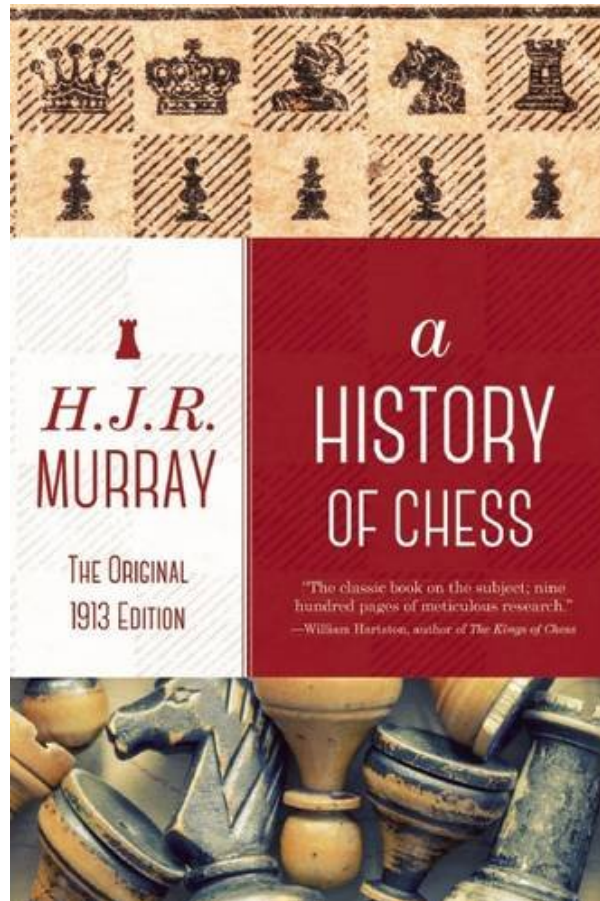
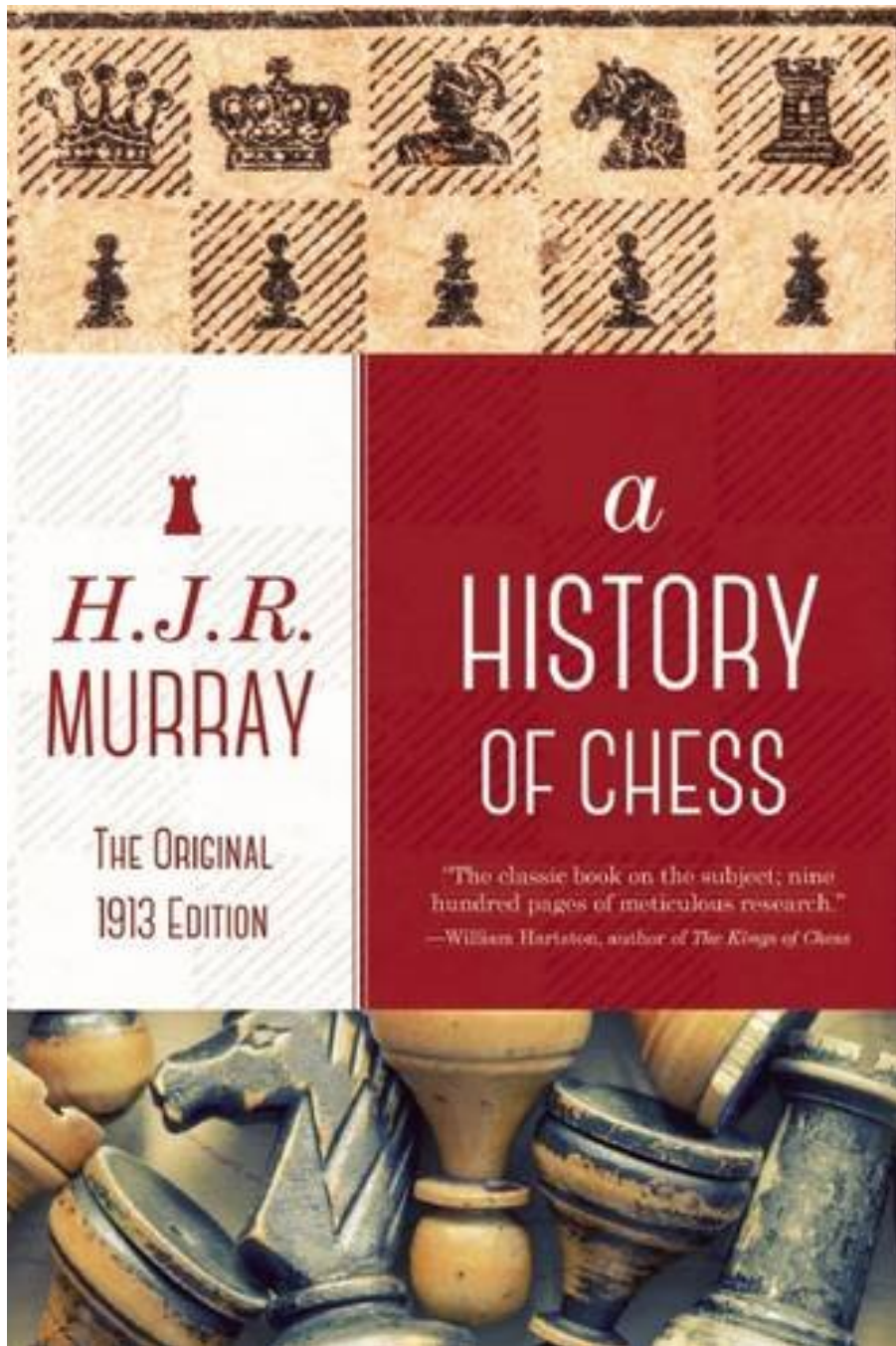


A HISTORY OF CHESS: THE ORIGINAL 1913 EDITION BY H.J.R. MURRAY



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Review

“So fascinating it is difficult to put down.” (Ernest J. Clarke - American Chess Bulletin)

“The classic book on the subject; nine hundred pages of meticulous research.” (William Hartston - The Kings of Chess)

About the Author

H.J.R. Murray was an English school inspector and prominent chess historian. His father was the first editor of the Oxford English Dictionary. Murray only published one other book during his lifetime, A History of Board Games Other Than Chess. He lived in England.

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An epic work that took more than a decade to complete, *A History of Chess*, originally published in 1913, is a historic undertaking that shattered preconceptions about the game upon publication. Over a century later, Murray's research and conclusions, in which he argues that chess originated in India, are still widely accepted by most chess historians.

Undertaking such a pioneering task, the scope of which has never been attempted before or since, Murray taught himself to read Arabic in order to decipher historical manuscripts on the game and its beginnings. His study unravels the history of the game as it evolved from its Asiatic beginnings, through the role chess played in Europe during the Middle Ages, and up until the nineteenth century with the arrival of modern chess as we know it.

A History of Chess includes transcribed diagrams of important games, as well as some of the more famous historical chess figurines, such as the Lewis chessmen. No single work on the game of chess has become close to touching Murray's in breadth or significance.

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Most helpful customer reviews

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

If you like tons of historical details...

By Peter B.

If you buy books by the pound this one is certainly worth the price! But, all kidding aside, it's an amazingly detailed discussion about where chess came from, the varieties it morphed into, and how it traveled the world up until the nineteenth century. The 900 pages of text and countless footnotes show how the author has

researched thousands of literary and historical documents for insight into the ancient origins and development of the game. Also included are anecdotes about those who played it, loved it, hated it, made it illegal, and condemned it as the work of the devil. While chess was at times regarded as a substitute for warfare, apparently some actual battles were lost because the army's leader was busy playing chess while he should have been commanding his troops. The author discusses early versions that were played with dice, others that were four-sided, sometimes played on a blank board without squares, and sometimes with huge boards and hundreds of pieces. When the author mentioned versions in which the captured pieces were added to your own side, or where players were allowed to arrange pieces in any order they wished it reminded me of Fischer's attempt to spice up the game with similar innovations.

But it can be slow going when wading through the massive amount of information about foreign kingdoms, their rulers, and so on. This is an academic history book which contains more details than most readers will want both in the body text and the footnotes. And it ends in the nineteenth century. The original version of this reprint is where most chess writers have gone when in need of a reliable source of chess history, but probably not for a casual Sunday afternoon read.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Yeah! That's right, Literati... 900 PAGES!

By Keith Halonen

I've owned my copy of this exceptional history for almost 30 years. It launched my avocation as an amateur chess historian. I've always had the sense that Murray's 1913 book is likely more accurate in that he was closer to the past than more recent chess historians. What new can be discovered? Carbon dating of ancient pieces, perhaps, but as to recorded history there are very few themes that are better recorded than chess. Everything SINCE 1913 is recorded a thousand times over, that's for sure. It was a great pleasure for me to discover 19 chess problems attributed to `Ala'addin at-Tabrizi (Tabriz, Persia), commonly called Kwaja `Ali ash-Shatranji (Great Ali of the Game of Chess). According to Ibn `Arabshah (died 1450), biographer of great Moghul emperor Timur the Lame (aka Tamerlane), `Ala'addin was an attorney and court-appointed historian. Few realize that this person is the traditionist (story-telling historian) who concocted some of the now-famous children's stories in the 1001 Arabian Nights, mostly featuring himself as the protagonist Aladdin! He was the greatest chessplayer in the world circa 1375. He could play four blindfolded games at once, while also playing two games of Pachisi and carrying on casual conversation with his friends!

For those with no desire to pour over many ancient diagrams and detailed gamescores from the entire last millenium (all the while trying to bear in mind confusing pre-16th century rules), there are still 650 pages of great reading here for you. Read about gruesome Gran Guignol chess (page 37), Conquistador Commander Diego Lopez' account of the first Portuguese expedition off Malacca in 1509 when a Javan mainlander boarded the ship and immediately recognized the game (page 96), or have a darkside chuckle over the 13th century chessboard murder of Charlemagne's nephew Berthelot at the hands of Renaud de Montaubon (page 741). Read about the chessboard seduction of Guy of Warwick (page 436) and discover Alaskan Yakutat Kuluschan chess pieces that predate the arrival of Columbus by 50 years (page 374). Find Lucena's 1497 description of en passant pawn capturing (page 784). Discover little known facts such as the bishop piece shape actually symbolizing the tusk and mouth of the elephant (that's what it used to be in the Indian army). Learn that those Egyptian tomb-paintings that look like people playing chess actually depict a game called Senet (don't let anyone tell you otherwise), which is a chase game more like canasta or backgammon (the only living game older than chess). Murray knew that a hundred years ago! Did you know that the pawn and knight are borrowed from games much older than chess (which emerged in the 5th century Punjab)? This and much, much more await you in Murray's History of Chess.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

The Wait was worth it!

By Thomas Owen Michnay Jr.

This magnum opus by Murray is amazing. I first got turned onto it in Cleveland, Ohio where The Library Main Campus, Special Collections houses the world's largest chess collection and the curator turned me onto this book. I readily admit that I have encountered difficulty while reading since I am relatively new to the game of chess. Having said that, there is no short explanations given here, and is superb in dealing with the Birth, and Historical significance of the game. No library is complete without it. Thanks for the new reissue.

Respectfully,
Tommy Ohio

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