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Welcome!

DRAUGHTS PROBLEMATIC
A HISTORY

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PREFACE

Draughts allows everyone to participate and strive in the field of the game itself - a draughts game at the board, in which two partners participate, and in the field of problematic (draughts composition).

Problematic is a type of activity within draughts, the goal of which is to find original works within certain genres.

We use “to find” rather than “to invent” (“to compose”). This choice reflects the fact that all positions that may arise in draughts already exist in theory, because all actions in draughts happen within a limited space. Therefore, it is impossible to invent (compose) something that already exists but remains unknown yet. While computers currently lack the capability to find and store all possible positions in draughts, it's only a matter of time before they do. As far as people are concerned, we can only speak in the context of finding the original position that has not yet been found. But in everyday life we may use the term *composing* a work of problematic.

A work of problematic is either a position found outside of a game or a position that occurs within a game, both of which must meet the criteria for a work of problematic. To solve a work of problematic means to find thematic variant(s) that reveal the author's intention.

In the course of the development of problematic, two main genres were defined: “problems” and “endgames”.

The content of the problems genre is a combinational play, consisting (mainly) of a series of sacrifices of White pieces.

The content of the endgames genre is a complex of thematic variants (TV), which consists (mainly) of positional maneuvers.

There are two principal motivations for composing problems.

The first: to study the combination possibilities in positions close to positions that occur in a draughts game. This type of problems has an educational character, for this type has no requirements regarding the accuracy of the solution and the finale (apart from the so-called “Bound problematic”). We consider such problems as “practical problems” whose main criterion of aesthetic value is the degree of similarity between their Initial positions and positions which occur in a draughts game.

The second: to find new (completely or partially) combinational structures in positions, which by their drawing may differ (completely or partially) from the drawing of positions which occur in a draughts game. We refer to this type of problems as “artistic problems”. In modern problematic, special requirements have been entered for this type.

The aesthetic value of artistic problems is defined by a set of criteria in which the originality of the author's concept and the spectacular of the solution come to the fore; the similarity of their Initial positions to positions which occur in a draughts game is only one component, and not the main one.

The Initial position in such problems may not always arise from the starting position of a draughts game (20 pieces of each color). But even if it is possible to prove the emergence of the Initial position (legality) of a problem from the starting position 20x20, such proof is formal and has nothing similar with the logic of the development of the draughts game. Therefore, in problematic, there is no requirement to prove the emergence of the Initial position of a problem from the starting position of a draughts game.

Problematic is closely tied to the game of draughts, as it follows the rules of the game and showcases its artistic possibilities. At the same time, problematic stands as an independent form within draughts. This independence is underscored namely by the lack of a requirement to trace the origin of the Initial position of the problematic work back to the starting position of the draughts game (20x20).

This book mainly examines Artistic problems (hereinafter referred to as problems) and their authors.

It is not possible to include examples of the work of everyone who composed problems from the time of the birth of 100-square draughts to the present day. However, in the supplement “Problemists of all epochs” we indicate all the authors of problems whose names we were able to find, all those who supported the spirit of problematic in 100-square draughts over the centuries.

In the history of problematic, we distinguish three main periods of development.

The first period, from the appearance of the first books on 100-square draughts in the 18th century to the first decade of the 20th century inclusive, we consider as the “Problematic of the pioneers”.

The second period, from the official organization of the draughts movement at the beginning of the 20th century to the introduction of the first rules for the problematic, published in G. Gortmans’ “1001 Miniaturen” in 1939, we consider as the “Old problematic”.

The third period, beginning after the introduction of the first rules for the problematic and continuing to this day, we call the “Modern problematic”.

Of course, life is more flexible than the periods that we (or anyone else) might distinguish. The development of problematic was not revolutionary; problematic developed through evolution. There are authors whose creative life took place at the borderlines of the designated periods, partially covering both. We present such authors in one period, however, depending on the period their problems were more characteristic of. We make an exception for the family dynasties of problemists, however, and present family members sequentially.

Many books have been written about the problematic. Among them are books whose content presents the problems of one author, or books that study some combination theme. But the world history of problematic is covered

in only one book: the work of the Dutch problemist D. Kleen, “Geschiedenis damproblematiek” (“A development of draughts problematic”), published in 1945, which serves as the prototype for this book.

Since 1945, problematic has become deeper. After the founding of the World Draughts Federation (FMJD) in 1947, the geography of 100-square draughts expanded. Along with the development of the game, problematic also developed, especially in the USSR, whose players powerfully entered the leaders of 100-square draughts in the late 1950s - early 1960s; twenty years later, problemists of that mighty country, which has gone down in history, also powerfully declared themselves.

Numerous publications in different countries contain relevant and interesting materials, but until now no attempt has been made to collect together the most valuable of what has been published on problematic anywhere.

It is time to make such an attempt. Our book is a synthesis of materials taken from literature (periodicals) connected with our personal research into the development of problematic. The history of draughts in France in the 18th-19th centuries is presented according to the book by M. Nicolas and G. Foucault “Anthologie des problèmeistes français du Jeu de Dames” (“Anthology of French problemists of draughts”, 1966). Biographical information taken from periodicals is given without indicating the sources of publication; otherwise the book would become difficult to read. The most important conceptual theses are cited with an indication of the source of publication and the original text.

In the 20th century, together with the beginning of the organization of the draughts movement in Europe, the division of draughts amateurs into players and problemists began. With the growing number of draughts clubs, the number of competitions and people wishing to succeed in them increased accordingly. Draughts became a sport.

Problematic, in its essence, is not a sport, although it does acquire sport’s features in the course of contests and championships.

Since the first world championships, a division between players and problemists appeared, contrary to previous generations, when the majority of leading players, more or less, also composed problems (of any type). The distance between players and problemists was becoming larger, and as a result we may say that by the second half of the 20th century players and problemists were finally divided. The number of problemists was much smaller than the number of players, as the sport side of draughts was more attractive for people to satisfy their ambitions. Accordingly, the society’s interest in players was larger, with attention given to the personal qualities of the players, both in and out of draughts. As a rule, information about people who loved draughts only in its problematic part is lesser (with some exceptions).

The book does not contain photographs of all the authors of problems and promoters of problematic, but the paucity of photographs is not the result of our personal choice. We would have been happy to include photographs of all problemists whose works are present in the book, but, alas, our incomplete photo gallery contains all we managed to find.

We are grateful to everyone who helped us in working on the book: E. van de Akker, J. Bastiaannet, M. Ben, S. Berenstein, G. Dalidovich, C. Fougeret, A. Gimbutas, N. Gortmans, J. M. Inguañez, B. Ivanov, I. Ivatsko, A. Kačiuška, A. Kogotko, K.W. Kruijswijk, A. Maluta, V. Matus, N. Mezenina, S. Mezenin, A.D. van Mourik, V. Muliar, A. Panchenko, S. Pedko, A. Rom, G. Rudnitskij, N. Shapoval, G. Shestirikov, P. Shkludov, A. van der Stoep, A. Tavernier, M. Tsvetov, A. Uvarov, J. Viergever and E. Zubov.

We are grateful to David Black for his help in translating the book into English.

We are especially grateful to three problemists, without whose help our book would hardly have been written: L. de Rooij, J. Vink, and J. Céron.

In all positions, the task is (as a rule) “White moves first and wins”. If the position has a different task, it is indicated under the diagram. Non-obligated moves of Black are indicated in brackets. The asterisk (*) indicates to refer to the “Remarks” section in the Supplements. The sign “+” means a win, the sign “=” means a draw. A list of abbreviations is provided in the Supplements.

In some publications (i.e., in “Het Damspel”), the Initial position of a problem was sometimes published without the last move of Black, which led to that initial position, and the question “Can Black move 21-26 (for instance)?” was placed under the diagram. In such cases, we give the initial position of a problem after such a move 21-26 without any comments. A list of abbreviations is provided in the Supplements.

Both in modern problematic and in the problematic of past epochs, borrowing (intentional or unintentional) of either ideas or details from earlier published positions was not uncommon.

There is nothing wrong with this if such borrowing leads to the creation of a problem that has a significant degree of novelty. But it is not easy to evaluate the quality of such a problem, and an answer has not yet been found (and is unlikely to ever be found) to the question: how to evaluate problems demonstrating the same idea, which one author formulated earlier but a later author improved?

In such cases, we took the best realization, in our opinion, citing the predecessors in the “Remarks” (R).

Examples of date abbreviations are as follows: “1930e” means the period from 1930 to 1939 inclusive; “01.08.1956” means 1 August 1956; “09.1974” means September 1974. The notice of a move 31/27 means either a choice of the square where White King arrives or the changing of moves 31 and 27.

The endgame with White King 2 and Black pieces 1, 6, 25 (Black to move) is known from Spanish books of the 16th and 17th centuries for draughts on the 64-square board; the winning strategies are the same as on the 100-square board. According to A. van der Stoep, those books had the character of a textbook; their authors documented what they saw in the current game and we share his perspective on this matter.

Therefore we cannot attribute an author of this endgame, even in the book in which this endgame appeared for the first time. That epoch did not consider indicating the author of a position as important, unlike in the following centuries.

In 2005, the National Library and the National Archives of Quebec officially merged into a single entity, BAnQ. In 2015, the BAnQ numérique portal ([BAnQ numérique](#)) became open access. This made it possible to study a huge amount of Canadian periodicals from the first half of the 20th century. After this, it became clear that draughts in Canada and Canadian problematic deserved a separate part in this book: so huge and powerful is this draughts world. Please note that titles “La Presse” and “La Patrie” are relevant to Canadian newspapers; in case they are relevant to France newspapers, it is indicated specially.

The correctness of the positions of modern problematic was checked with the KINGSROW program (written by E. Gilbert). The originality of the positions was checked using the TURBO database (database founded by W. de Zwart and TURBO program written by K. Bor) and the KNDB “Toernooibase” database (written by P. Bouma, H. Veenstra, and G. Kos).

Sometimes problems with Second solution are interesting by their authors conceptions. For such problems, we open “Museum of Second Solutions” (see Supplement 1).

In the article “Two Images of the Manoury Café” (see Supplement 3), we propose our hypothesis about people described in the pictures.

In Supplement 7, we give the names of all the problemists we were able to find: everyone who composed at least one problem (either artistic or practical) on a 100-square board. Where biographical information is unavailable, we indicate (approximately) the years in which an author was active. For the Netherlands, the “Index of Dutch Problemists of the 20th Century” (2001) by K. W. Kruijswijk and L. de Rooy was used as a basis, supplemented in large part by research undertaken by A. D. van Mourik. Problemists from former French colonies (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) and problemists from Monaco are given in the list of French problemists. The left column lists the problemist’s first and last name. The middle column lists their biographical information. If such information is not available, then the right column indicates (approximately) the years in which this problemist showed himself.

We neither applied the requirements of modern problematic nor noted the infringements of modern rules towards positions composed before the establishment of modern rules.

Names of both problemists and geographical names from the former USSR we translated from Russian because such translation has become the norm in Western draughts literature.

The pronoun “we” (which we use) does not imply that this book was co-authored or written by a creative team: it was written solely by the author of these lines.