

"LA PARTITA AL NOBIL ZIOGO DE LI SCACCHI" In MAROSTICA

di Gianfelice Ferlito

Last September, together with our CCI American friends Sarisohns and Levenes, I went to Marostica to see "La Partita", the famous Chess Game with living pieces, which every even year is played in the Piazza of the Castle. (see photo n.1)

"La Partita" is based upon an old Italian episode which goes back to 1454 and took place in Marostica.



PARTITA A SCACCHI 11-12-13 September 1992

Foto n.1

The plot tells the story of two young noblemen, Rinaldo of Angarano and Vieri of Vallonara, sons of two important Earls of the Venetian Republic, who fell in love with the beautiful Lionora, the eldest daughter of the "Gubernator" (governor) of Marostica. Formally and officially the girl had no say in choosing her future husband, though she was probably in love with one of the two. So the two young rivals challenged each other to a duel for settling the matter.

However, the wise "Gubernator" of Marostica, referring to law issued by Cangrande della Scala of Vicenza more than a hundred years earlier but confirmed by the Venetian Doge, forbade any duel on pain of decapitation of both contenders. He did not want to have the loser as his enemy, or even worse to lose both contenders in

such a chivalrous duel to the death. He had in fact a second daughter, Oldrada, to marry.... So he decided that the two rivals should instead play a game of chess (La partita) in front of the people of Marostica. The winner should marry Lionora and the loser... his other daughter Oldrada, who was also pretty and virtuous. The two noblemen accepted the special challenge and the "Partita a scacchi" was played with living chessmen. The people of Marostica gathered for the event in the Piazza and many Embassies of important Venetian towns came to assist the game chanting "'S. Marco e Lion ti con nu nu con ti" ("St. Mark and Lion you with us us with you").

An Italian University student, Francesco Pozza, who found the plot in a manuscript, organised with some friends the "Partita" in the Piazza of Marostica for the first time on the 9th September 1923. (see photo n. 2)

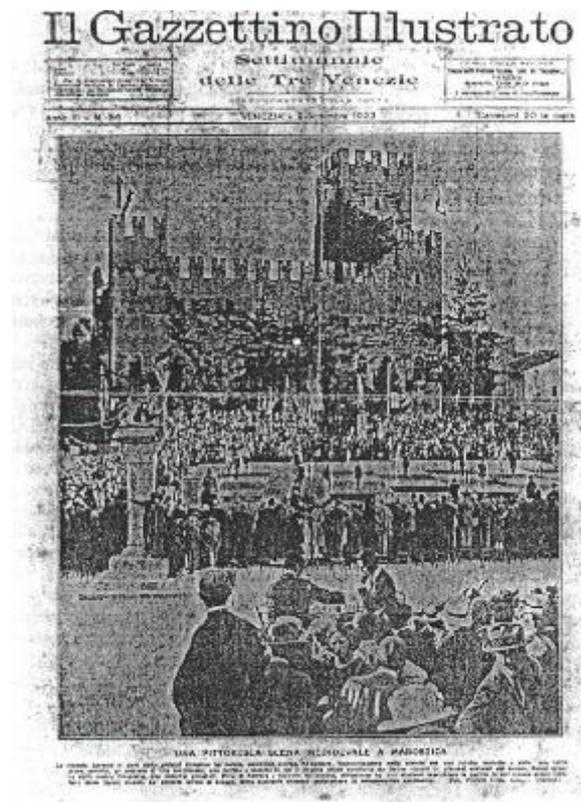


Foto n. 2

On that occasion the game played was a casual one and there is no record of it.

The Marostica display continued before the Second World War for several years.

After the Second World War, in 1954, in the fifth Centenary of the "Partita", the show was revived. This time the plot was written by Mirko Vucetich. On that occasion the game played in the Piazza was the following:

1.b4 e6 2.Bb2 Nf6 3.a3 c5 4.b5 d5 5. d4 Qa5+ 6.Nc3 Ne4 7.Qd3 cd 8.Qxd4 Bc5
9.Qxg7 Bxf2 + 10.Kd1 d4 11.Qxh8 + Ke7 12.Qxc8 dc 13.Bc1 Nd7 14.Qxa8 Qxb5
15.Bf4 Qd5+ 16.Kc1 Be3+ 17.Bxe3 Nf2 18.Bxf2 Qd2+ 19.Kb1 Qd1+ 20.Ka2 Qxc2 #

This pyrotechnic brilliancy ("Sokolsky opening") was played between Fleissig (White) and Schlechter (Black) in 1895 at the Vienna Chess Club.

In the following even years, Marostica's organisers put on the famous "Immortal Game". As we all know, this game was played between Anderssen and Kieseritzky in London in 1851 and its name was given by Falkbeer in 1855.

1.e4 e5 2.f4 ef 3.Bc4 Qh4+ 4.Kf1 b5 5.Bxb5 Nf6 6.Nf3 Qh6 7.d3 Nh5 8.Nh4 Qg5 9.Nf5 c6 10.g4 Nf6 11.Rg1 cb 12.h4 Qg6 13.h5 Qg5 14.Qf3 Ng8 15.Bxf4 Qf6 16.Nc3 Bc5 17.Nd5 Qxb2 18.Bd6 Bxg1 19.e5 Qxa1 + 20.Ke2 Na6 21.Nxg7+ Kd8 22.Qf6+ Nxf6 23.Be7 #

In later years the following type of game was often played in Marostica:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d4 ed 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.Re1 d5 7.Bxd5 Qxd5 8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Nxd4 Nxd4 10.Qxd4 f5 11.Bg5 Qc5 12.Qd8+ Kf7 13.Nxe4 fe 14.Rad1 Bd6 15.Qxh8 Qxg5 16.f4 Qh5 17.Rxe4 Bh3 18.Qxa8 Bc5+ 19.Kh1 Bxg2+ 20.Kxg2 Qg4+ 21.Kf1 Qf3 + 22. Ke1 Qf2 #

The game ("Two Knights' Defence") was actually played between Dr. Euwe (White) and Reti (Black) in 1.920 at the Amsterdam Tournament.

But the organisers of the performance had to face a problem of "bestial" nature: in fact in that game only two Knights were sent off, and this happened on the 12th and 18th move. We all know that horses may become restless on stage and create problems to the entire group of performers. So the Pro-Marostica Association, with the support of an enthusiastic local Chess Club, chose a game where the Knights were eliminated at the early stage of the game.

The one we saw last September was as follows:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 Bg4 4.de Axf3 Qxf3 de 6.Bc4 Nf6 7.Qb3 Qe7 8.Nc3 c6 9.Bg5 b5 10.Nxb5+ cb 11.Bxb5+ Nbd7 12.0-0-0 Rd8 13.Rxd7 Rxd7 14.Rd1Qc6 15.Bxd7+ Nxd7 16.Qb8+ Nxb8 17.Rd8 #

As we see, Knights were captured off on the 4th, 10th and 13th move. This was the famous casual game played by the American genius Paul Morphy against allies (the Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard) at the Paris Opera in 1858 during the performance of "The Barber of Seville" by Rossini.

For the chess fans gathered in Marostica last September there was also an interesting Exhibition organised by the Philatelic Society of Marostica on chess postcards and many historic photos of the Marostica "Partite" during the years. The thematic postcards were part of the huge and important private collection of a new CCI member, Giancarlo Botta of Lecco.



Beryl Gray as the Black Queen in a 1947 production of the ballet Checkmate

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