

The Literary World of 15th-Century Valencia: The “Schacs d’amor” Manuscript and its Three Authors

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Around 1400, as the crisis of the Later Middle Ages took form, the supremacy that Barcelona previously exercised in the kingdom of Aragon passed on to the city of Valencia.

In the course of his 1494 visit, German traveller Hieronymus Münzer went as far as to call Valencia a "principal town in Spain". Another traveller, Nicolaus von Popplaw, noted down on his visit in 1484-85 that the city "*is much better and adorned with much more luxury than any other city in all the dominions of the king*". Its demographic ascent is documented throughout the Late Medieval period. The world map was growing exponentially, thanks to geographic discoveries: Castile kingdom towards the Atlantic and the kingdom of Aragon towards the Mediterranean in them, and from the port of Valencia, ships followed the so-called “route of the islands” towards the Balearic isles, Sardinia and Sicily, or reached the North African coast or the besieged kingdom of Granada. In Valencia, it was possible to find Castilian merchants, Portuguese slave dealers and Galician or Andalusian sailors who spoke of travelling towards new worlds.

We discover Valencia’s characteristic as a trading city starting from the 14th century. The maritime export of its own agricultural products (such as rice, nuts, saffron, sugar), handicrafts (ceramics from Paterna and Manises, leather products and the highly important textile and dyeing sector) and Castilian wool - with the port of Valencia as a natural route - created a multinational trading network.

From the end of the 14th century, Valencia was an important centre of immigration, and the flow of migrants grew incessantly, turning the city into one of the most highly-populated cities of the Mediterranean. Notary public Gaspar Eximeno, in his tax records for 1489, reflects the existence of 8.840 houses in the city and an approximate head count of around 40.000 inhabitants. A significant number of the population of Valencia was of Jewish origin. At the height of its glory, the Jewish quarter came to have close to 600 houses in Valencia, sheltering some 3.000 Jews. After the edict of expulsion promulgated by the Catholic Monarchs, several ships weighed anchor from the *Grao de Valencia* at the beginning of June 1492 laden with a numerous contingent of Jews heading for Italy. Those who remained were obliged to convert, or had already previously done so.

The Jewish converts in Valencia were characterized by a special interest in integrating into Valencian society by various means.

Another colony of special interest was the German population, since it included the core group of printers that turned Valencia into first-rate production centre during the early beginnings of printing (the merchant family of Jacobo Vizlant was famous for its paper imports destined for printing activities).

It is a well-established fact that the majority of the first printers in this cultural and political capital of the western Mediterranean at the end of the 15th century were Germans. During the second half of the 15th century, Valencia was busy and rich, having assumed the role of cultural capital. In the cultural circles of the city of that period, literary gatherings were frequent. Among them was a circle of very significant literati headed by Bernat Fenollar. The 15th century is the period of splendour in Valencian poetry. The writers of Valencia reflected this atmosphere in their works. The

situation of well-being and prosperity provoked the bourgeoisie of the period to take up literature as a source of entertainment. Within this entertainment, the Valencian satirical vein appeared in the framework of the Golden Age as a counterpoint to the obligatory seriousness of daily life.

Printing in Valencia, with editions in Valencian, began with splendid ambitions, as only a kingdom such as the Valencian could, becoming the publishing capital and, very soon, the cultural and linguistic axis of the period.

With respect to chess, the recently-invented way of playing was perfectly adjusted to the mentality of the new era, so congruent with Renaissance thought that this modality of chess immediately established itself throughout all Europe, rendering the medieval forms of playing obsolete. Valencia was the decisive setting for understanding the symbolism of the manuscript, *Scachs d'amor*.

This poem is a manuscript. Its full title is:

Hobra intitulada Schacs d'amor feta per don Françi de Castellvi e Narcis Vinyoles e Mosen Fenollar, sots nom de tres planetas ço es Marc, Venus e Mercuri per conjunccio e influencia dels quals fon inventada

The game as such was not played at any chess competition or tourney, but rather, as already indicated by the authors, was invented, composed so that the moves could serve as amatory passes in the form of an allegory.

The performance of this work in verse probably took place at one or another of the floral festivals that may still be seen nowadays throughout the Spanish Levant. The authors themselves took part in the representation in the following way:

Francesch de Castellvi played the pieces of Mars (red on the chessboard, equivalent to our white nowadays), Narcis Vinyoles played the pieces of Venus, (green on the chessboard, equivalent to our black), and Bernat Fenollar, as arbiter (Mercury), dictated the rules of the new chess, the Dame's Chess.

The Manuscript bears no date (although current research has finally dated it 1475) and neither is the city in which the event took place indicated. But Castellvi, Vinyoles and Fenollar were three very well-known members of a highly active Valencian literary circle at the end of the 15th century, and their important literary works are well-known in Valencia

After one of the literary gatherings that Bernat Fenollar frequently organized, these three young men (reflected in the woodcuts that Lope de Roca Alemany executed for *Lo procès de les Olives*, where two of them appear along with other authors from the period) were contemplating in the starry dawn sky of the Valencia at the end of May 1475 a conjunction of three brightly shining planets that was to lead to their being remembered forever, not only as poets and great man of the Kingdom of Valencia, but also as the authors of a poem that revolutionized the world of chess and marked a new manner of playing in honour of a Lady, the Lady par excellence in those days: the Catholic Queen.

Certainly, on those evenings after the Marian contest of 1474, besides discussing literature and poetry, people played chess, a common game amongst bourgeoisie, nobility and royalty.

We may think that perhaps there was a division of labour amongst the three, since from among our authors, only Castellvi was a true chess player, whilst the other two were only good amateurs.

Fenollar was perhaps the organizer and Vinyoles the person charged with compiling the sonorous verses in old Valencian that would come to form the 64 stanzas of the poem.

We are assuming this license in distribution on the basis of the role that each would adopt during the performance. Castellvi represented Mars: he was to talk first and pronounce the last stanza, once victory was won. Vinyoles would handle Venus' weapons and would be his worthy adversary, reciting verses of great beauty. Fenollar perhaps reserved the most significant role for himself: he would be Mercury, the first and only arbiter, who would dictate the rules and laws of the new chess.

However, above all, it should be recalled that we are in Valencia, one of the most important cities of the Kingdom of Aragon, a fief of the Catholic King, who was a fervent chess-player, like the Queen of Castile, Isabella I. Through her biographies, we know that our authors maintained relationships with the court (this is the affirmation of eminent researchers). That would justify the inspiration of the Catholic Queen in the novelty of their invention, the creation of the most powerful chess piece, the Dame-Queen, which substituted the "Fers" (Sp. *Alferza*) in the old game.

A powerful piece which, in a beautiful poem, moves and fights its way across the board in a combat that not only obeys the rules of war in a struggle between two armies, but also symbolizes the love-play between knights and ladies for the favours of one or the other.

We continue to assume that the work was performed at one of the frequent floral games that we still find in the Spanish Levant, and that after the performance in which our three Valencian poets intervened, the poem was kept and filed, and only the rules proclaimed by Mercury followed their path.

This was before its rediscovery in the 20th century. In 1905, a little over 100 years ago, Father Ignasi Casanovas accidentally found the manuscript of *Schacs d'amor*, which had been kept for 430 years in the Royal Chapel of the *Palau de Barcelona*, almost unknown to all and undervalued by some specialists in the game of chess, due to partisan interests in other manuscripts.

This poem written in Old Valencian was an unpublished poem, the authorship of which was set forth in the title, enabling the clear identification of the century to which it belonged.

Up to recent times, the exact date on which the poem was written had only been surmised. In a study published in 1999, Ricardo Calvo gave an approximate date between 1470 and 1490, based on its being a manuscript and on the evident youth of its authors. Today, thanks to the study done by J.A. Garzón in Chapter 3 of his book "El regreso de Francesch Vicent – Valencia 2005 (pp. 345 ff.) regarding the watermarks on the paper used to write it and the precise moment of the planetary conjunction of Mars, Venus and Mercury in Valencian skies, we can affirm that it should have been written at a date close to the 30th of May 1475.

A second fundamental figure is José Paluzie y Lucena, for having called attention to the presence and importance of the discovery in the specialized literature. Thanks to him, we know what the manuscript was like. In his own words, "*a sufficiently well-preserved notebook measuring 29 x 21.5 cm with parchment bindings, containing 13 written unnumbered folios and, afterwards, 28 blank sheets; cursive script from the end of the 15th century*". He went on to describe: "*notice that this game is played according to the reform that chess underwent at the beginning of the Modern Era, which is reflected in some verses (..) it is the oldest (game) known today that was played in the modern style*".

A third figure that can only be called providential is Ramón Miquel i Planas, who, apart from undertaking a study of vital importance, had the foresight to photograph the complete poem, thanks to which we know its content and meaning, despite its having been lost, destroyed, or taken - who knows. This photographic record is preserved in the Library of Catalonia and has been published in the book "*El poema Schacs d'amor, siglo XV, Primer texto conocido sobre ajedrez moderno, análisis y comentarios por Ricardo Calvo*", Madrid 1999.

Miquel i Planas pointed out the poetic and allegorical aspects of this magnificent poem and recommended its study from the point of view of chess, but among scholars, the

poem predominated over the game and for a long time this was the kind of study that was being done.

Ricardo Calvo jointly analysed the three planes on which *Schacs d'amor* develops: the poetic, the allegorical and the game of chess itself. Within this universe, he points out that not only is it the first game known in modern "Dame's chess", but it is also the first time that the rules of the new chess are clearly proclaimed, pronounced by Mossen Fenollar in his role as Mercury, the arbiter.

In the first stanza, the authors indicate that this is about a new game, and underscore the strength and importance that the queen is to have.

[1]

*Trobat-se Març ab Venus en un temple,
ensems tenint Mercuri [en] sa presència,
ordí hun joch de scachs, ab nou exemple:
Prenent Raó per Rei sense preeminència
La Voluntat per Reina amb gran potència;*

We must insist that *Schacs d'amor* as a poem is, above all, a love game. In a pure Renaissance setting, two gods fight with each other. Mars and his pieces are presented with all the qualities that a gentleman should have to obtain the love of his lady (Reason, Will, Amorous Desire, Praise, and Amorous Thoughts and Services).

Venus has all the qualities that a lady should possess to enamour her knight in the game of love (Honour, Beauty, a sense of Shame, Disdain, Sweet Glances and Courtesies of the Gallant Game).

And Mercury? His stanzas always follow those of the two leading gods. He establishes three levels for the game: that of the chess player, amorous gallantry, and the laying down of the rules of chess, assuming the role of the arbiter who will explain how this competition should be played, this being the first time that this figure of the arbiter exists.

He talks about the board as a simile of time, with nights and days like the colours of the squares, the number of these being equal to the number of stanzas. Immediately afterwards, he begins with the new rules, which will be preserved up to the present. (We mention, among other things, the rule that a piece touched must be played (stanza VI), and the movement of the king to a third square that recalls the Lombard rules to which Murray refers (stanza XV). The presence of an arbiter (stanza XXXVI), passant capture (stanza XXXIX), the different kinds of mates (stanzas XLV, XLVIII, LI), and the kinds of movements for dames (stanza LIV) are mentioned, along with the rules that a player cannot have more than one on the board (stanza LVII), that if the queen is captured the game is lost (stanza LXII), and that kings and queens cannot fight amongst themselves (stanza LX).

The possible political situation glimpsed between the lines remains to be pointed out. Govert Westerfeld, in his work written with J.A. Garzón (*La reina Isabel la Católica: su reflejo en la dama poderosa de Valencia, cuna del ajedrez moderno y origen del juego de damas*, Valencia, 2004) already notes down this possibility, and not only in the first stanza quoted, which indicates "a king without pre-eminence and the will of a very powerful queen".

The unaccountable prohibition against queens fighting amongst themselves and capturing each other found in stanza LX could be related to the war with Portugal during the struggle for the throne against Princess Juana, since on the 28th of April 1475, to prevent a struggle between two ladies, Isabella I granted absolute power as a peer to her husband Ferdinand the Catholic. It is the date of this concession that would mark the allegorical significance of the stanza, effaced by the passage of time, but which would even more strongly confirm 1475 as the year that the poem was composed.

Whoever is seeking exceptional technical quality is going to be disappointed. This is an invented game, from which no conclusion may be drawn regarding the chess skills of the players (Castellvi and Vinyoles). As occurs throughout the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, games in allegorical combat are pretexts for love and gallantry. They are played, of course, but in accordance with new rules. What is really important is a new piece that would give chess a new name from this moment onwards - Dame's Chess - and triumphant love that would have the last word.

These three chess-playing writers enjoyed a noteworthy social prestige and great political influence in the Kingdom of Valencia during the last quarter of the 15th century. The three were related in one way or another to the circle closest to King Ferdinand the Catholic. Let us remember as well that both monarchs played chess - the king, according to some chroniclers, "excessively".

Catalonian scholars have given them some attention, although not as much as they deserve, since it is hard to find their works and biographies outside the area of Valencia, partly since these were written in the vernacular, and partly because, unfortunately, they have not been translated into other languages of international diffusion. (Salvador Guinot, *"El ajedrez en la tertulia de mossen Fenollar"*, *Boletín de la Sociedad Castellonense de Cultura*, Castellón del la Plana: 1921, pp. 132-143; Antoni Ferrando Francés, *Narcís Vinyoles i la seva obra*, Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres, Valencia: 1978; Alexandre Bataller and Carme Narbon, *"Escacs d'amor; una obertura al joc"* (*A Sol Post: Estudis de Llengua i Literatura*. Ed. Marfil, 1991).

Brief Biographies

"Caualler" Francesc de Castellvi (+ 6-11-1508), who appears as one of the three authors of the poem *"Scachs d'amor"*, is the person we know least about. The surname Castellvi originated in Bourgogne. A branch of the family moved to Aragon, their coat of arms representing "a silver castle in a blue field, bordered in silver and blue " (Julio de Atienza, *Nobiliario Español*, Aguilar, Madrid: 1948, p. 557).

He belonged to an aristocratic family from Valencia and was an acknowledged player of modern chess. He was lord of several towns belonging to the area around Játiva, and acted as chamberlain to the prince and future King, and as steward and close counsellor in the Aragonese court of Ferdinand the Catholic, at least between 1476 and 1497. Even after centuries, some aspects of his personality may be observed, thanks to his peculiar literary expressions.

Professor Antoni Ferrando Francés speaks of his good literary technique and the authentic filigrees in some of his works, particularly in his contributions to the *"Obres e trobes en llaor de la Verge Maria"*. His attitude reflects a taste for struggle in the search for triumph and for the confrontation of difficulties. His expansive personality and vital character endowed him with contagious optimism. As a poet, Castellvi mainly appears in minor poems, collaborating with the other two co-authors of *Scachs d'amor*.

His literary contributions often emerge as riddles and literary challenges, as may be seen in one of the poems published in Hernando del Castillo's *Cancionero General* (second edition, Valencia: 1514). It consists of a *"demanda adeuinativa"*, a riddle in which an attempt is made to guess the name of a certain lady, which consisted of seven letters and four syllables. The first two syllables were "one of the highest names that appear in the Passion of Jesus Christ" and the remaining two syllables correspond to a great prize.

Fenollar formulated the question in verse and Castellvi and Vinyoles gave him the answer in brass band: *"Elionor"*. *Eli, Eli, sabactani del lamma* is one of Christ's laments

on the cross. "Onor" means honour. The silent "H" was used very erratically. In the *Scachs d'amor* MS, words such as "Honor", "Obra" or "Honestat" sometimes appear with "H" and sometimes without.

Vinyoles clarified further that the complete name of this lady included "de Corbera", an aristocratic family with a "speaking" coat of arms ("corb" is "crow" in Catalan). Perhaps because of this, Castellvi and Vinyoles call her "beautiful popinjay", "enamelled pagó" and "kind falcon" in the rhymed praises to the lady that followed.

An aristocrat named Romeu de Corbera moved to Valencia as "Maestre" of the Order of the Knights of Montesa between 1410 and 1445. Elionor de Corbera could have been, in reality, the muse that inspired some amorous affair that our poets preferred to deal with in a delicate manner. And perhaps this story inspired *Scachs d'amor*.

Mossen Bernat Fenollar (1440?-1526?)

Abbot "mossen Bernat Fenollar" (*mossen* is a regional title for "Master" and also "Father") was born in Penaguila, near Alcoy, in the province of Alicante. He belonged to a noteworthy Valencian family and perhaps was a second son, among those who, during this period, were earmarked to join the Church (his coat of arms consisted of four sable bands in a gold field). The year he was born is estimated to be between 1435 and 1440; he died in Valencia before 1527. He maintained relations with King Ferdinand, after having served as his *escribano de ración* (equivalent to a Purser or Quartermaster in financial and economic matters) and in 1479, as chaplain, chapel supervisor and choirmaster of King Ferdinand himself.

As a priest, Fenollar held a post as choirmaster of the Cathedral of Valencia in 1467. In 1510, he was also a professor of mathematics at the University, under General Studies. Abbot Fenollar's important role in his activities as literary sponsor and organizer of cultural competitions in Valencia suggests that he was the soul of the trio. Hence, this was probably the reason why he appears in the manuscript assuming the role of Mercury, the arbiter.

He also played an active part in the group of literati that met in the house of Berenguer Mercader, the circles where Mossen Fenollar moved being the same ones in which the first books printed in Valencia - and according to several sources, in all of Spain - emerged.

On 11 February 1474, he was called upon by Viceroy Luis Despuig and charged with holding a poetry contest on 24 March in which the mandatory theme was to praise the Virgin Mary. Out of this Marian contest emerged the first book printed in the Valencian language, in addition to being the first book printed in the entire kingdom of Spain: the oldest incunabulum entitled "*Obres e trobes en llaors de la Verge Maria*", printed by Lambertus Palmart in 1474. This was a 60-page compilation of the poems presented at this poetry contest by the most select among Valencian poets.

Fenollar acted as the secretary of the jury, with several contributions from Castellvi, Vinyoles and Fenollar himself, among many other writers ("*Don Jorge Centelles: N. Corella: **Mosen Bernardo Fenollar** por sí y a nombre de la Virgen Pura: **Mosen Francisco de Castellvi**: Mosen Barcelo Cavaller: N. Alcañiz: Mosen Juan Nagera: Belenguer Cardona: Pedro Perez: Juan Verdauxa: Juan Moreno en persona de la noble Violante, cuyo apellido se calla: Antonio Vallnanya: Luis Muñoz: Juan Gamisa: **Narciso Vinyoles**: N. Sobrevero: N. Lanzol: Gines Fira: Miquelot Perez: N. Villalva: Juan del Bosch: N. Gazull: Luis Garcia: Bernardo Despuig: Geronimo Monzó: Bernardo Valenanya: Pedro de Civillar: Lorenzo Diamant: Juan Sentcliment: Bartolomé Salvador: Juan Vardania: Luis Catalá: Bartolomé Dimas: un Anónimo Castellano: Francisco de Sanramon: Mateo Esteve: Pedro Alcañiz: Jayme Roig: Pedro Bell: Y Mosen Juan Vidal.*")

Of special significance to chess is printer Lope de Roca "Alemany", because he was one of the printers who - apart from Vicent's treatise on chess - published *Lo procés de les*

olives on 25 October 1497, a collection of satirical poems in which several contributions by Fenollar and Vinyoles appear. It also includes a woodcut that shows both together with several men of letters in the Valencian circle.

Given the influence of Fenollar on literary activities in Valencia, Salvador Guinot suggests in his study that the general concept of the poem *Scachs d'amor* was to be attributed to Fenollar, the technical planning to Castellví (whom Guinot imagines an expert chess player, due to his playing the winning pieces of the game), and the verification to Vinyoles, who had a proven ability in these tasks.

"The magnificent Mossen Narcis Vinyoles", as he was called in his later works, died in Valencia in 1516, a few months after Ferdinand the Catholic, at an estimated age of between 70 and 75 years. He would thus have been born between 1440 and 1445. He was a significant politician and writer of the Valencia of the last quarter of the 15th century. He came from a well-known family of jurists, documented in these functions since the first decades of the 15th century; and during his long political career, he occupied important positions in the city.

It seems a concrete example of the well-known rise of the urban bourgeoisie as a factor of influence. For several years, Vinyoles was the principal administrator of the *Llotja* or the New Market (1473, 1496, 1497 and 1516), a great success in an important trading city such as was the Valencia of that period. Vinyoles enjoyed the favour of King Ferdinand, being, in addition, a faithful servant of the royal policy of centralization.

(Already in 1468, Vinyoles was appointed member of the City Council, a post renewable yearly upon the proposal of a parish. The parish of Santo Tomás appointed him for 1468, 1476 and 1492; the parish of San Andrés (which would have been the area where he was born, since his father Antoni Vinyoles lived there) in 1469; and the parish of Santa Maria in 1491. The parishes of San Salvador, San Bartolomé and San Juan appointed him to diverse positions in the consistory. Twice he was appointed to the important post of "Civil Judge". In 1495, a letter from King Ferdinand praising Vinyoles recommended him for the position of "Criminal Judge". The text of this letter says:

"Lo Rey.- Cambrer e Batle general: Per la bona relació que tenim de la suficiència, disposició, abilitat e probitat del amat nostre Narcis Vinyoles, ciutadà de aquixa nostra ciutat de València, per a regir e exercir qualsevol dels officis de aquella, vos diem, encarregam e manam quant estretament podem que si lo dit Narcis Vinyoles exira en hu dels tres redolins que us seran presentats lo sendemà de Sanct Tomas primer venidor per a la elecció faedora del offici de Justicia Criminal de la dita ciutat per a lany après immediatament següent de Mill.CCCCLXXXV, eligiau i nomenau aquell per al dit offici axi com Nos en tal cas ara per favors lo elgim e nomenam..." (ARV, Cancelleria Reial, "Diversorum": Ferdinand II, 1483-1496, dossier 2, vol. 8. F. CCLXIII. Cit. by Ferrando Francés, p. 21).

Upon merging the Kingdom of Aragon with the Kingdom of Castile, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella began to create a unified State and decided that linguistic differences were not desirable. Thus, on translating the Jacobus de Bergamo's *Supplementum Chronicarum* from Latin to Castilian in 1510, he explicitly renounced Valencian-Catalonian. Today, there are still Catalanian scholars who consider Vinyoles a traitor to his own cultural roots, which would also explain why research on the works of Vinyoles is still relatively rare.

Throughout his long life, Vinyoles occupied high political positions in the city. He could be defined as a losing chess-player and a winning politician.

A certain number of trivial, satirical or amatory poems appears in his works, but the majority of them were increasingly more related to religious themes, such as those found in the literary competition in honour of the Virgin Mary, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Christopher, etc. In particular, the gravity of his sermon about Psalm 50 in verse and prose, "Miserere mei Deus", published in Nicolaus Spindeler's incunabulum stamped 24 July 1499 must be underscored, preserved in the University of Valencia in a famous volume known as *Lo Natzaré*.

It is also this seriousness of the Valencian high politician that reinforces our impression that *Scachs d'amor* is a work of youth. There is no other way of understanding the assumption of the role - as allegorical as this may have been - of the goddess Venus in

an amorous dispute on the part of someone who, in his mature years, exercised the functions that "*lo magnífich mossen* Narcis Vinyoles" would later perform.

There are several other reasons. It is a manuscript and not a book. The first book printed - *Obres los e trobes en llaor de la Vergel Maria*, by Lambertus Palmart - appeared in Valencia around 1474 (containing, in addition, poems by Fenollar, Castellví and Vinyoles). Moreover, in the manuscript the title "mossen" is not mentioned with respect to Vinyoles. This title, on the other hand, is given exclusively to Fenollar. Castellví, at least, has a "don" before his name, but Vinyoles signs exclusively with his name.

We see him appearing with the title "lo magnífich" in 1488, in a literary contest in honour of St. Christopher. All these facts point to the execution of the manuscript at a probable date during the decade of 1470, which subsequent, more recent studies have set at 1475.

In 1490, a year of plague, Narcis Vinyoles fell ill. Faced with the possibility of death, he wrote a will indicating that he was a widower, and asking his administrators, in memory of his wife, the "honorable" Margarita (we know that in 1468 he was already married to her, but we do not know when or how she died) to distribute 15 pounds for yearly masses for her soul, settling some debts that had to be paid, among them 5000 sous lent by D. Franci de Castellví. Not having children, he made his first degree cousin Berenguer de Floris his heir, and subsidiarily, Gaspar Desllava, the son of a first cousin (according to records 22560 and 22547 of the Notary Public Francesc Pintor, who was in turn the brother-in-law of Brianda de Santangel, Narcis Vinyoles' second wife, since he was married to Violante de Santangel).

The political activity of Castellví, Fenollar and Vinyoles and their good relations with King Ferdinand indicate a possible link to Lucena and his clan. Indeed, it seems probable that the chess players of the Valencia literary circle were acquaintances of the Lucenas, if not as a group of chess players, as was possible, at least as a group of Valencian civil servants of a high rank. The contact with chess is not limited only to the well-established relation with the printer Leonard Hutz, but rather, relations between the Lucenas and the Valencian group may be supposed. If the point about having travelled "to Italy and France" with his father before writing his work remarked by Lucena is true, the port of Valencia was the most sensible route of departure for Italy.

Castellví had relations with converts, as the son of the "conversa" Violant d'Esplugues. Perhaps Fenollar was also one, to judge from some connotations of his name, whereas Vinyoles was related to another group of well-known "conversos", the famous Santangel clan.

Luis de Santangel was the most important banker in the Kingdom of Aragon, even in its Italian parts. King Ferdinand did not only trust his money, but also his advice, and it was Santangel who financially supported Columbus' first expedition.

Part of Vinyoles' political success, with particular regard to his second marriage in 1497, may perhaps be due to this intimate connection with the Santangel family, since Brianda de Santangel was the niece of the great banker (Vinyoles had to ransom his wife, accused of "Judaizing", from the fury of the Inquisition [Jordi Ventura "*Inquisició espanyola I cultura renaixentista al País valencià*" Ed. Tres i Quatre, Valencia 1978.])

The marriage seems to have been one of those dictated by political convenience, given the difference in age between Vinyoles and Brianda. The couple lived in the parish of San Valery in 1513.

Vinyoles died in 1517, but Brianda was still alive in 1543, when she declared in her will that her marriage to Vinyoles had no descendants. This impression is reinforced by one of Vinyoles' love poems, when Fenollar poses a friendly riddle about the name of Brianda. Vinyoles' response was:

"Hoynt tal nom, hoy cant de sirena

*Fent-m adormir l'esperit sensual
 Brianda, crech, es de tal font la vena
 Y aquet dins mi, ab voluntat serena
 Viu y viura lo terme natural".*

("Hearing that name, I hear a siren's song / that lulls my sensual spirit / Brianda, I believe, is the stream of this spring / that, within me, with a serene will / lives and will live its natural term".)

Brianda was the daughter of Berenguer de Santangel, Luis' brother. Her older brother, also called Luis, was abbot in San Giovanni di Fiore, in Naples in 1511. This branch of the Santangel clan lived in Naples for several years, which would explain Vinyoles' Italian connections, observable throughout his entire literary production, thus establishing the connection between the circle of Valencia and southern Italy.

In fact, Vinyoles did not only speak Catalanian, Castilian and Latin; he also wrote very fluent verses in Italian. One of his poems in the 1474 competition in honour of the Virgin Mary was in the "Tuscan language", and began with the line, "Dilecta de Dio, obediente ançilla". In the competition in honour of the Immaculate Conception (1486), Vinyoles writes another "Tuscan" poem that begins with the line, "Non po sentire lo insensibili morto"

This would also explain the Valencian influence, up to now completely overlooked by scholars, on the works of the Italian chess treatise-writers from the period that were so important. It may even be possible to extrapolate this to Vida's famous *Scacchia Ludus*, where two Greek gods playing chess appear.

Woodcuts from the period in which several of the figures cited appear



Woodcut done by the printer Lope de Roca Alemany for the book *Lo procés de les Olives*, where several of the members of some of the literary circles existing in 15th-century Valencia are represented.

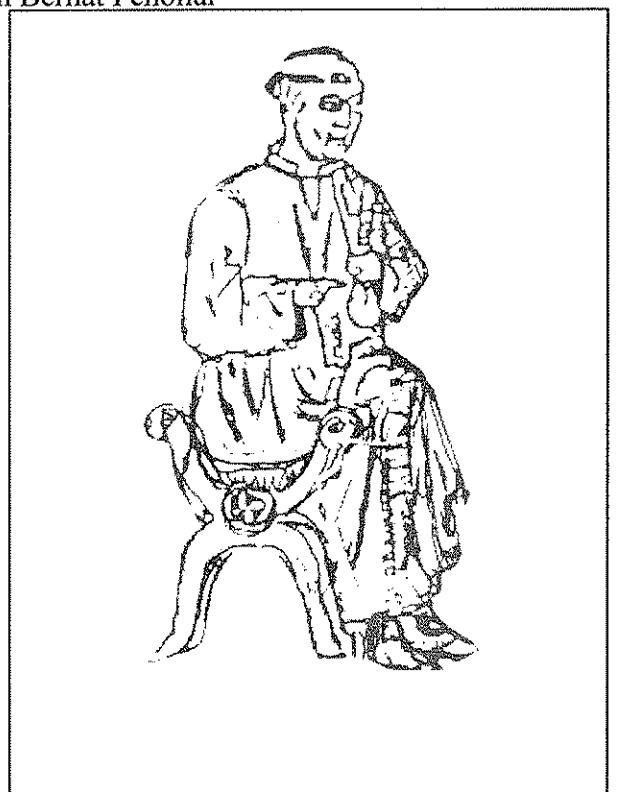
In the upper right hand corner is the hero of the work "*Lo somni de Johan Johan*", very famous during that period. The rest, according to the inscription that appears in letters beside it, are - from left to right and from up to down:

Mossen. Bernat Fenollar,
 Johan Moreno (Notary Public),
 "The Magnificent" Narcis Vinyoles,
 Jaume Gassull (Syndic of the fishermen's commune)
 Jerome Bosch
 Baltasar Portell (man of letters)



In this woodcut we find several of the figures mentioned beforehand strolling through the city. We can identify Johan Moreno, Narcis Vinyoles and perhaps also Mossen. Fenollar.

These are pictures of Narcis Vinyoles and Mossen Bernat Fenollar



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