

FRANCESCH VICENT

**First Author and
Master of Modern Chess**



Script: José A. Garzón
Art: Dani Salvador

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FRANCESCH VICENT, First Author and Master of Modern Chess

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**Excmo. Ayuntamiento
de Segorbe**

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INTRODUCTION

The challenge of capturing the life of Francesch Vicent and his profound contribution to modern chess in a comic was a highly complex one. Despite having written several monographs, articles and book chapters about Vicent, summarizing everything, including the latest research, has been an extraordinary task.

I would like to thank Miguel Ángel Malo for his immense, invaluable work over many years, working with Vicent and his legacy at the epicenter. Working with him and Daniel Salvador has been a very rewarding experience, the fruits of which we share today, thanks to the Fundación Valencia Cuna del Ajedrez.

Approaching Vicent and his celebrated book, which is widely considered the Holy Grail of chess, in this format and language has required the utmost rigor and care. Therefore, as the comic itself points out, we have attempted to fill in the gaps in the Segorbian's biography as accurately as possible.

The comic is structured in 4 parts. We begin with Vicent's childhood in Segorbe (1) and his adult life in Valencia (2), which culminates in the publication of his book, the first modern chess treatise, in 1495. Later we explore his Italian period (3), under the protective wing of the Borgia family, where he became Lucrezia's chess teacher, and his contribution to the international expansion of modern chess is recognized in the Book of Damiano (Rome 1512). In the final section (4), we quickly travel through the five centuries that have passed since. Vicent's greatness has only been truly preserved through complex research works, which have made his current recognition possible. Having recovered the contents of the book in 2005, we do not renounce the discovery of the "incunabula" itself, which inaugurated the Modern Age of the king of games.

Incidentally, the comic has various layers or levels of interpretation. As such, it shows the ancient and modern rules, the genesis of the changes, recovering historical concepts and terms that have since been lost to history. Famous figures walk through its pages, such as the poets of "Scachs d'amor," -the founding text of modern chess, which we celebrate on the 550th Anniversary (1475-2025)- the Pope Borgia and his children, great ladies of the Renaissance, distinguished men of the Enlightenment, and renowned bibliophiles, all coming to life on the board of life.

The noble game, so often vilified by other media such as film, advertising, or literature, finds its restitution in this short comic: each chosen position has meaning and is motivated by honor or homage. It is the reader's task to perceive these nuances.

Finally, this work compels us to spare no effort in vindicating the figure and contributions of Vicent, a bulwark of Modern Chess, an extraordinary master, and the first teacher of "Axedres de la Dama". The man who codified and gave to the world the modern way of playing, which millions of chess players globally engage in every day.

José A. Garzón



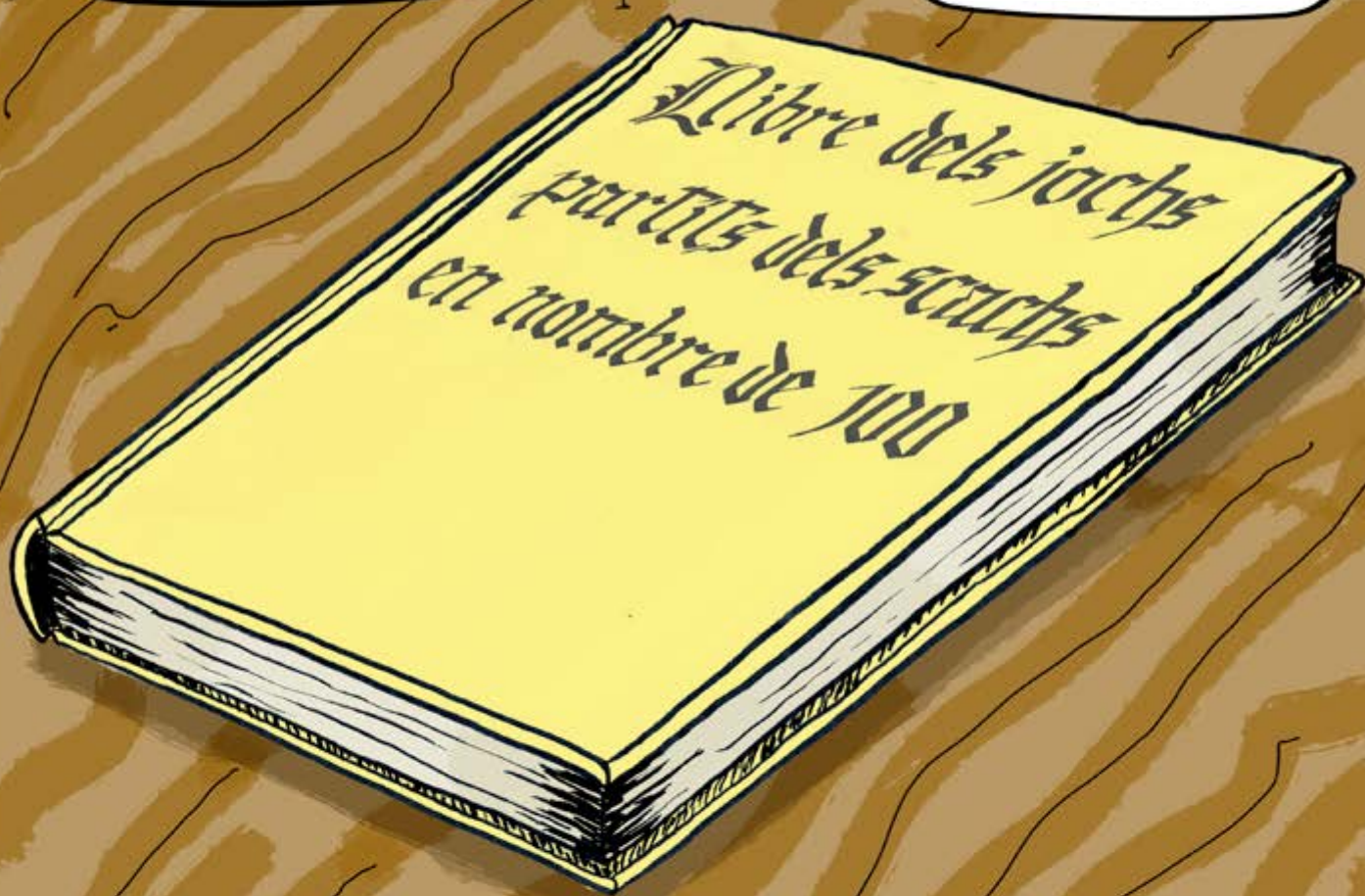
Graphic representation of Valencia in the second half of the 15th century, seen from the Turia River at the height of "Torres de Serranos"

VALENCIA, MAY 15, 1495
HOUSE OF THE BOOKSELLER PERE TRINCHER

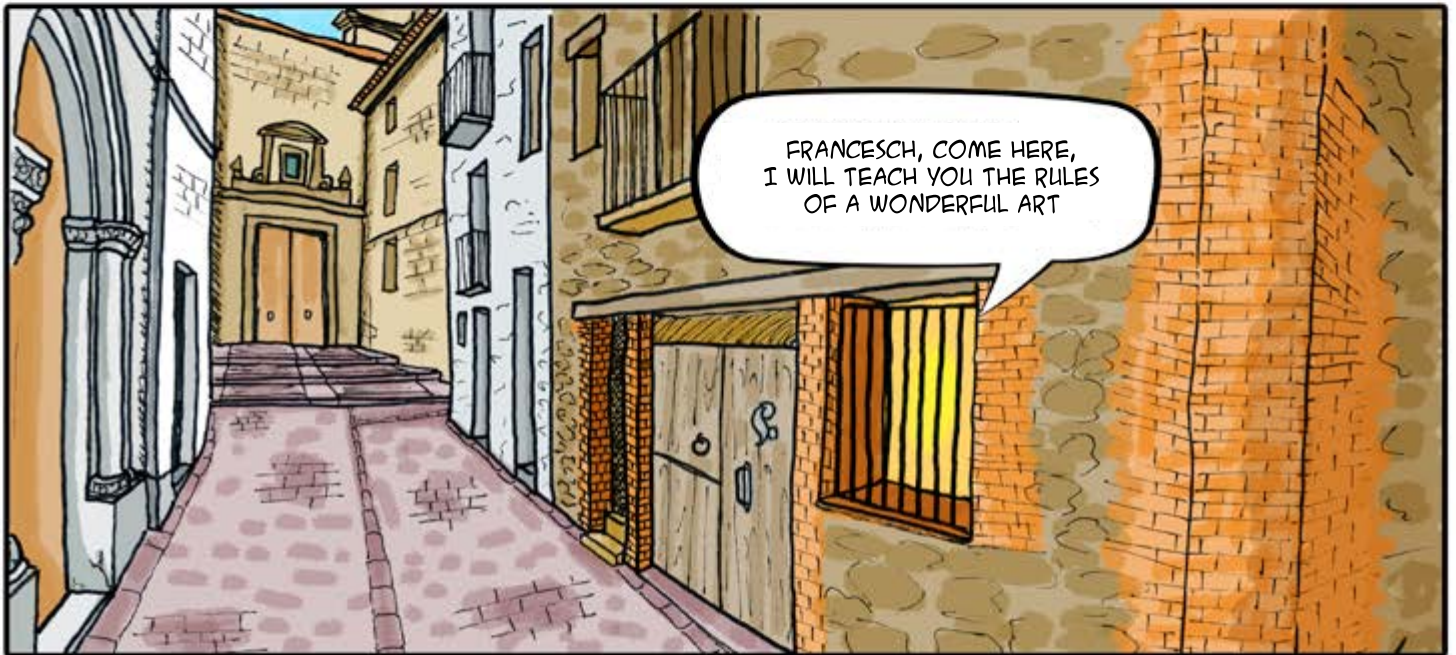
VICENT, WE HAVE IT.
AS WE AGREED, WE HAVE USED
LOPE DE ROCA'S GOTHIC TYPES.

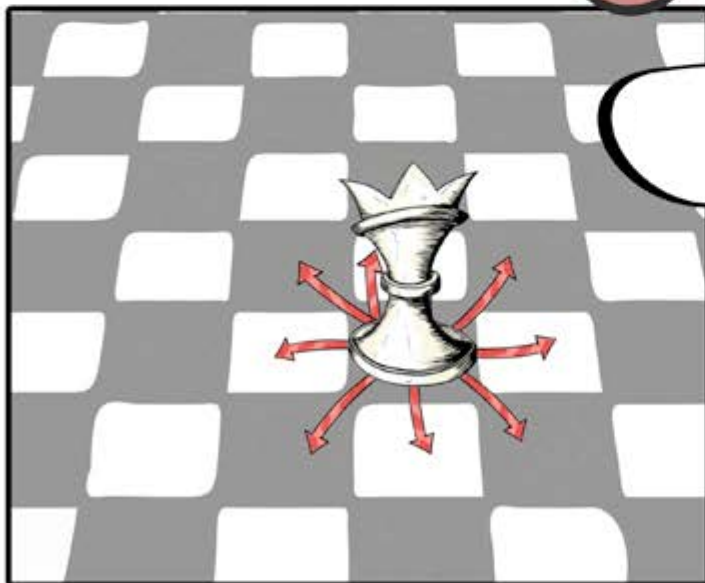
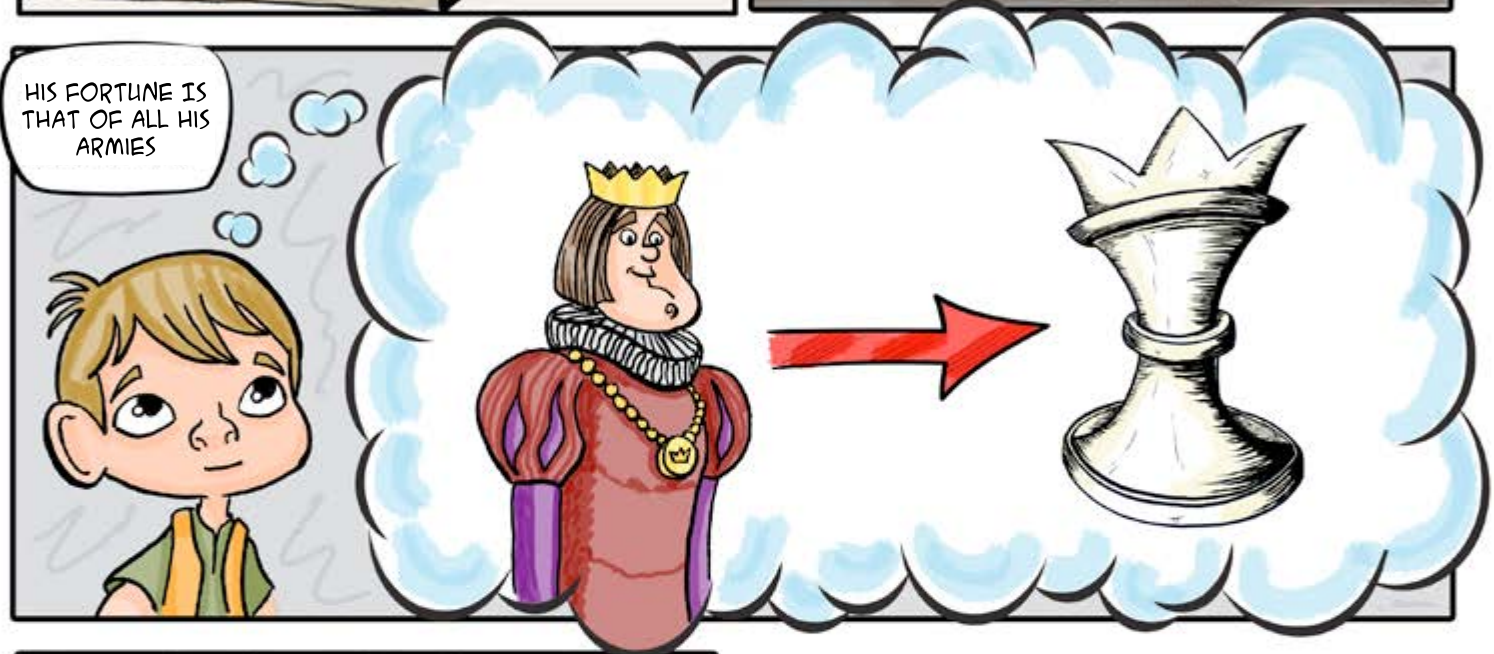
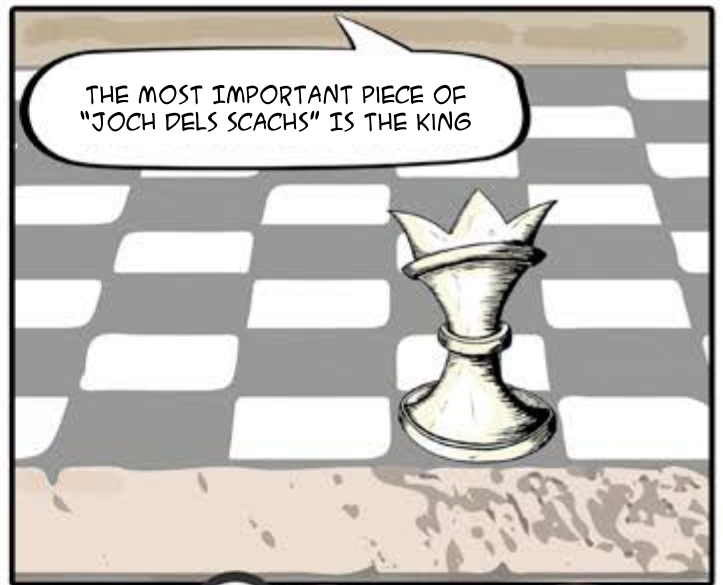
THANK YOU VERY MUCH,
PERE, GREAT JOB.

NOW THE DIE IS
CAST FOR THE NEW CHESS GAME



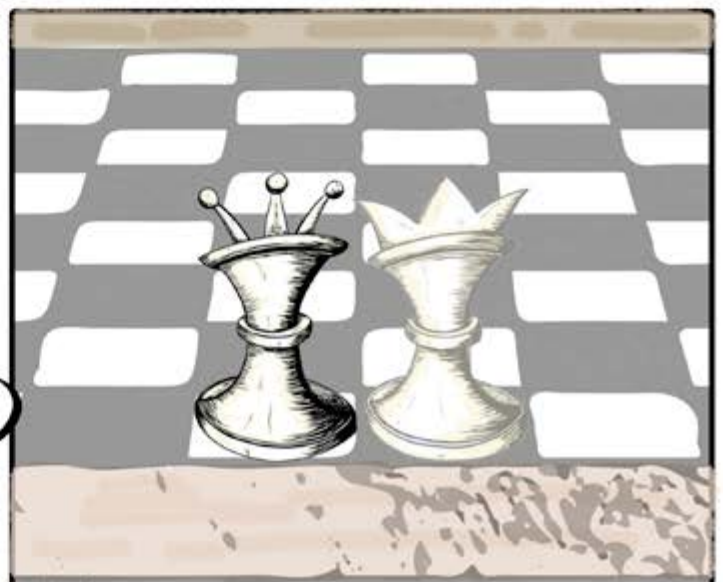
SEGORBE, SECOND HALF OF THE 15TH CENTURY





HE MOVES SQUARE TO SQUARE,
AS HE WISHES,
IN ALL DIRECTIONS

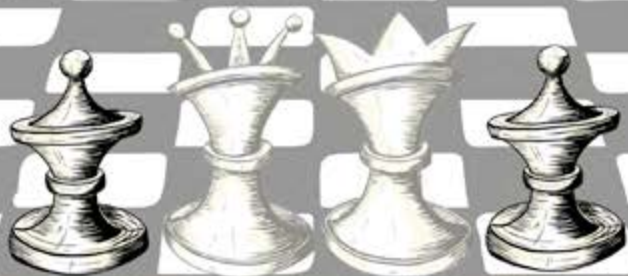
BY HIS SIDE SITS THE "REYNA"



ALTHOUGH THE BEST PLAYERS PREFER TO CALL IT "ALFERZA"*, SINCE IT WAS A MALE PIECE WHEN THE ARABS BROUGHT THE GAME OF "AXEDRES" TO OUR LAND



NEXT, THE "ORFILS"* ARE "ARRANGED"

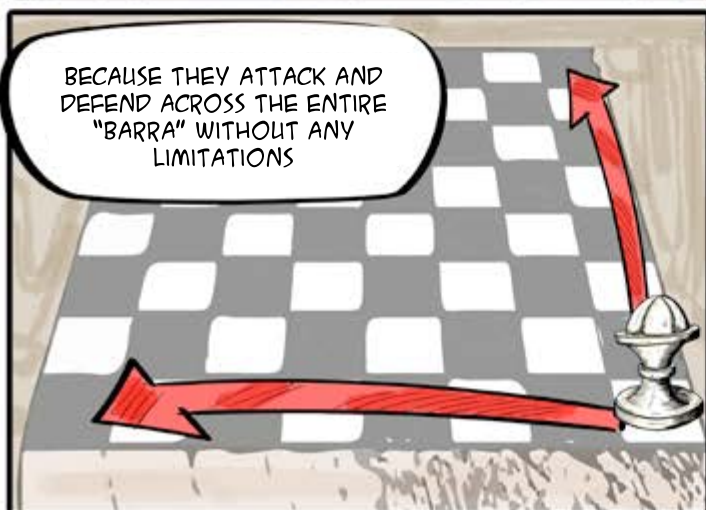
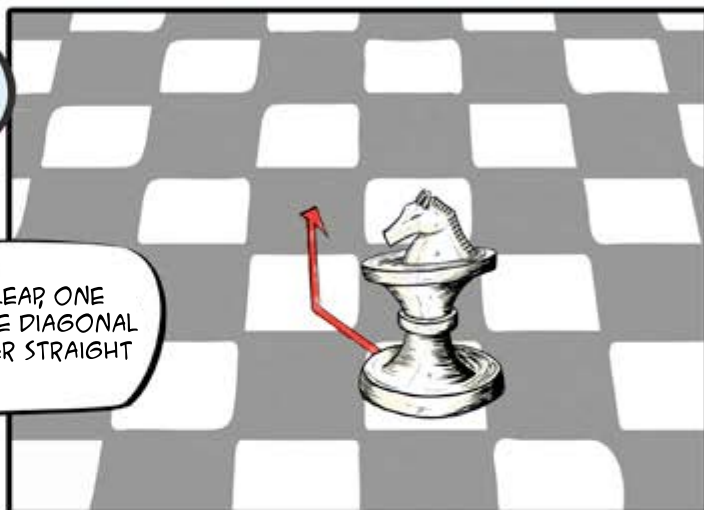


WHICH MOVE BY LEAPING TWO SQUARES, IN "SOSQUINO"



*ALFERZA = WAS THE EQUIVALENT OF A VIZIER OR ROYAL ADVISOR

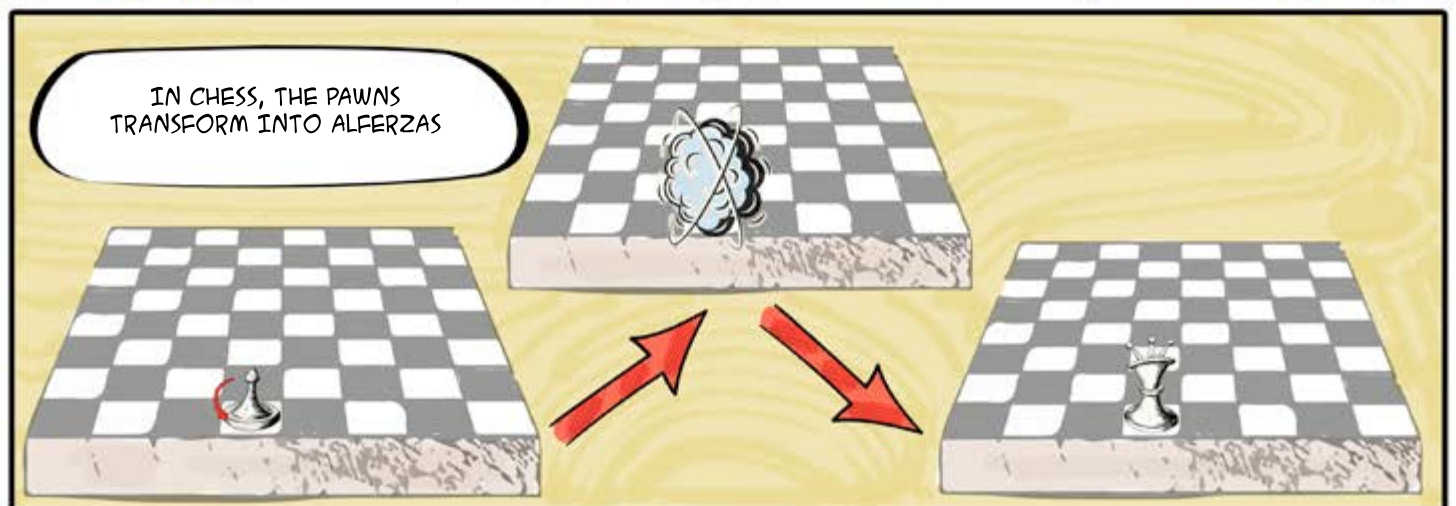
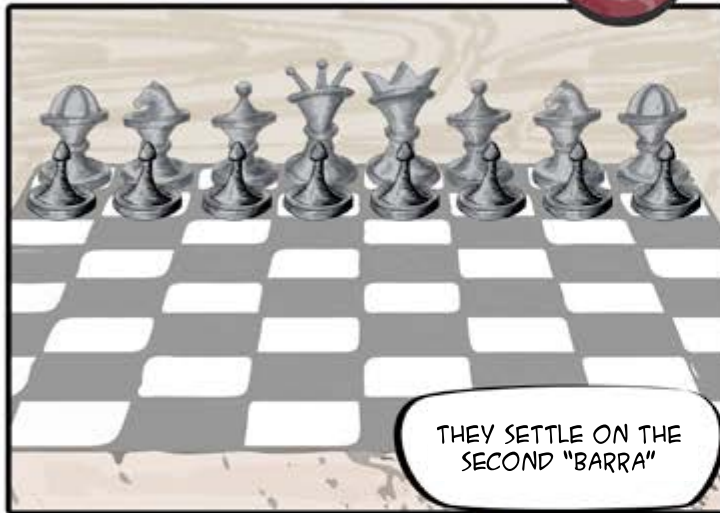
*ORFIL = ALFIL = BISHOP



*CAVALLS = KNIGHTS.

*ROCHS = ROOKS.

*BARRA = COLUMN AND ALSO ROW.



I HAVE NOT YET EXPLAINED THE MOVEMENT OF THIS PIECE TO YOU, WHICH ONLY MOVES ONE STEP DIAGONALLY



PROTECTING THE KING FROM THE "ROQUES"



SUCH A LONG JOURNEY AND SO LITTLE REWARD



I WILL TELL YOU THAT THE ALFERZA HAS THE PRIVILEGE OF A LEAP OF TWO SQUARES, THE FIRST TIME IT MOVES, BUT ONLY THEN



THIS REMINDS ME THAT I HAVE TO EXPLAIN TO YOU THE OBJECTIVE OF THE GAME, WHICH IS TO GIVE "SUS MAT" TO THE OPPOSING KING. THAT MOVE ENDS THE GAME. THEREFORE, WHEN A PIECE GIVES "SUS" TO A KING, IT MUST BE WARNED, AND THE MONARCH MUST HEED THAT WARNING, MOVING SQUARES, COVERING, OR CAPTURING THE PIECE. IF NONE OF THIS IS POSSIBLE, IT'S "SUS MAT" AND THE GAME IS OVER



ANOTHER IMPORTANT RULE IS THAT WHATEVER PIECE IS TOUCHED MUST MOVE, AND THAT NO PLAYER CAN MAKE TWO CONSECUTIVE "TRETAS"



AND THE MOST IMPORTANT THING, FRANCESCH, IS THAT IN "AXEDRES" AS IN LIFE, YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT THE JOYS AND THE SORROWS, THE VICTORIES AND THE LOSSES



*SUS MAT = CHECKMATE

*SUS = CHECK

*TRETAS = MOVES

DAYS LATER....

FRANCESCH, YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO BE ABLE TO GIVE AN OPINION ABOUT VERY ANCIENT RULES THAT WERE APPARENTLY CONCEIVED IN INDIA.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE "QUEEN'S" MOVE.

IF SHE'S NEXT TO THE KING, HER POWER SHOULD BE MUCH GREATER, DON'T YOU THINK, FATHER?

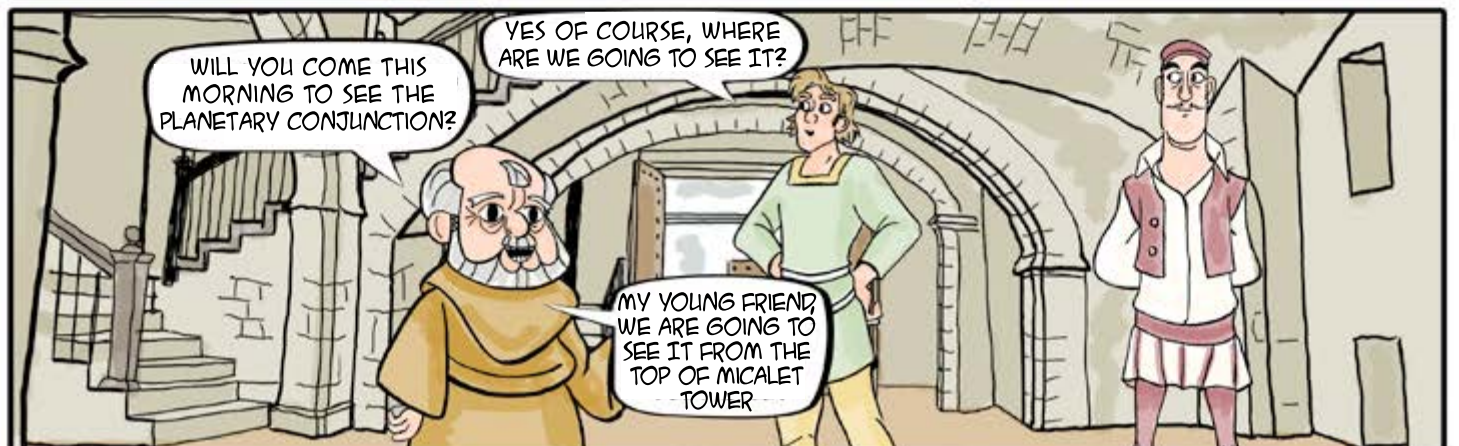
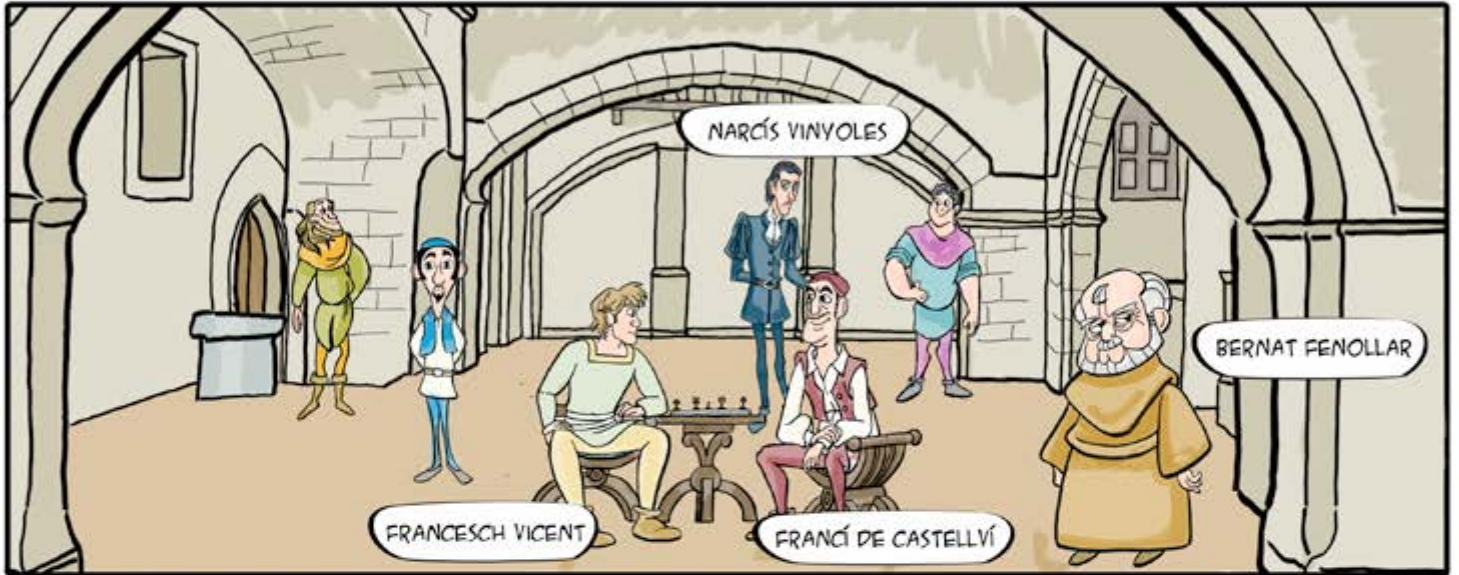
SOON WE'LL BE LIVING IN VALENCIA, WHERE THE BEST CHESS PLAYERS IN THE KINGDOM ARE! I'M SURE THEY'LL TEACH YOU THE RULES AND HISTORY OF THIS MAGICAL GAME BETTER THAN I CAN.

WHO KNOWS IF ONE DAY YOU'LL BECOME A MASTER...

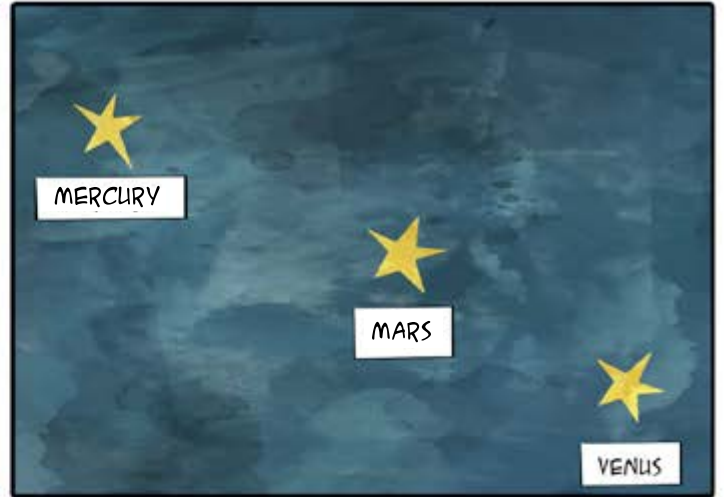
VALENCIA, 6/29/1475

BERNAT, WHAT AN ENTERTAINING DISCUSSION TONIGHT BETWEEN INTELLECTUALS AND POETS. YOU MUST SEE HOW "THE YOUNG FRANCESCH" STANDS OUT ALONGSIDE "EL JOCH DELS SCACHS"

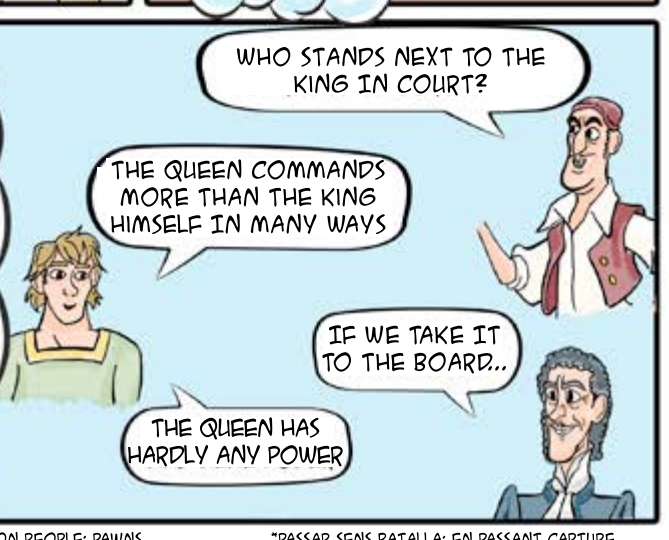
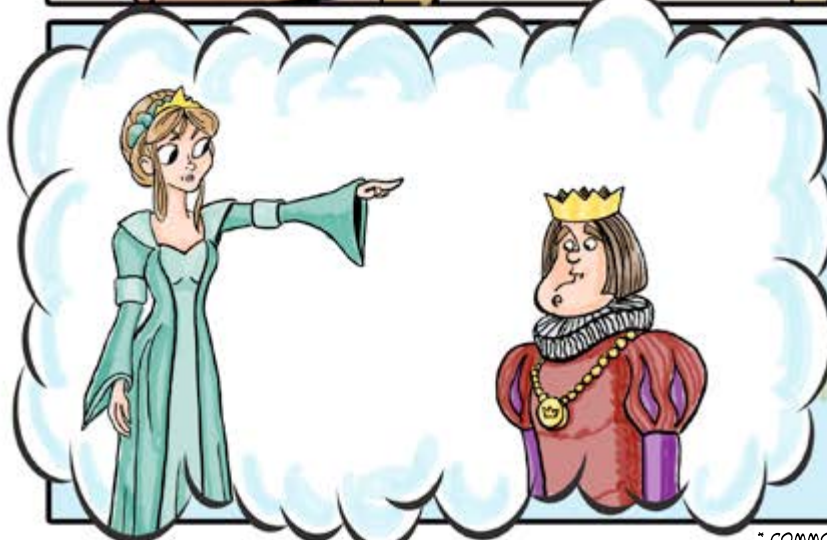
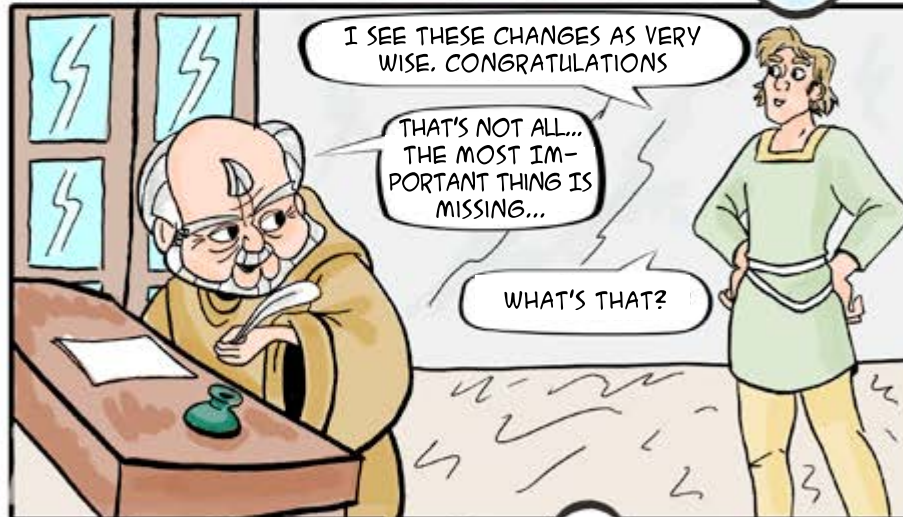
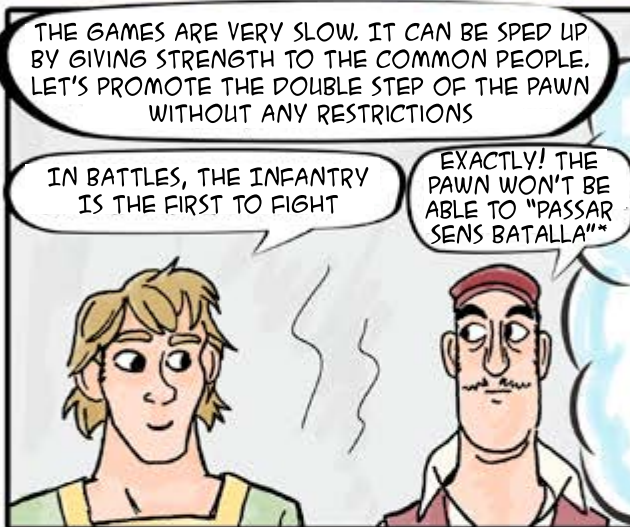
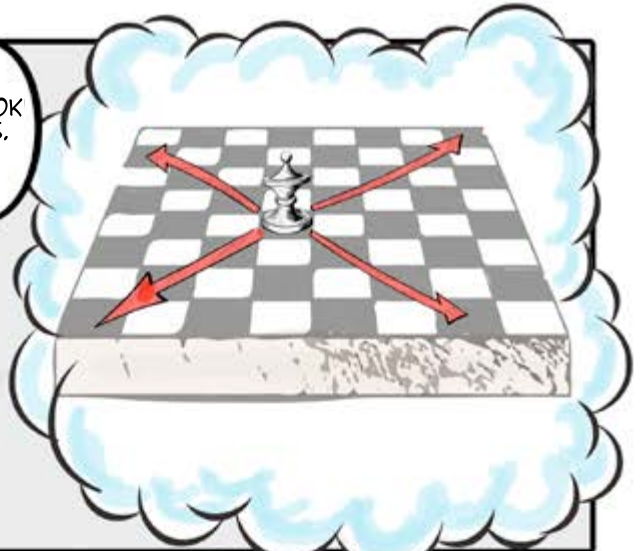
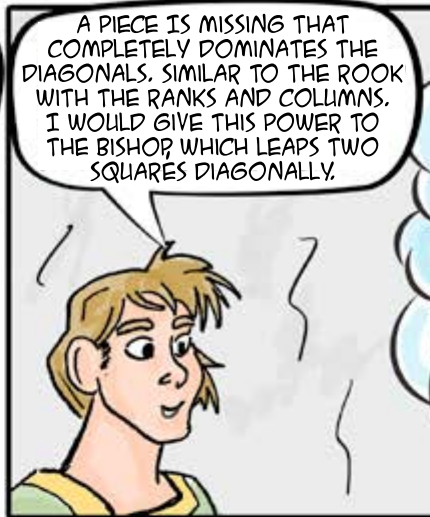
YES, AND THAT'S EVEN CONSIDERING THAT FRANCÍ DE CASTELLVÍ IS AN EXPERIENCED CHESS PLAYER



THAT SAME NIGHT, AROUND
4:30 A.M.

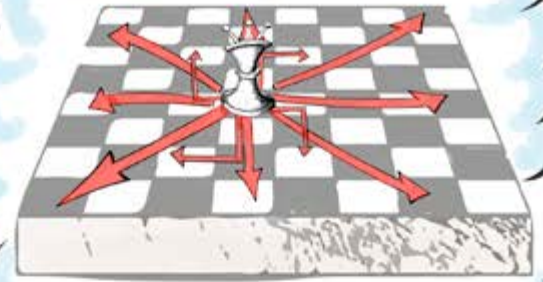


*RED PLAYS AS WHITE AND GREENS AS BLACK



OUR PROPOSAL IS VERY SIMPLE: THE QUEEN HAS THE POWER TO MOVE AROUND THE BOARD WITH THE MOVEMENTS OF ALL THE PIECES

THAT IS AN IMMENSE, ALMOST ABSOLUTE POWER, WHOSE ONLY LIMITATION IS THE CONFINES OF THE BOARD



ALSO AS A KNIGHT?

NO, IT WOULD BE TERRIFYING. SHE COULD MATE HERSELF

IT WOULD BE ENOUGH FOR THE QUEEN TO USE THE ORDINARY MOVEMENT OF ALL THE PIECES EXCEPT THE KNIGHT. THAT WAY IT GREATLY INCREASES ITS POWER AND DOESN'T BECOME UNGOVERNABLE

SO,

WHAT SHALL WE TITLE THE POEM?

*Din que la Reyna maye
use con tots sins Cornell*
I say that the queen has the movement of
all the pieces except the knight.

THIS IS HOW IT IS WRITTEN!!

WE WILL CALL IT...
"SCACHS D'AMOR"!!

FRANCESCH, EVER SINCE WE WROTE "SCACHS DAMOR" THROUGH THE YEARS, HAVE YOU REALIZED THAT IN VALENCIA, AND FROM WHAT FRANCI* HAS TOLD ME, IN THE ENTIRE COURT OF ARAGON

ONLY "AXEDRES DE LA DAMA" IS PLAYED, ACCORDING TO THE RULES WE ESTABLISHED IN THE POEM

YES, I HAVE NOTICED IT. IT SEEMS THAT THE ANCIENT GAME THAT THE ARABS BROUGHT TO OUR LANDS HAS DISAPPEARED

YOU SHOULD PREPARE A TECHNICAL WORK TO CONSOLIDATE AND ESTABLISH REFORMS TO THE GAME

AT HOME, I KEEP MANY MANUSCRIPTS WITH IMPORTANT QUESTIONS REGARDING THE GAME AND OTHER VARIANTS, SUCH AS STARTING THE GAME WITH 2 QUEENS

IN THE BOOK, I WILL INCLUDE RULES THAT HAVE BEEN CONSOLIDATED THROUGH PRACTICE, SUCH AS THE PROMOTION OF THE PAWN TO THE QUEEN, WHICH WAS ONE OF THE ISSUES THAT CAUSED US THE MOST PROBLEMS

YES, THAT ISSUE IS IMPORTANT

I HAVE SOLVED IT. THE CORONATION IS POSSIBLE EVEN IF THE ORIGINAL QUEEN EXISTS



FRIEND, I'VE BROUGHT YOU HERE SO YOU CAN MEET THE BEST PRINTERS IN VALENCIA AND THEIR INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES. THEY ARE AMONG THE FEW IN THE ENTIRE KINGDOM WHO HAVE A PRINTING PRESS LIKE GUTENBERG'S

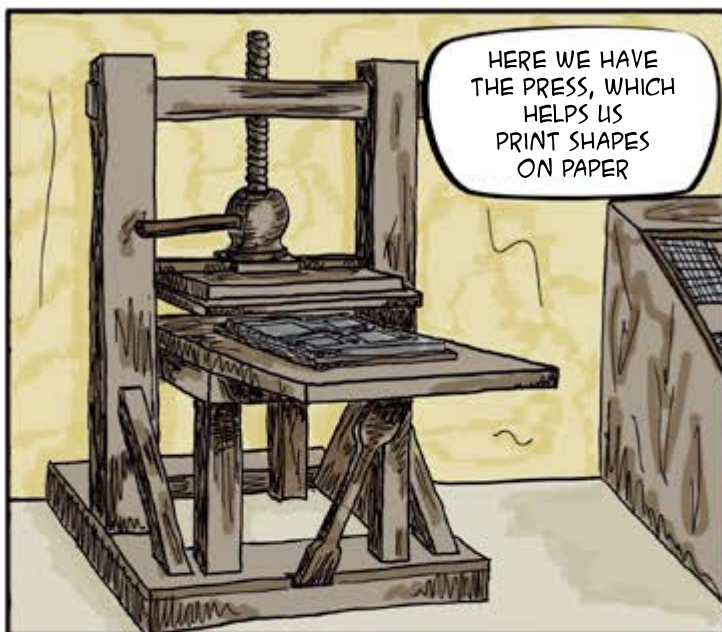
THEY ARE LOPE AND PERE

HELLO, I'M FRANCESCH

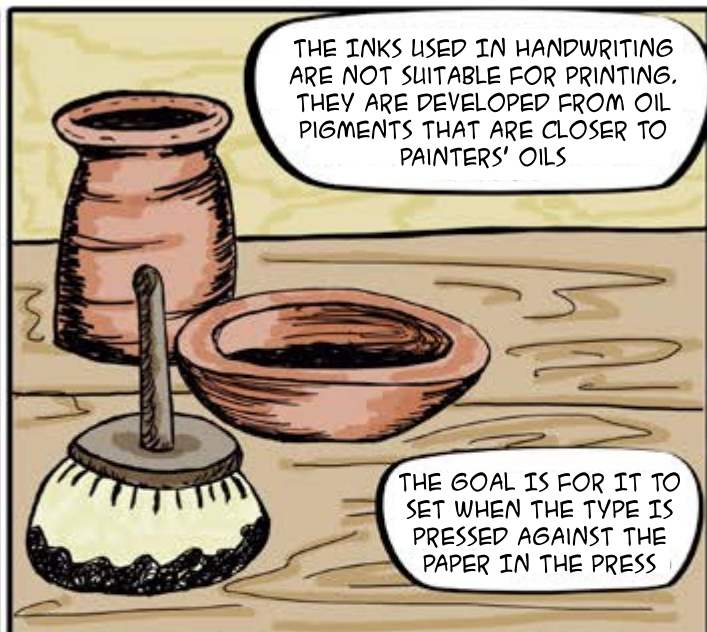
HELLO, BERNAT HAS ALREADY TOLD US ABOUT THE GREAT IDEA YOU HAVE. COME IN AND WE'LL SHOW YOU OUR WORKSHOP

LOPE DE ROCA

PERE TRINCHER

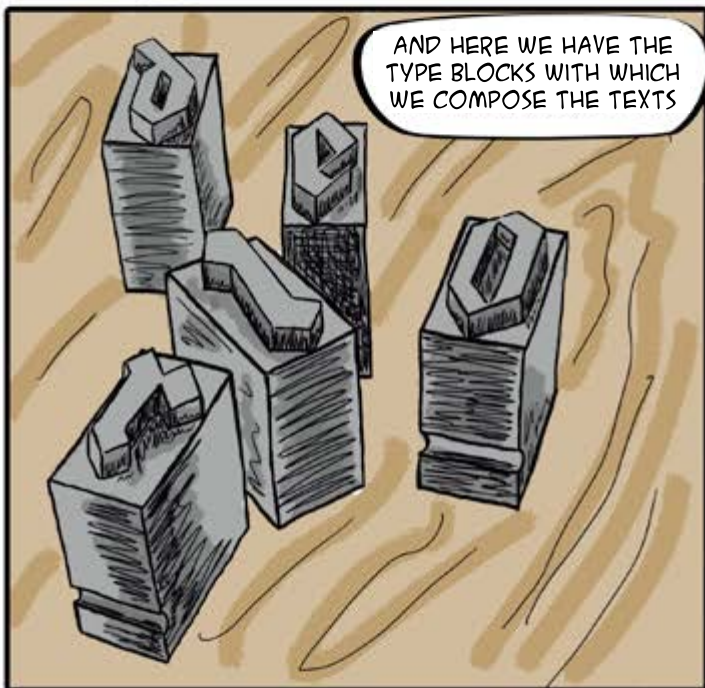


HERE WE HAVE THE PRESS, WHICH HELPS US PRINT SHAPES ON PAPER

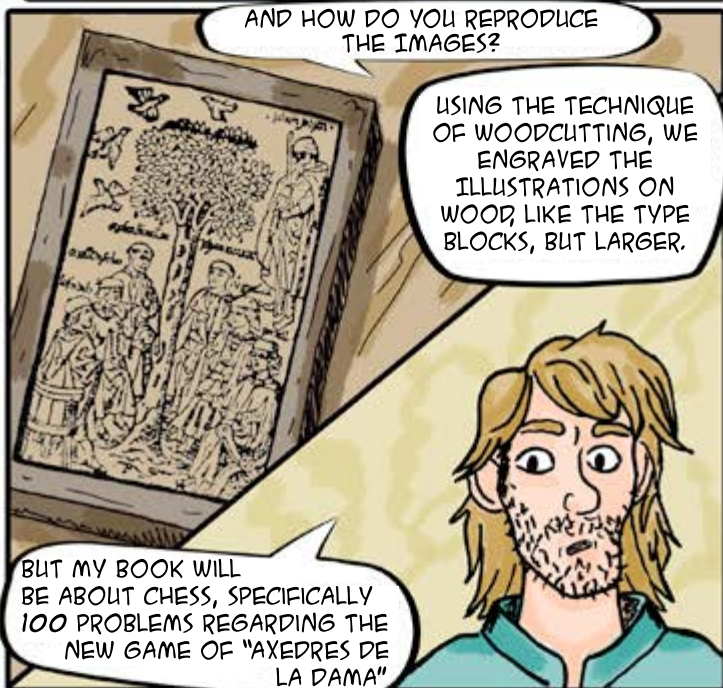


THE INKS USED IN HANDWRITING ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR PRINTING. THEY ARE DEVELOPED FROM OIL PIGMENTS THAT ARE CLOSER TO PAINTERS' OILS

THE GOAL IS FOR IT TO SET WHEN THE TYPE IS PRESSED AGAINST THE PAPER IN THE PRESS



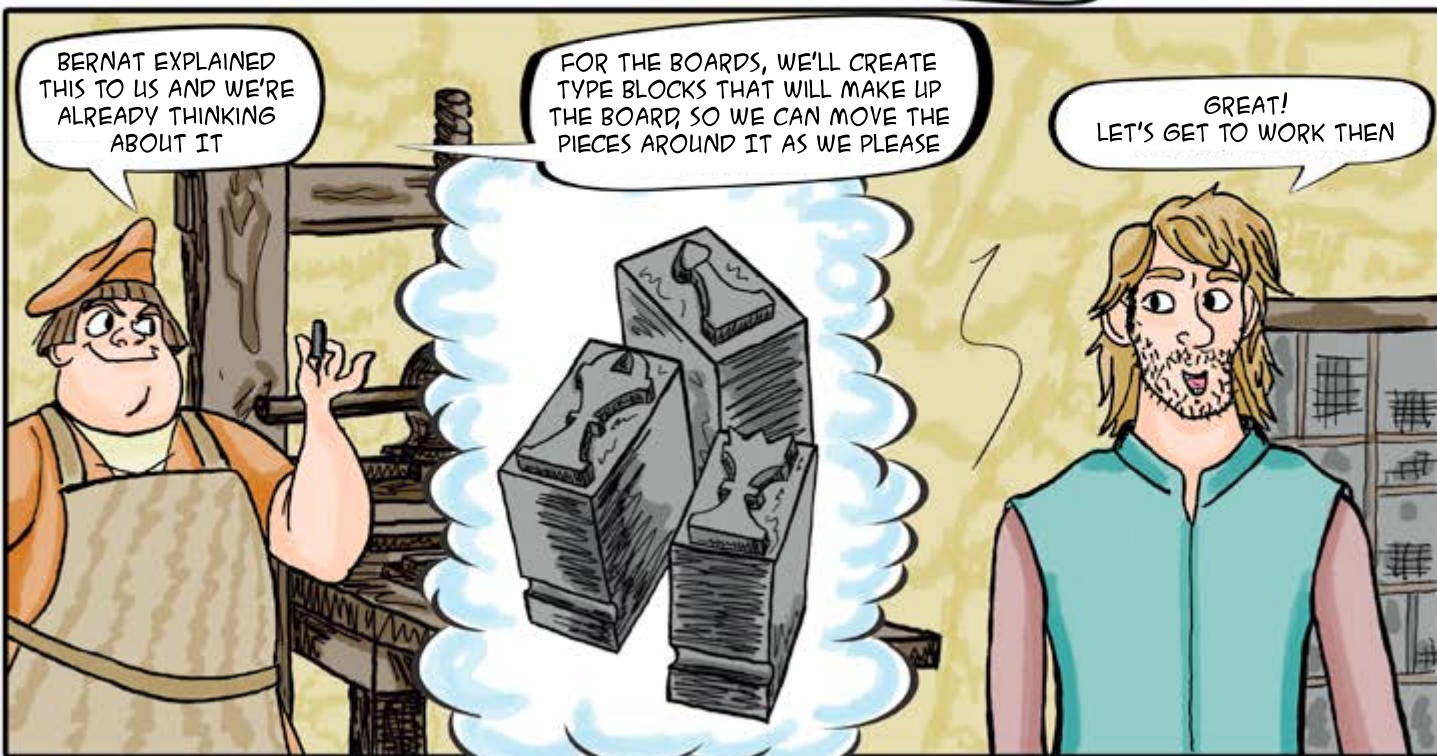
AND HERE WE HAVE THE TYPE BLOCKS WITH WHICH WE COMPOSE THE TEXTS



AND HOW DO YOU REPRODUCE THE IMAGES?

USING THE TECHNIQUE OF WOODCUTTING, WE ENGRAVED THE ILLUSTRATIONS ON WOOD, LIKE THE TYPE BLOCKS, BUT LARGER.

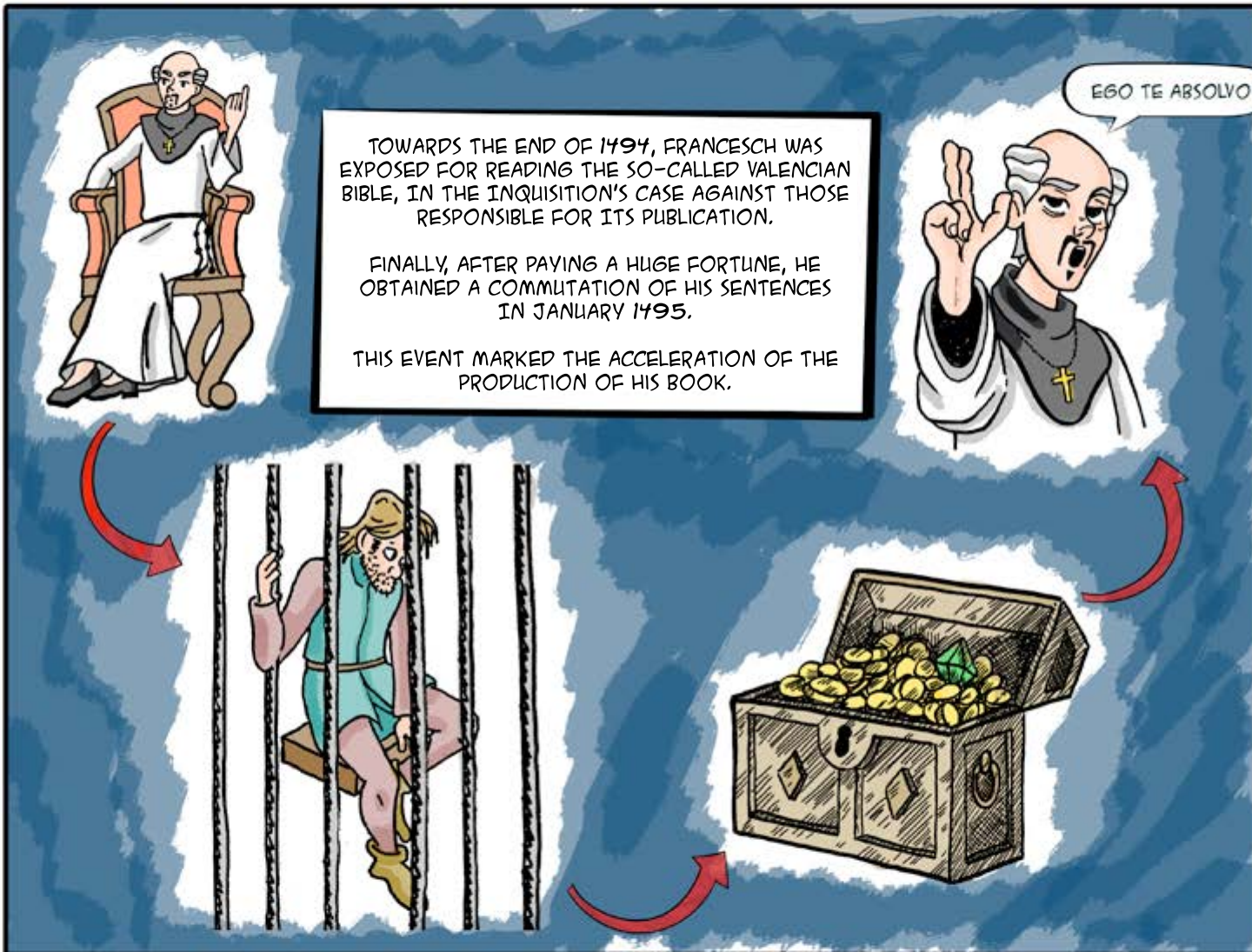
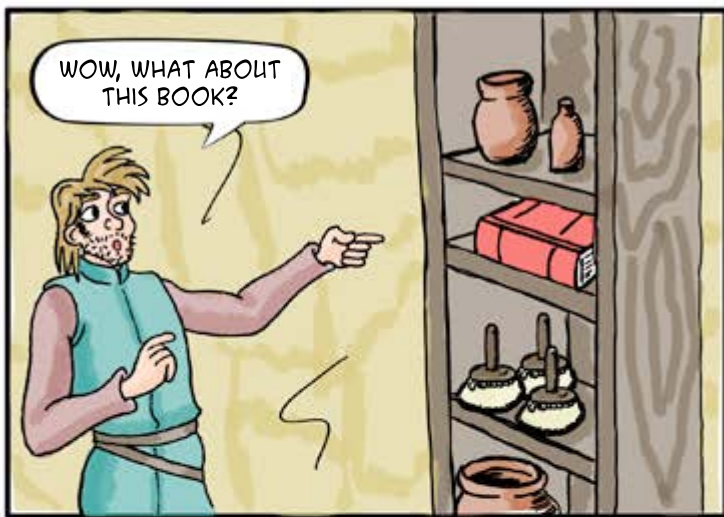
BUT MY BOOK WILL BE ABOUT CHESS, SPECIFICALLY 100 PROBLEMS REGARDING THE NEW GAME OF "AXEDRES DE LA DAMA"



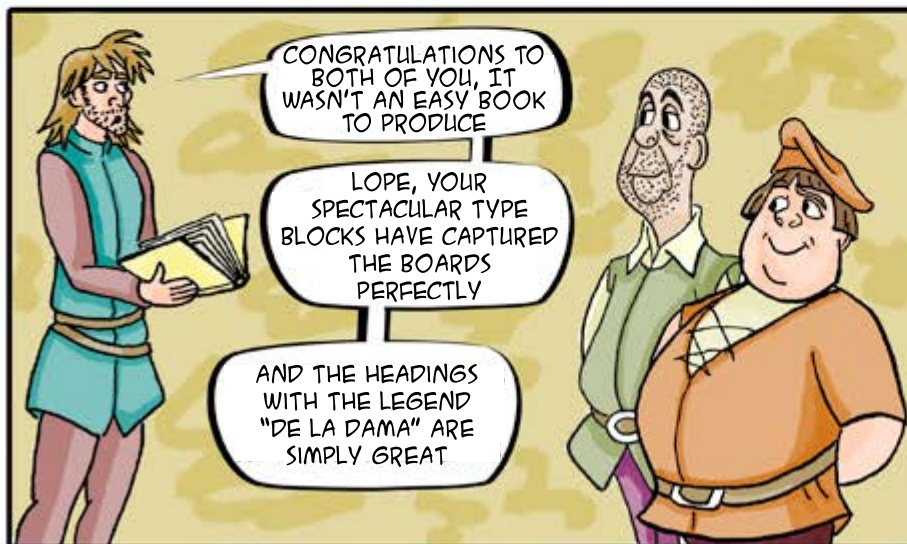
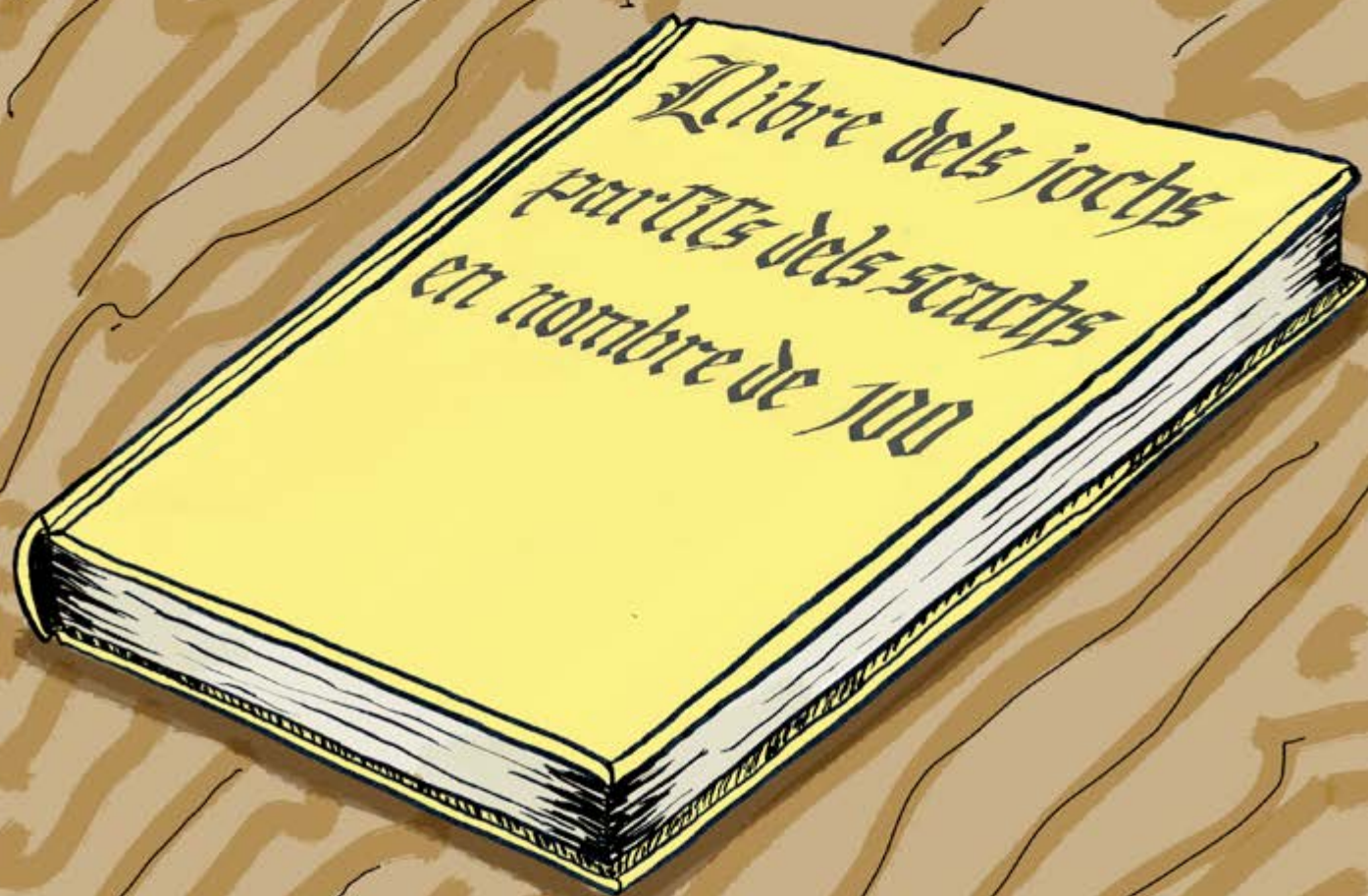
BERNAT EXPLAINED THIS TO US AND WE'RE ALREADY THINKING ABOUT IT

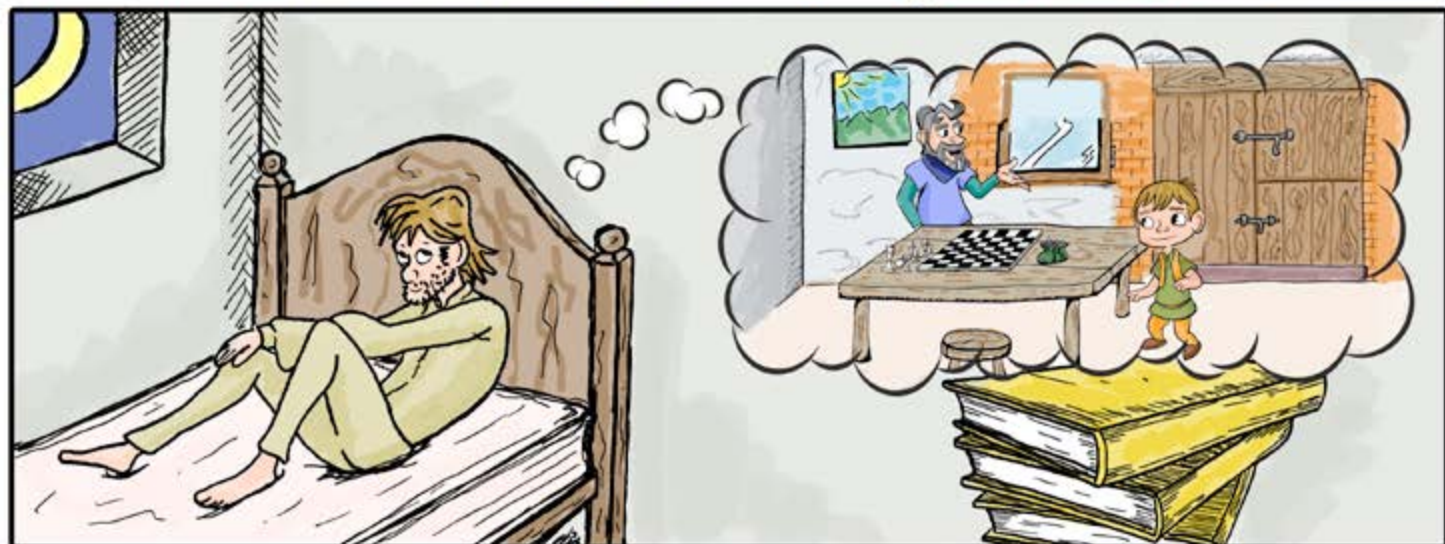
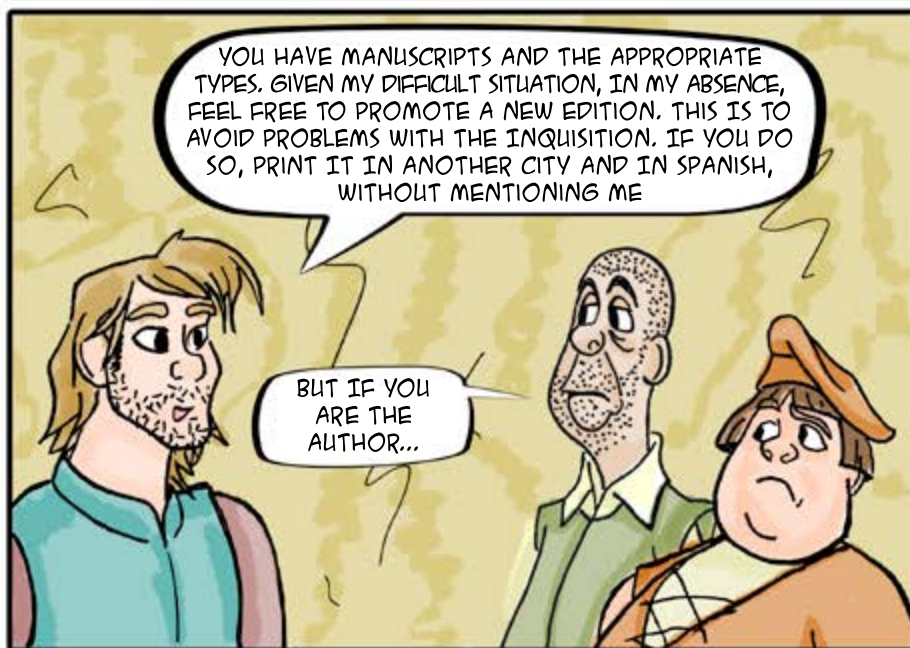
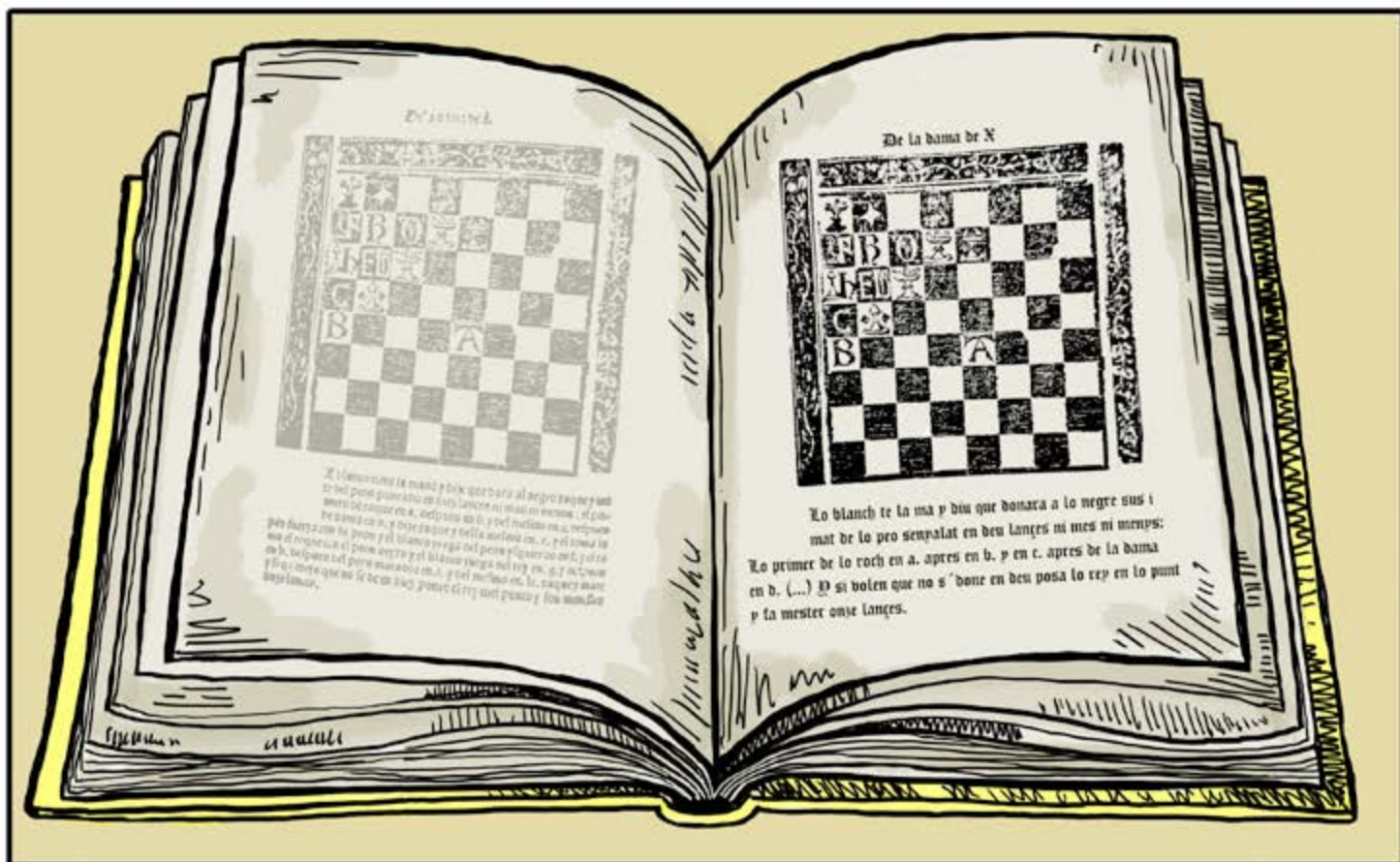
FOR THE BOARDS, WE'LL CREATE TYPE BLOCKS THAT WILL MAKE UP THE BOARD, SO WE CAN MOVE THE PIECES AROUND IT AS WE PLEASE

GREAT! LET'S GET TO WORK THEN



MAY 15, 1495





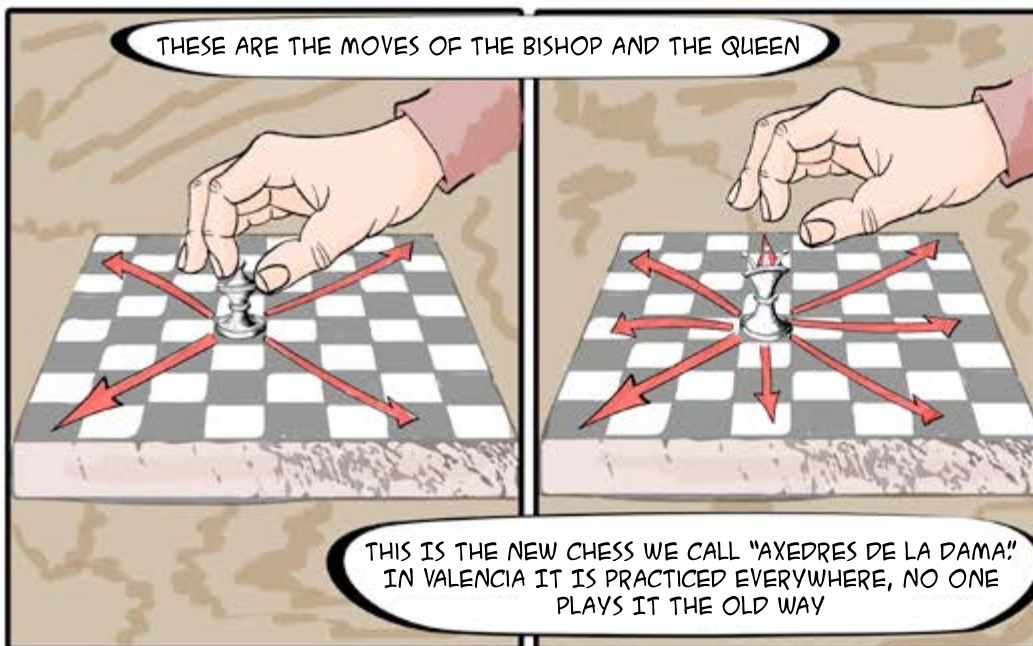
ROME, VATICAN HALLS,
LATE 15TH CENTURY



I'VE BEEN
WANTING TO MEET YOU,
MASTER FRANCESCH, AND
FOR YOU TO TELL US
ABOUT HOW LIFE IS IN
OUR BELOVED VALENCIA,
BUT FIRST, I WANT TO
LEARN FIRST-HAND ABOUT
THIS GREAT INVENTION
OF YOURS

POPE ALEXANDER VI

CESARE BORGIA

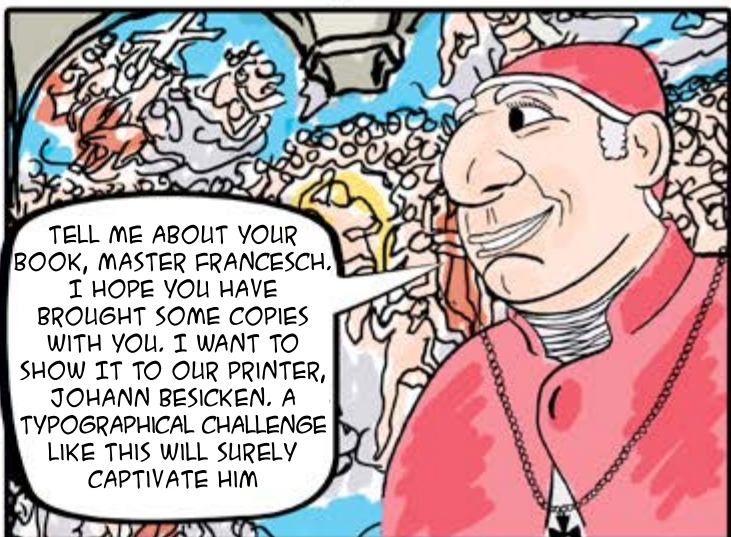


THESE ARE THE MOVES OF THE BISHOP AND THE QUEEN

THIS IS THE NEW CHESS WE CALL "AXEDRES DE LA DAMA!"
IN VALENCIA IT IS PRACTICED EVERYWHERE, NO ONE
PLAYS IT THE OLD WAY

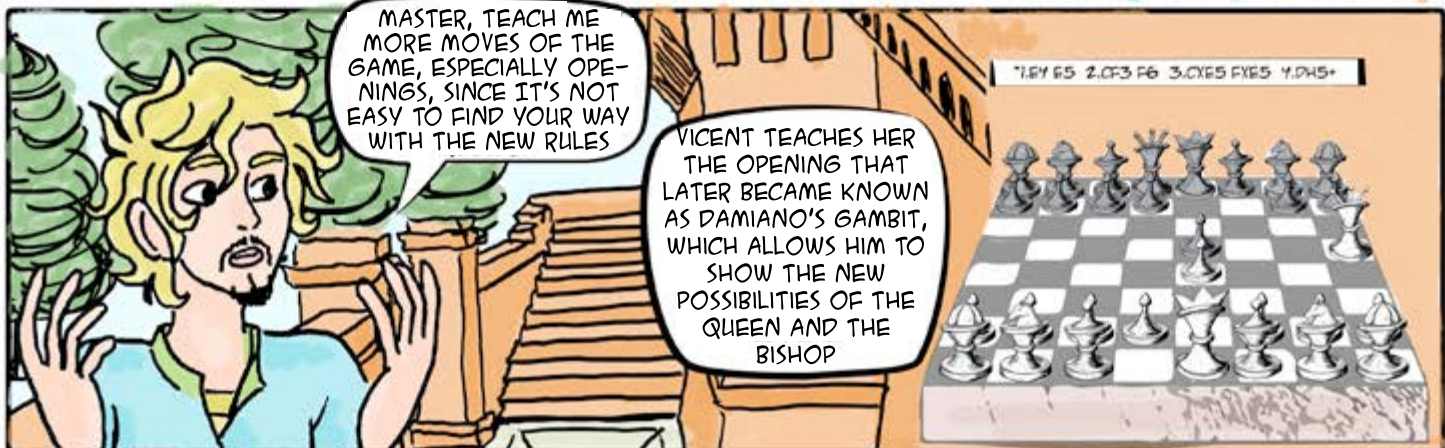
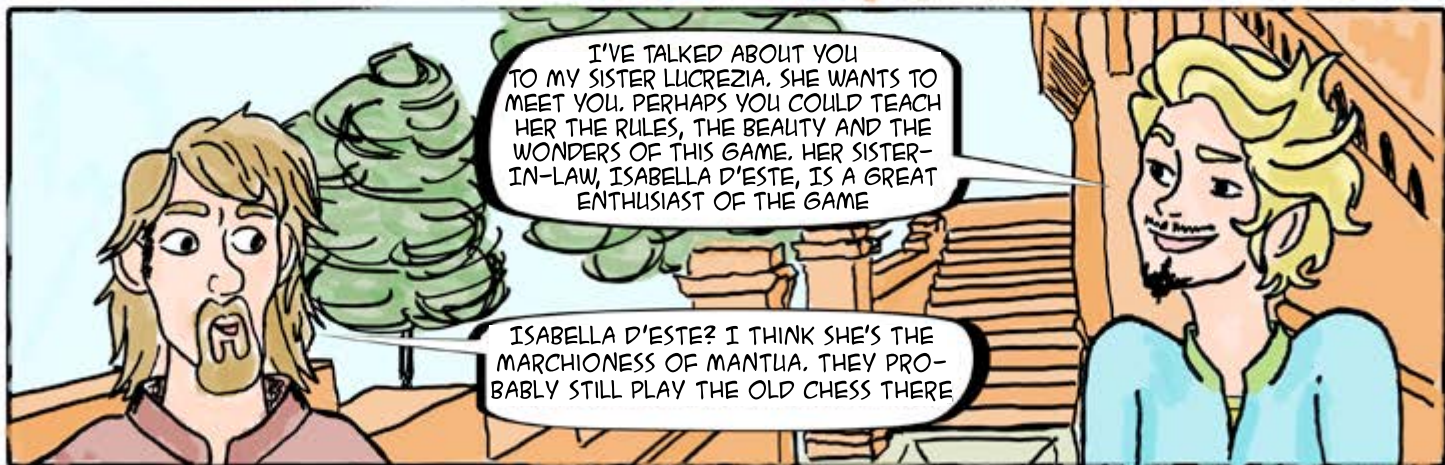


I THINK IT IS SUBLIME. IF
CHESS MAGNIFICENTLY REPRESENTS
THE ART OF WAR, THE NEW
MODALITY IS INGENUOUS. IT
WILL BE OF GREAT USE TO ME,
MASTER FRANCESCH



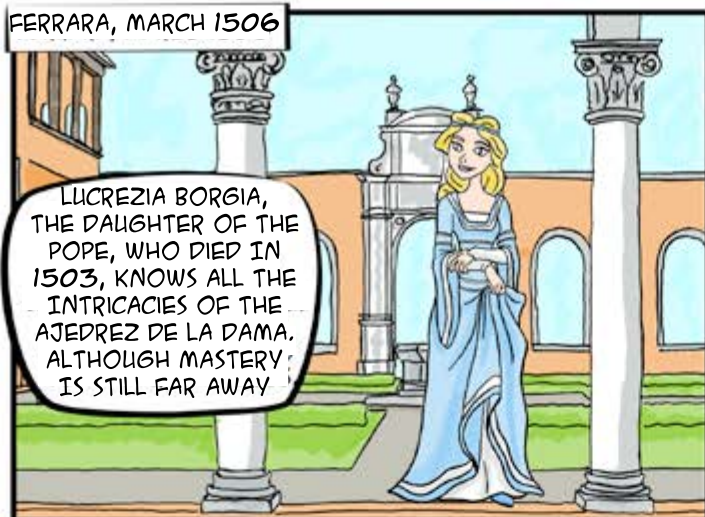
TELL ME ABOUT YOUR
BOOK, MASTER FRANCESCH.
I HOPE YOU HAVE
BROUGHT SOME COPIES
WITH YOU. I WANT TO
SHOW IT TO OUR PRINTER,
JOHANN BESICKEN. A
TYPOGRAPHICAL CHALLENGE
LIKE THIS WILL SURELY
CAPTIVATE HIM

CESENA, PAPAL STATES
C. 1500



*YEARS LATER, THE MATHEMATICIAN LUCA PACIOLI INTENDED TO DEDICATE A BOOK ABOUT GAMES, INCLUDING CHESS, TO HER AND HER HUSBAND, FRANCISCO GONZAGA.

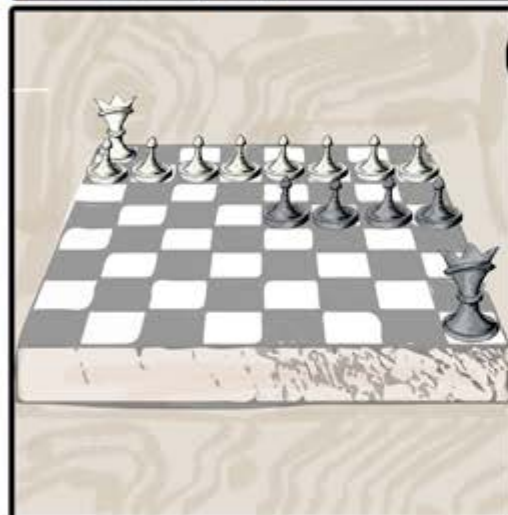
FERRARA, MARCH 1506



LUCREZIA BORGIA, THE DAUGHTER OF THE POPE, WHO DIED IN 1503, KNOWS ALL THE INTRICACIES OF THE AJEDREZ DE LA DAMA. ALTHOUGH MASTERY IS STILL FAR AWAY



IN ITALY, FRANCESCH VICENT IS KNOWN AS "FRANCESCO, SPAGNOLO, MASTER OF SCACCHI"



MASTER FRANCESCO, DO YOU THINK I COULD FACE OFF AGAINST MY SISTER-IN-LAW WITH CERTAIN GUARANTEES?



WE WILL ONLY HAVE THIS CERTAINTY, MY LADY, ONCE YOU ARE FACING EACH OTHER. HOWEVER, IN THIS GAME, ONE MUST GET USED TO THE PLEASURE OF WINNING AND THE BITTER TASTE OF DEFEAT

ROME, 1512



A BOOK IS PUBLISHED THAT WILL BE A TRUE BESTSELLER. THE WORK OF A MYSTERIOUS PORTUGUESE AUTHOR WHO CALLS HIMSELF "DAMIANO." IN REALITY, ALL THE PROBLEMS AND SUBTLETIES COME FROM VICENT'S BOOK AND HIS MANUSCRIPTS

ROME, 1518



ON THE TITLE PAGE OF THE SECOND EDITION OF DAMIANO'S BOOK, IT SEEMS THAT A CODED MESSAGE HAS BEEN INSERTED, WHICH WOULD HIDE THE TRUE AUTHORSHIP OF DAMIANO'S TECHNICAL MATERIAL:



V S O
VICENT SCRIPTOR OPERUM
(VICENT IS THE AUTHOR OF THE WORK)

Q V E S T O
Libro e da impa
rare giocare
a Scacchi e
dele par
tite.

ROME, 1524



THE PLACE AND DATE OF VICENT'S DEATH ARE UNKNOWN.

THE TITLE PAGE OF DAMIANO'S THIRD EDITION STATES THAT IT HAS BEEN REVISED BY THE BEST PLAYERS, WHICH SUGGESTS THAT THE TRUE AUTHOR COULD NOT HAVE CARRIED OUT THIS WORK, SO HE MIGHT HAVE DIED BEFORE THAT DATE (1524).

THE ENGRAVING USED ON THE TITLE PAGES OF DAMIANO'S BOOK FROM 1524 ONWARDS, WITH ITS REFERENCE TO A RELIGIOUS FIGURE AND A HUMANIST OR COURTIER, SUGGESTS JOINT AUTHORSHIP OF THE WORK: PERHAPS A PORTUGUESE RELIGIOUS FIGURE AND VICENT HIMSELF

VICENT, 500 YEARS LATER



TRAGEDY IS INNATE IN VICENT'S BOOK. TODAY THERE IS NO CATALOGED COPY OF THE WORK, WHICH CHANGED THE HISTORY OF CHESS

ITS TRUTH AND GREATNESS COULD ONLY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH COMPLEX RESEARCH, PROMOTED WITH GREAT PERSONAL SACRIFICE BY GREAT SCHOLARS, WORK WHICH WE NOW SUMMARIZE



JOSÉ A. GARZÓN

MONTSERRAT ABBEY (BARCELONA), LATE 18TH CENTURY

A PERFECTLY DESCRIBED COPY WAS IN THE FAMOUS ABBEY LIBRARY, AS RECORDED IN THE FIRST REPERTOIRES OF IBERIAN INCUNABULA FROM 1795 AND PREVIOUSLY IN A LETTER FROM JOSEP VEGA TO JUAN ANTONIO MAYANS, DATED NOVEMBER 15, 1783



AUGUST 1799

...DURING MY VISIT TO THE ABBEY OF MONTSERRAT, I REVIEWED ELEVEN INCUNABULA, INCLUDING A TREATISE ON CHESS, IN WHICH MOST OF THE DIAGRAMS FEATURED THE LEGEND "DE LA DAMA"...



GASPAR MELCHOR DE JOVELLANOS

JOSÉ VARGAS PONCE



THE OFFICIAL VERSION INDICATES THAT THE BOOK MAY HAVE BEEN DESTROYED IN THE FIRE THAT HIT THE LIBRARY DURING THE ASSAULT BY FRENCH TROOPS IN 1811

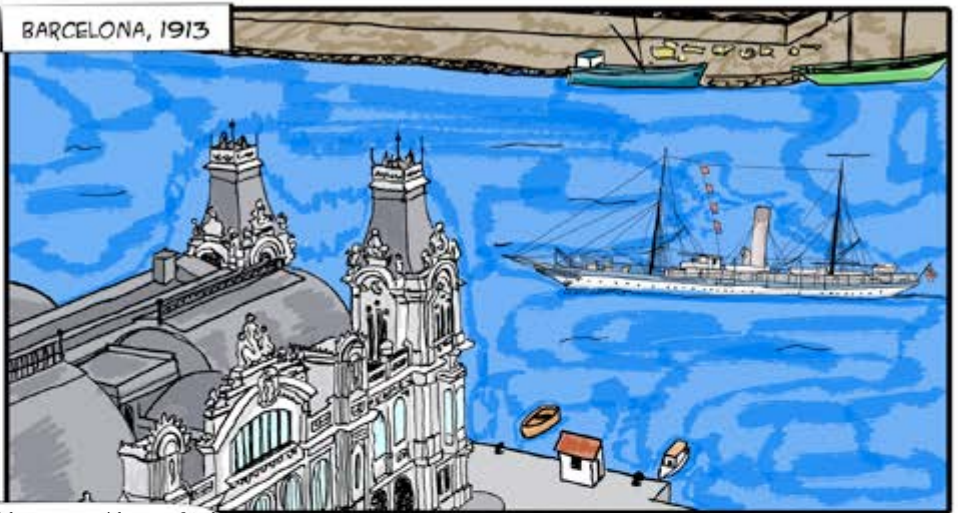


HOWEVER, TODAY WE KNOW THAT MANY INCUNABULA WERE SAVED AND RETURNED TO THE LIBRARY OF MONTSERRAT IN THE FIRST DECADES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

"EN POS DEL INCUNABLE PERDIDO" (2001) BRINGS TO LIGHT THE IMPORTANT EPISODE OF THE SALE OF A COPY OF VICENT'S BOOK



BARCELONA, 1913



THE SELLER IS THE MYSTERIOUS BOOKSELLER SALVADOR BABRA



WHOM, IN ADDITION TO VICENT'S BOOK, ALSO POSSESSED 2 PAGES OF THE "VALENCIAN BIBLE" AND A COPY OF THE FIRST EDITION OF "TIRANT LO BLANCH" (VALENCIA, 1490)



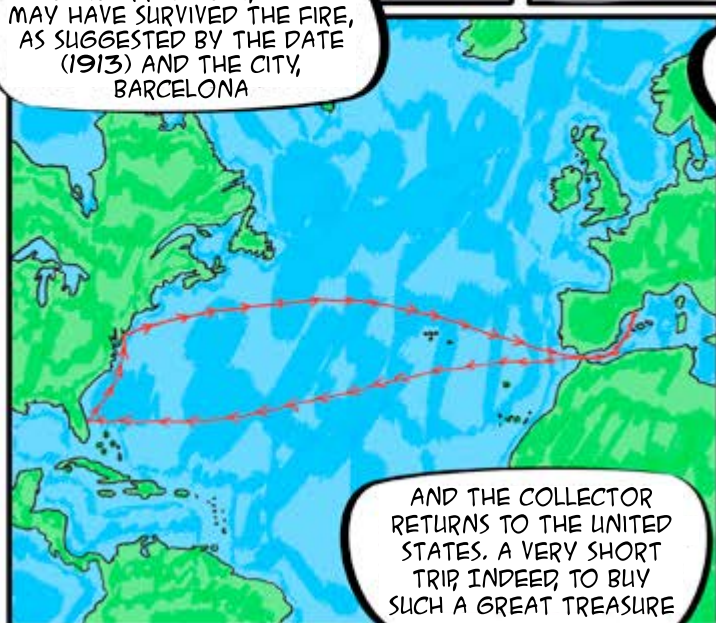
A MYSTERIOUS AMERICAN COLLECTOR ARRIVES BY YACHT TO BUY A BOOK MEASURING JUST 20 CM



THE SALE IS SECURE, WITH HONORABLE WITNESSES PRESENT

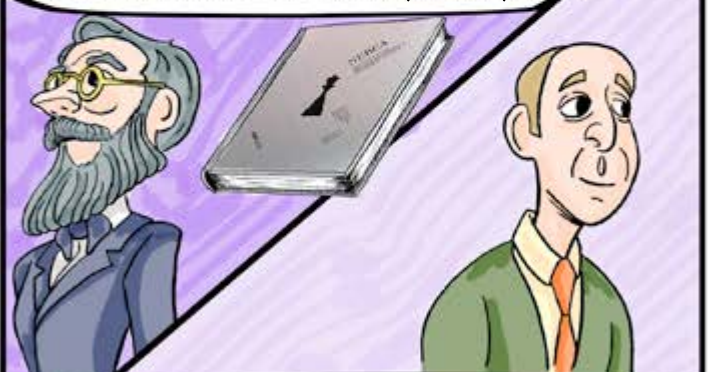


THIS IS PROBABLY THE MONTSERRAT COPY, WHICH MAY HAVE SURVIVED THE FIRE, AS SUGGESTED BY THE DATE (1913) AND THE CITY, BARCELONA



AND THE COLLECTOR RETURNS TO THE UNITED STATES. A VERY SHORT TRIP, INDEED, TO BUY SUCH A GREAT TREASURE

IN NEBEA (1912) IT'S SHOWN THAT SALVADOR BABRA HAD BUSINESS RELATIONS WITH JOHN G. WHITE OF CLEVELAND, OWNER OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PRIVATE LIBRARY IN THE WORLD, THEREFORE A CANDIDATE TO BE THE MYSTERY BUYER



ANOTHER PROBABLE BUYER, OR LATER OWNER, IS GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS PFEIFFER, SINCE IT IS PROVEN THAT HE ACQUIRED A MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPT THAT BABRA HAD IN 1912. IF SO, THE TRACE OF VICENT'S BOOK WAS LOST AFTER HIS DEATH IN 1953

2005

FIVE CENTURIES LATER, IN THE BOOK "THE RETURN OF FRANCESCH VICENT"



THE CONTENT OF VICENT'S BOOK, ITS 100 GAMES, PRESENT IN THE CESENA MANUSCRIPT, WAS ACCREDITED

IT IS PROBABLE THAT THE AUTHOR WAS VICENT DURING THE TIME HE LIVED IN ITALY.

SEVERAL PROBLEMS SURVIVE IN VICENT'S ORIGINAL WRITING IN THE VALENCIAN LANGUAGE

*Dif aperi d' feg feps nat mes lo n' mar si noi
q'se donar m' feg or d'ar p'ar p'io lo p'ig x'f' la p'ma*



THE CESENA MANUSCRIPT CONTAINS THE TECHNICAL CONTENT OF DAMIANO'S TEXT, CONFIRMING VICENT'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CREATION OF THE BOOK AS THE PRINCIPAL, AND PERHAPS ONLY SOURCE

ACCORDING TO NEW DISCOVERIES, THE ENGRAVING FROM THE FIRST EDITION OF DAMIANO'S BOOK LINKS THE WORK WITH THE ENTOURAGE OF POPE BORGBIA, HIS SON CESARE, AND THE PRINTER OF HIS PHYSICIAN, GASPAR TORRELLA

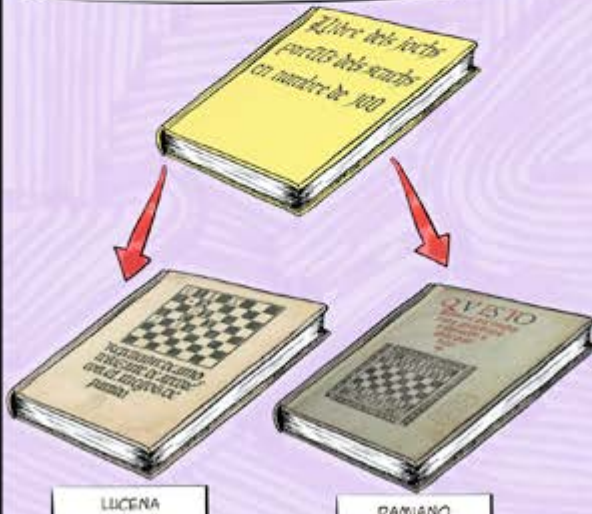


VALENCIA, DECEMBER 11, 2012

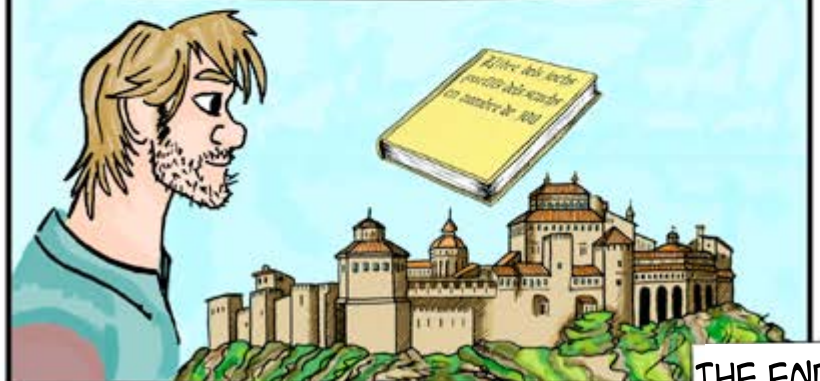


THE 2012 CALL FOR ENTRIES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL "VON DER LASA" PRIZE FOR THE SEARCH FOR VICENT'S BOOK MADE GREAT PROGRESS, INTERNATIONALIZING THE SEARCH AND RAISING AWARENESS OF ITS IMPORTANCE

TODAY WE ARE CERTAIN THAT THE LATER BOOKS BY LUCENA (1497) AND DAMIANO (1512) ARE TRANSLATIONS OF VICENT'S BOOK



BUT THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PAGE IS YET TO BE WRITTEN. THE BOOK'S CONTENT HAS BEEN REBORN, BUT THE PHYSICAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE MYTHICAL "INCUNABULUM," THE PRINTED GEM, THE HOLY GRAIL OF CHESS, WRITTEN BY FRANCESCH VICENT, FROM SEGORBE IS STILL PENDING



THE END



Graphic representation of the upper part of the Micalet Tower, as we assumed it was in the second half of the 15th century.

The story of Francesch Vicent, his
legendary book, key to
the birth and expansion of
Modern Chess.

