



DARE TO KNOW
CHESS IN THE AGE OF REASON



Germany
Selenus/Braunschweig Set
c. 1780
King size: 3 3/4 in.
Silver and silver-gilt
Collection of Tom Gallegos



INTRODUCTION

by Emily Allred, curator



During the Enlightenment era, European and American scientists, philosophers, and other thinkers questioned the status quo, promoting ideas that would help shape today's society. Intellectuals gathered in new public spaces—cafés, coffeehouses, salons, and masonic halls—to discuss new ideas. Some challenged the power of monarchs and questioned organized religion. Many thinkers promoted values of tolerance, interest in other cultures, rationalism, and liberty. At the same time that there were challenges to the authority of the monarchy, chess was transforming from a game played by the aristocracy to one played by people of all social standings. *Dare to Know: Chess in the Age of Reason* explores the history of the game during this period of remarkable change.

Chess, associated with knowledge, foresight, and strategy, became a favored pastime of many of the era's most famous thinkers, including Voltaire, Denis Diderot, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in France. They took part in the lively social scene that existed in coffeehouses and places like the Café de la Régence, a renowned chess center that attracted philosophes and the best chess players of the era, including François-André Danican Philidor. Diderot described the café in his 1805 book *Rameau's Nephew*:

If it is too cold or wet I take shelter in the Café de la Régence and amuse myself watching people playing chess. Paris is the place in the world and the Café de la Régence the place in Paris where this game is played best, and at Rey's the shrewd Légal, the crafty Philidor and the dependable Mayot sally forth to battle. There the most amazing moves can be seen and the poorest conversation heard, for if you can be a man of wit and a great chess-player like Légal you can also be a great chess player and an ass like Foubert and Mayot.

In the United States, founding father Benjamin Franklin (a 1986 inductee to the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame) wrote one of the country's first published chess books. His essay *The Morals of Chess* (1786) explored how playing chess could teach important qualities like foresight, circumspection, caution, and not getting discouraged by difficult circumstances.



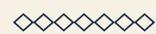
The game of Chess is not merely an idle amusement. Several very valuable qualities of the mind, useful in the course of human life, are to be acquired or strengthened by it, so as to become habits, ready on all occasions. For life is a kind of chess, in which we have often points to gain, and competitors or adversaries to contend with, and in which there is a vast variety of good and ill events, that are, in some degree, the effects of prudence or the want of it.

Franklin also described the pitfalls of his chess habits in the humorous bagatelle *A Dialogue between Franklin and the Gout*. In the story, Franklin and “Madame Gout” discuss the repercussions of his sedentary lifestyle. Madame Gout chides him for playing chess rather than visiting the verdant gardens in the regions of France where he was touring.

Walking in the beautiful gardens of those friends with whom you have dined would be the choice of men of sense; yours is to be fixed down to chess, where you are found engaged for two and three hours!...Wrapt in the speculations of this wretched game, you destroy your constitution.

Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States and an important figure of the American Enlightenment, was also an enthusiastic chess player. His family later recalled his passion for the game, and he received a chess set as a gift from the French Court.

During the same period, the Mechanical Turk, a famous illusion, toured Europe. Created by Wolfgang von Kempelen, the Turk debuted at the court of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria and was advertised as an automaton that could play chess against human players. Though the Turk was actually operated by a person inside a cabinet, it captured the imagination of its audiences, and may have even inspired computer pioneer Charles Babbage (who played against the machine in 1819) to think about machine intelligence in new ways. The Turk later traveled to the United States, where it was destroyed



in a fire. The few remaining artifacts connected directly to the Turk will be exhibited in *Dare to Know* courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Dare to Know: Chess in the Age of Reason showcases numerous chess sets, books, artwork, and other artifacts representing Enlightenment centers in Europe and the United States. The artifacts date from the 17th through 21st centuries and are on view at the World Chess Hall of Fame courtesy of public and private lenders from the United States and Europe including Phil Brykman, Jon Crumiller, Dr. George and Vivian Dean, OH Faber, Tom Gallegos, António Horta-Osório, the Library Company of Philadelphia, Dr. Thomas H. Thomsen, and Washington University Libraries’ Julian Edison Department of Special Collections. Chess sets belonging to famous historical figures from the era, including Catherine the Great and Madame Tussaud will be displayed alongside chess sets that would have been used by the average person in coffeehouses.

Among the highlights of the exhibition is a full set of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (*Encyclopedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*). In this subversive text, its creators sought to “collect all the knowledge that now lies scattered over the face of the earth,” which included a section on chess. On view courtesy of Tom Gallegos, the volumes will be shown alongside a chess set made from a pattern within the publication. The Enlightenment was the era when chess books were first widely distributed—several examples of publications from the era will be on view as well as examples of other games like playing cards and tarot.





France
The Encyclopédie Set (various views)
c. 1750-80
King size: 4 in.
Wood
Collection of Tom Gallegos

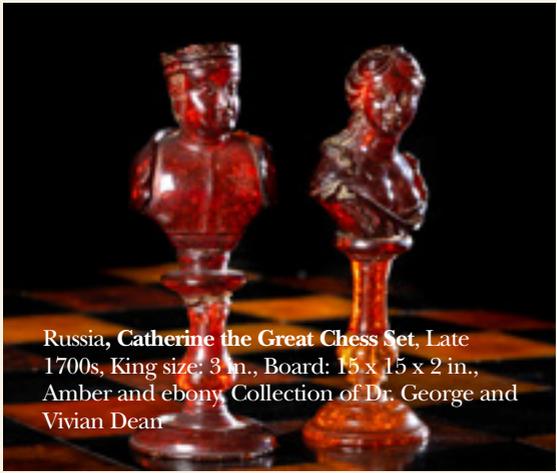
Germany
Folding Boxboard
c. 1730
4 ¾ x 20 x 15 ¼ in.
Wood and silver
Collection of Tom Gallegos



Artist unknown, **The Mechanical Turk**, Date unknown, 4 x 6 x 5 5/16 in., Plastic and marble, Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame



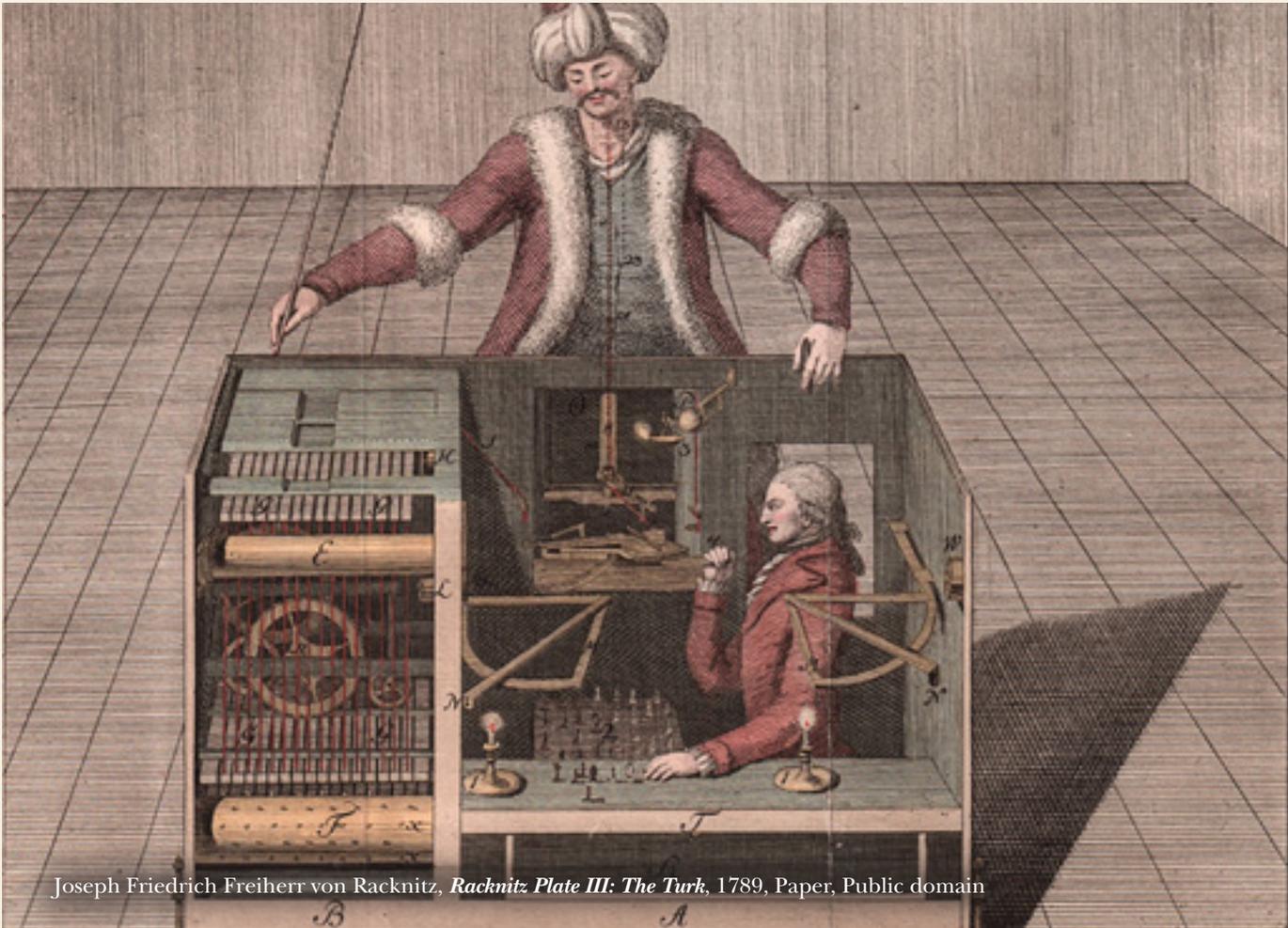
Germany, **Kändler Chess Set**, mid-18th century, King size: 3 7/8 in., Meissen porcelain, Collection of Dr. George and Vivian Dean



Russia, **Catherine the Great Chess Set**, Late 1700s, King size: 3 in., Board: 15 x 15 x 2 in., Amber and ebony, Collection of Dr. George and Vivian Dean



Italy, **Virtue vs. Vice**, c. 1700s, King size: 5 1/2 in., Board: 20 x 20 in., Ivory and ebony, Collection of Dr. George and Vivian Dean



Joseph Friedrich Freiherr von Racknitz, *Racknitz Plate III: The Turk*, 1789, Paper, Public domain



Italy, **Italian Set**, c. 18th or 17th century, King size: 3 1/2 in., Wood, Collection of Tom Gallegos



Italy, **Murano Glass Set**, 18th century, King size: 3 1/4 in., Board: 13 1/2 x 13 1/2 in., Glass, Collection of Dr. George and Vivian Dean



DARE TO KNOW

CHESS IN THE AGE OF REASON

AN AGE WHEN THE GAME OF KINGS FIRST BECAME...

A GAME OF THE PEOPLE

by **TOM GALLEGOS** The Absentminded Antiquary

Tom Gallegos is an antiques collector and dealer, independent researcher, and self-taught antiquary. His greatest areas of interest are the history of Western Civilization before the Industrial Revolution, the history of science, and the history of ideas. He has been a member of Chess Collectors International since the 1990s, though he collects in many other areas as well, including Greek, Roman, and Medieval antiquities, and also participates in other collecting societies in areas such as playing cards, rare books, maps and prints, scientific instruments, and nautical antiques. Though no longer active as a tournament player, he formerly held a US Chess Class A rating, and still enjoys playing chess daily.



Chess is often described as the game of kings. And it is. But there was a time when chess was also the game of those who were throwing off their kings. A time when chess was the game of dangerous radicals and revolutionaries, writers and intellectuals; men and women who used coffeehouses, newspapers and salons as we use the internet, to spread once-forbidden ideas and knowledge, ideas that would ultimately shatter the old order and usher in the modern world.

In all the vast upheavals of the 18th century, chess was in the thick of things, played in taverns and inns as well as royal courts, played by misfits and disaffected intellectuals as well as kings and aristocrats. In 1784, some five years before the storming of the Bastille, *sapere aude* was the motto applied to that century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, in an essay analyzing and defending the Enlightenment. *Sapere aude* translates as "dare to know," "dare to be wise," or more loosely as, "dare to think for yourself."

SAPERE AUDE thus became the unofficial battle cry of the Enlightenment. It is also good basic advice for any chess player.

The current exhibition at the World Chess Hall of Fame examines this fascinating and little-understood era of chess history in depth for the first time, covering roughly the years from 1700 through 1830. At the beginning of the era, with few exceptions, chess was a game played primarily by kings and their courtiers, as well as the clergy. By its end, people of all classes played in great numbers, chess books began to be published more widely, and the saga of chess in the 19th century had begun.

What caused such a drastic transformation in our beloved game? It was a natural outgrowth of the Enlightenment, a phenomenon that likewise transformed so much of the world. This exhibition includes material from the various regional Enlightenments of Europe and America, but will focus primarily on that most central Enlightenment—the *French* Enlightenment. Most historians define the era as beginning in the early 18th century and ending sometime much later in



the century, usually with the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. *Dare to Know* includes the Enlightenment as well as both the pre- and post-Enlightenment periods.

REINVENTING the WORLD—The ENCYCLOPÉDIE

It is impossible to discuss the Enlightenment without also discussing the famous *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert. The most famous, revolutionary, and subversive encyclopedia ever published, the lofty and audacious goal of the *Encyclopédie* was nothing less than to gather together all human knowledge, and yet at the same time, to fundamentally change the way people think.

But before all this, the *Encyclopédie* had set out to be, first and foremost, an encyclopedia. (Indeed, scholars still rely on it for authoritative answers to many historical questions related to 18th-century France). The *Encyclopédie* was the work of its chief editor, the *philosophe* Denis Diderot, assisted by Jean Le Rond d’Alembert and over 150 other authors, many toiling in obscurity. By far, the most prolific author was the Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt, who wrote over 17,000 articles, or roughly a quarter of the entire *Encyclopédie*. Diderot himself wrote well over 5,000 articles, the second-highest total.

To modern people, it may seem hard to believe that the writing of an encyclopedia could be fraught with controversy. But this one was written by a unique group of progressive intellectuals known as the *philosophes*, who could not help but infuse their articles with high-minded concepts of tolerance, reason, open-mindedness, and egalitarian political ideas, all of which posed a bold and flagrant challenge to the authority of both Church and State. As a result, the *philosophes*, or the *encyclopédistes*, as they came to be called, worked under constant threat of censorship, arrest, and even worse.

AN ENDURING MYSTERY: KNIGHT or BISHOP?

Chess is included in the *Encyclopédie* in two main places: First, in the fifth text volume (1755), under the E’s (for *échecs*, the French word for chess), on page

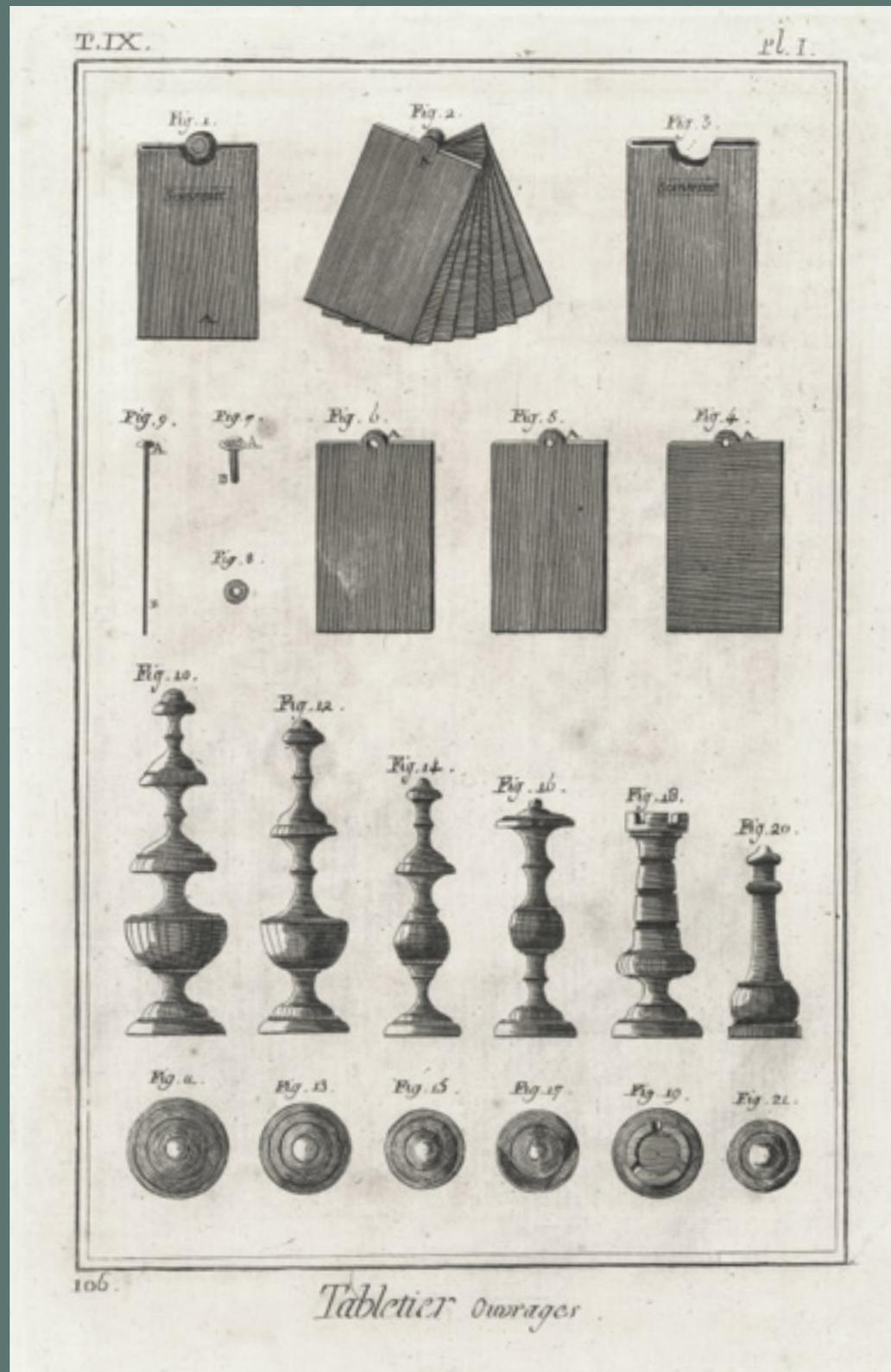
SAPERERE AUDE

 thus became the unofficial 

BATTLE CRY

of the Enlightenment.





Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *The Encyclopédie* (p. 106), 1751-1780, 16 x 10 ½ in., Paper, Collection of Tom Gallegos

244, can be found the actual article about the game, written and signed by the ever-prolific Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt.

And second, in the 9th plate volume (1771), lies an illustration of a chess set that has fascinated and confused chess historians and collectors for some 250 years. The set appears here, not because it was considered important to show what a chess set looked like, but merely because it was one of the typical products of a *Tabletier*, or toymaker. Known as an *Encyclopédie* set, or sometimes as a *Diderot* set, few complete examples of this once-common set are still extant. It also gave rise to later French chess set styles such as the *Directoire* and *Régence*.

The six different chess pieces are depicted in a sophisticated manner, giving both elevation (side view) and plan (top view), in the manner of an architectural drawing. One of the pieces, fourth from the left, is depicted as having a top cut into a crude triangle. Many writers have pointed out that this crude triangular cut was probably cheaper than employing a skilled carver to make horses' heads, the rest of the set being turned quite inexpensively on a lathe.

Though one might expect the piece to be a knight, other information in this entry conflicts with this identification. On the comments page that precedes this plate, the third piece from the left is referred to as the *cavalier*, or knight, while the fourth piece from the left is dubbed the *fou*, or bishop. This does not agree with how the pieces sit on the board at the start of play. There has been tremendous debate over the years about this conundrum, but with access to a genuine first edition of the *Encyclopédie*, I believe (with all due respect to those who disagree) that I have solved it. The piece ordering on the comments page is a typographical error—a misprint. The fourth piece from the left is indeed the knight.

**For the reasons behind this conclusion, please consult the fuller and more complete version of this essay on the WCHOF's website.*

PLAYERS of the WORLD, AWAKE! The RISE of the COFFEEHOUSE

You have all Manner of News there: You have a good Fire, which you may sit by as long as you please: You have a Dish of Coffee; you meet your Friends for the Transaction of Business, and all for a Penny, if you don't care to spend more.

Maximilien Misson (c. 1650-1722),
on the proliferation of London coffeehouses in the late 17th century.

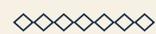
Just as chess was the chosen game of the *philosophes*, coffee was their chosen drink. Because of the way coffee tended to sharpen the wits rather than dull them like alcohol, coffee was the obvious choice for all manner of thinkers, writers, *philosophes*, *encyclopédistes*, scientists, academics, and everyone else intent on living what we would now call a life of the mind.

Today it is almost impossible to find a decent chess coffeehouse anywhere in the world; they have mostly gone the way of the dodo bird, or the *Ancien Régime*. It was not always so. Once there were thousands of them. Every major city in Europe and the Americas had countless options to choose from; there were some 300 coffeehouses in Paris alone, most of them allowing or encouraging chess and other sober games such as draughts. While many chess players today have heard of the Café de la Régence, and perhaps Café Procope in Paris, these were only the most famous.

Chess players today often tend to think of the Café de la Régence and places like it merely as places where chess was played, but this is a woefully inadequate view of history. If ever there was a place where world-shaking ideas flowed along with the flow of the black brew, mingling with the gentle click of the pieces, it was that venerable and much-mourned institution, the chess coffeehouse.

MYSTERIES of the AGES—CHESS AMONG the SECRET SOCIETIES

As can be seen on a ritual Masonic apron included in the show, the floor of virtually every Masonic Temple has always been the chequered board, or chess-



Louis Léopold Boilly
Le Jeu des Échecs (A Game of Chess)
Early 19th century
13 ¹¹/₁₆ x 19 ⁴/₁₆ in.
Color lithograph
Collection of World Chess Hall of Fame



J.E. Nilson
Das Schach Spiel (The Chess Game)
1730
12 ⁵/₈ x 16 ⁵/₁₆ in.
Aquatint
Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame

board pattern, of alternating black and white squares. The standard explanation for this symbolism is usually that it is taken as an allegory of the eternal opposition of life and death, or good and evil. (The philosophical term for this is *dualism*). Coincidentally—or perhaps not—this is also the most common historical interpretation given as to why the chessboard itself has alternating light and dark squares.

The GHOST in the MACHINE—Von KEMPELEN'S TURK

*Yesterday upon the stair
I met a man who wasn't there
He wasn't there again today
I wish, I wish he'd go away ...*

“Antigonish” by William Hughes Mearns (1875-1965)

“A man who wasn't there” is an apt description of the greatest enigma of the 18th century, the famous chess-playing automaton known as the Turk. The invention of Wolfgang von Kempelen (1734-1804), the Turk made its debut at the court of Empress Maria Theresa in 1770. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. It made for quite a spectacle, with its pantographic arm uncannily moving the pieces, and its artificial voice box that could pronounce one word, “*Échecs! Échecs!*” over and over, the Turk astonished audiences—including many of Europe's greatest minds—and made them believe that a machine really could play chess and play it well.

Since about the mid-19th century, it has been common knowledge that this was in fact a hoax, a mere magic trick, and that there was a human chess player hiding inside the whole time. But this does not begin to do justice to the effect, which, when done properly, can still amaze and stupefy even modern, sophisticated audiences. Historians of magic consider the Turk to have been the first great “cabinet illusion,” the term for making people and things appear and disappear from such cabinets or closets.



Switzerland, Tarot Cards of Marseilles, c. 1795-1825, 4 ½ x 2 ½ in., Paper, Collection of Tom Gallegos



The Turk spawned a veritable cottage industry of writers and thinkers who corresponded with one another and published books speculating about von Kempelen's invention, or even claiming to expose its secrets. The modern computer age was, in an important sense, born out of such speculations.

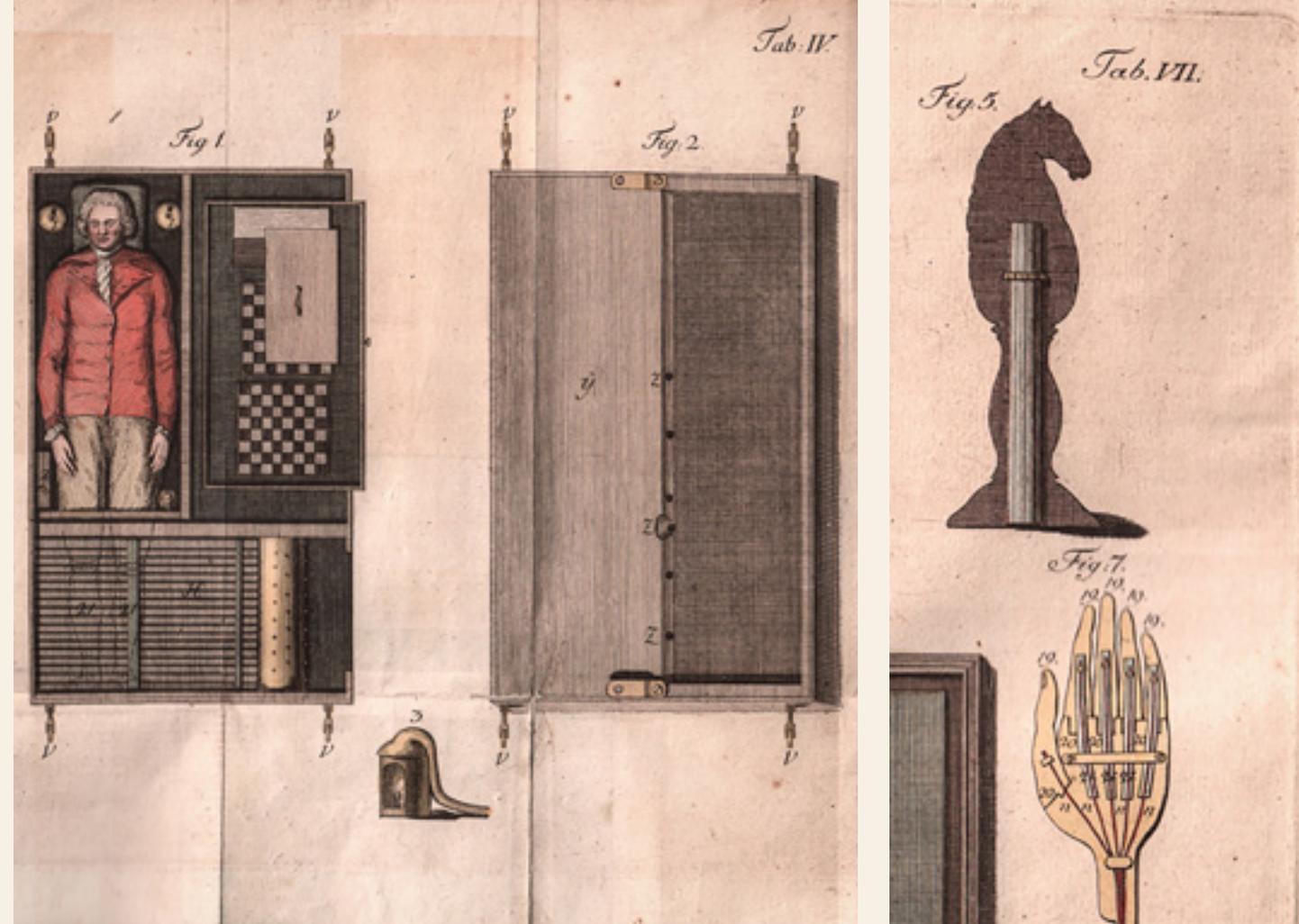
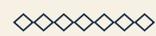
The original Turk was completely destroyed in a museum fire in 1854. In this exhibition we include three artifacts, held by the Library Company of Philadelphia, that are the only surviving relics from the original. They are the traveling or "marine" chessboard (because pegged chessboards and sets were often used at sea), probably the internal board used by the machine's human operator; a template or mask for allowing the human operator to perform the knight's tour, starting from any square on the board; and a leatherbound booklet of endgame problems, all of which the automaton would win, since it was stipulated to have the first move.

These three items were stored separately from the automaton, and thus escaped the fire, probably because they are the human operator's pocket aids, the equipment carried in and out of the machine by the human player, so they would not be lying around in view while the cabinet's doors were being opened and closed for the audience. They were kept pocketed to leave the operator hands-free, to help lift himself in and around the hidden compartment, avoiding the view of the audience before settling down to play a game. Once he did however, these items would be taken out of his pockets, and become indispensable aids to staying oriented to what was happening on the main chessboard above his head, thus enabling him to successfully play the games and perform the other feats.

The INFAMOUS LAW of SUSPECTS

We must smother the internal and external enemies of the Republic or perish with it; now in this situation, the first maxim of your policy ought to be to lead the people by reason and the people's enemies by terror.

Maximilien de Robespierre (1758-1794)



Joseph Friedrich Freiherr von Racknitz
Racknitz Plate IV, V & VII
 1789
 Paper
 Public domain



France, Paris Pattern Piquet Deck, c. 1790s, 3 ¼ x 2 ¼ in., Paper,
Collection of Tom Gallegos



The first government of revolutionary France, called the National Convention, issued a series of decrees aimed at cementing the gains of the Revolution against any remaining royalists. These culminated in the decree of September 17, 1793, known as the Law of Suspects, which outlawed any form of aiding, abetting, or even sympathizing with, royals and the aristocracy. It explicitly stated that anyone even suspected of having such sympathies was to be placed under arrest. (Arrest in those days could quickly lead one to the guillotine). This resulted in royal symbols and imagery of all kinds being frantically destroyed and replaced throughout France and other areas of Europe that were coming under French control.

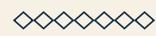
In the world of games, this mainly affected chess sets and decks of playing cards. Some figural chess sets, and most card decks had to be redesigned, with the kings and queens having their crowns lopped off on the woodblocks used for printing them, or completely redrawn and replaced with Phrygian caps (the cap of liberty, or bonnet rouge). For example, one set in the exhibition was created in Wallonia, which was annexed by France in 1795 as part of the War of the First Coalition (the first attempt of the great powers of Europe to stop Napoleon). The carver of this set may have replaced the royals to keep it in his inventory.

CONCLUSION

Dare to Know may mark the first time anywhere that a true first edition of the *Encyclopédie* has ever been displayed alongside a rare *Encyclopédie* chess set. And you will find many other important firsts and little-known stories from the Enlightenment and the Revolutionary era here as well, some of which I have only briefly sketched out in this document: The amber chess set of Catherine the Great of Russia, and the chess set of Madame Tussaud, of wax museum fame, who in her former life in France chronicled the worst excesses of the Revolution, by making death masks for the victims of the Terror. The last-known remnants of the infamous Turk. Memories of the most famous and important of all the countless chess coffeehouses of the day, the *Café de la Régence*. Period sets, boards, books and artifacts from all over Europe. And much more.



Dare to Know seeks to resurrect a lost world, the milieu of chess in the 18th and early 19th centuries. So much of the chess history that we know focuses on the later 19th and 20th centuries. Come and explore, and learn a bit about what happened before all that. And as you do, remember to *Dare to Know*—dare to think for yourself!



Denmark or Germany
Danish/German Count of Elberfeld Chess Set
c. 1750-1800
King size: 5 in.
Ivory
Collection of Tom Gallegos



French
French Miniature Encyclopédie Set
c. mid-18th century
King size: 1 ½ in.
Ivory
Collection of Tom Gallegos



France
Directoire Set
c. 1780-1800
King size: 3 ½ in.
Boxwood and ebony
Collection of Tom Gallegos



The Netherlands
Dutch Turret Set
c. 1775-1800
King size: 3 ½ in.
Bone
Collection of Tom Gallegos



England or the Continent
Pulpit Set
c. mid-18th to early-19th century
King size: 5 ¼ in.
Bone
Collection of Tom Gallegos

DARE TO KNOW

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Curated by Emily Allred, Curator, World Chess Hall of Fame, with Tom Gallegos.
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