working in the fields during times of conflict? _____

2. Why do you think Queen Isabella wanted her power represented on the chessboard? _____

3. Why was it considered disrespectful to have two queens on the board at the same time? _____

4. Why did Lucena recommend drinking water and not wine during a game? _____

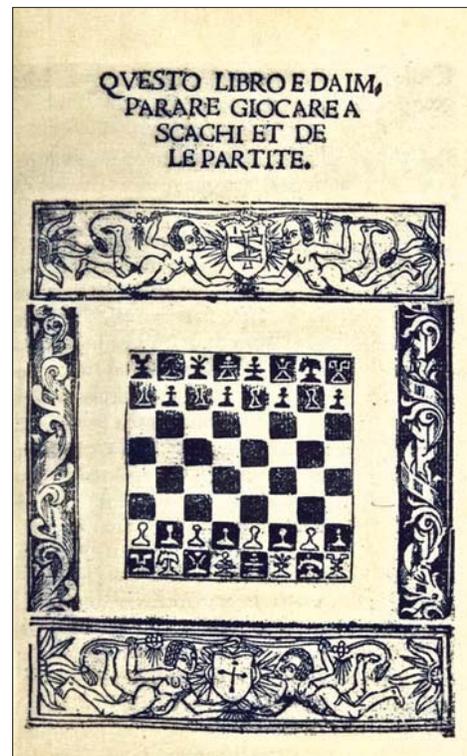
Pedro Damiano (Portugal, 1480-1544)

Fifteen years after Lucena's book, Pedro Damiano, a pharmacist by profession, published his own chess book.

Damiano was a Portuguese chess player who lived in Rome. His book was originally published in Italian in 1512 and went through eight editions. It was also translated into French and then into English in 1562. The English translator dedicated his edition to the First Earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley, an English nobleman who was a close friend of Queen Elizabeth I. The Queen and the Earl were both known to enjoy chess.

Damiano presented the rules of the game; his book is the first to include the rule that a light square should always be on the player's right when setting up the chessboard. He also offered advice. Damiano instructed players not to make their moves too quickly and, when they thought they had found a good move, to keep looking for a better one. Finally, Damiano presented sample problems and included opening analysis. He declared that the only good opening moves for White were 1.e4 or 1.d4, but felt that 1.e4 was better. **Symmetrical openings**, where both players begin the game with identical moves, were the norm in this era, so the usual response was 1...e5 or 1...d5.

Among the openings Damiano analyzed was the **Giuoco Piano**. The Giuoco Piano is an Italian term that in English translates as "the quiet game." Today, more than five hundred years after it was first introduced, the Giuoco Piano remains one of the most popular openings in chess.



Title page from Damiano's book in Italian published in Rome in 1512.

The Giuoco Piano

A basic strategy in chess is to control the center of the board. This is generally achieved by moving center pawns and **developing**¹ **minor pieces** (knights and bishops) onto central squares. **Major pieces** (queen and rooks) are held in reserve because bringing them out at this stage will expose them to attack unnecessarily.

¹ "Development" in chess means to move pieces off their starting squares and into more active positions.

Pedro Damiano

- | | <u>White</u> | <u>Black</u> | |
|----|--------------|--------------|--|
| 1. | e4 | | White begins by moving a center pawn, opening a door for his bishop. |
| 1. | ... | e5 | Black does the same. |
| 2. | Nf3 | | White moves his knight and attacks the e5-pawn. A centralized knight is more powerful because it controls more squares there than it would from the edge of the board. |
| 2. | ... | Nc6 | Black centralizes his knight and defends the e5-pawn. |
| 3. | Bc4 | Bc5 | Each side activates a bishop, again placing it on one of the 16 central squares. |



Giuoco Piano
Position after 3...Bc5

~ To Do ~

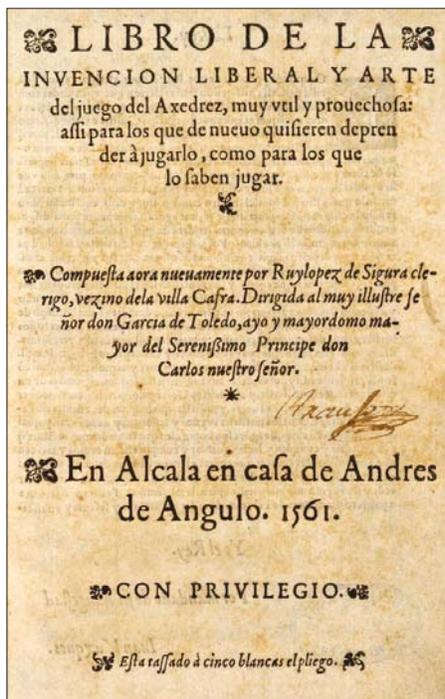
1. Damiano was Portuguese, but his chess book was written in another language. Which language did he write in? _____
2. Can chess moves be understood even if you don't read the language of the text? Explain your answer. _____

3. What is the reasoning behind Damiano's instruction to always look for a better move even when one has found a good move? _____

4. The center is the most important part of the chessboard. On the diagram above, shade in the 16 central squares.

Ruy López de Segura (Spain, c.1530-c.1580)

The first notable modern chess player was Ruy López de Segura. Born in Zafra in southwestern Spain around 1530, López was a priest who became the strongest chess player in his country. In December 1559, Catholic church leaders from around the world came to Rome to elect a new pope. Pope Pius IV was elected on December 25 and installed in an elaborate ceremony on January 6, 1560. One of the priests in attendance was López, who used his spare time to play chess.



López dedicated his book to Don García de Toledo, the military leader who was also a tutor to Don Carlos, the eldest son of King Philip II.



Ruy López de Segura

During his year in Italy, López put on many chess exhibitions and defeated the top players of Rome, bringing honor to his home country. Giacomo Boncompagni, the young Duke of Sora,¹ was a chess patron. The Duke was so impressed with Lopez's chess playing that he gave him an annual stipend of 2000 scudi² a year, an extraordinary sum of money at the time.

While in Rome, López met many players who had studied Damiano and he decided he wanted to publish a book of his own. He started working on it soon after his return to Spain and published the first edition in February 1561. López considered his book a rebuttal to Damiano's work and included many more openings. He also proposed standardizing the rules. One example is the **touch-move rule**, in which López stated that if a player touches a piece, he has to move that piece. Another is the **50-move rule**: if there are no pawn moves or captures for 50 moves, the game is declared a **draw**.³

¹ Sora was a small region south of Rome. It is now a city in Italy.

² Scudi is the plural of "scudo," which was a gold coin used as an international currency; 2000 scudi in Ruy López's time was an extraordinary amount of money!

³ In chess, a "draw" means that neither player wins.

Ruy López de Segura

One of López's major contributions to chess was popularizing an opening which came to be known as the "**Ruy López.**" It consists of the following moves:

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
1.	e4	e5
2.	Nf3	Nc6
3.	Bb5	



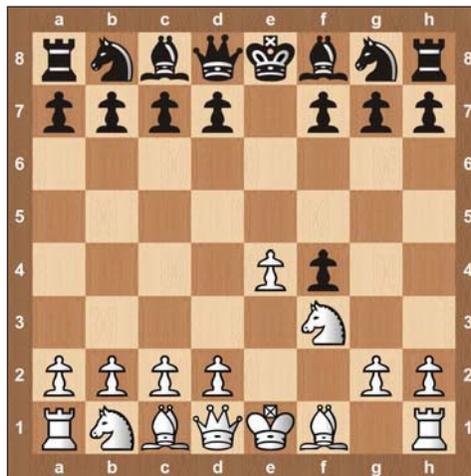
Position after 3...Bb5

López also introduced the word **gambit** to chess. It comes from the Italian word *gambetto*, a wrestling move where one tries to trip the opponent. López used the term for an opening move whereby a player gives up a pawn to develop his pieces more rapidly and gain control of the center of the board. López analyzed several gambits, the best-known of which is the "**King's Gambit**":

The King's Gambit

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	
1.	e4	e5	
2.	f4		White offers his f-pawn to lure Black's pawn away from the center.
2.	...	exf4	Black accepts the gambit.
3.	Nf3		White prevents Black from playing 3...Qh4+ and prepares to take control of the center.

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Position after 3.Nf3

López analyzed several variations and concluded that it would be best for Black to decline the gambit with 2...Bc5.

For 20 years after publishing his book, López remained the strongest player in Spain. His closest rival was Alfonso Cerón of Granada. López and Cerón played before King Philip II, who showed his appreciation by presenting López with a rook on a chain, both made entirely out of gold. And his legacy lives on to this day as the Ruy López is still considered one of the most reliable openings in chess.

~ To Do ~

1. What is a gambit? _____

2. How do you know that King Philip II appreciated chess? _____

3. What is Ruy López best remembered for? _____

4. What rules originally developed by López and Damiano still apply today? _____

The Fork

The **fork** is one of the first attacks that a chess player learns. It occurs when one piece attacks two or more of the opponent's pieces at the same time. The fork is sometimes referred to as a double attack. This powerful **tactic**¹ is commonly used to force a win of material.

One of the first examples of a position featuring a fork is found in Lucena's *The Art of Playing Chess*. He gives the following moves:

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	
1.	e4	e5	These are two random pawn moves that do not help either player's development. They would certainly not be played today.
2.	d3	c6	
3.	Nf3	h6	Another questionable pawn move, its only purpose appears to be to lure White into capturing Black's e5-pawn.
4.	Nxe5?		White takes the bait.



Position after 4. Nxe5

4.	...	Qa5+	The queen checks the king and attacks the knight at the same time. This is a fork. White must get out of check on his next move and Black will reply by capturing the knight.
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¹ A "tactic" is a move that results in an immediate advantage, usually a win of material.

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A more complex example of a fork is found in the following position from a game played by Ruy López against Giovanni Leonardo da Cutri in Rome in 1560. In the Lucena example, the fork was set up as a result of White's error. This time the tactic is the culminating move in a **forced sequence**.¹ Such sequences are known as **combinations**.



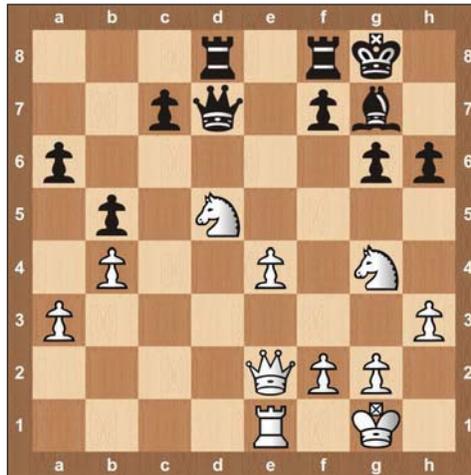
López
Position after 9. Qe6+

	<u>López</u>	<u>Leonardo</u>	
9.	...	Qe7	Blocking the check with the queen is forced because 9...Be7 would result in 10.Qf7 mate.
10.	Qc8+	Qd8	Forced. This is Black's only way to get out of check.
11.	Qxd8+	Kxd8	
12.	Nf7+		Forks the king and rook.
12.	...	Ke8	
13.	Nxf8		Wins the rook.

¹ In chess, a “forcing move” is one that leaves the opponent with only one legal reply, or drastically limits his choices. Examples of forcing moves are checks and captures.

The Fork

Exercise 1. White's knights work together to create a fork that wins material. What are the moves?

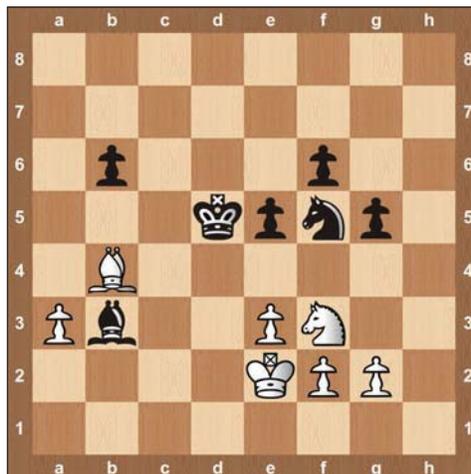


White to move

White Black

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____ wins material.

Exercise 2. White finds two consecutive forks to win material. Can you find them?



White to move

White Black

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____ wins material.

PART I. Chess: Origins and Development

Exercise 3. The following opening trap arises from a **Sicilian Defense** after the moves 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Bc4 e6 4.Nc3 Nf6 5.d3 Be7 6.0-0 Nc6 7.Be3?. This is the wrong square for the bishop. Black now sets up a pawn fork. Can you find it?



Black to move

	<u>White</u>		<u>Black</u>
7.	...		_____
8.		_____	_____
9.		_____	_____