

Thanks to the Professor Santi Correnti we know the name of the first Sicilian woman player of chess: Macalda Scaletta (XIII century)

1 - The annotation of the Professor Santi Correnti

The Professor Santi Correnti it is one of the most known Sicilian historians. Born to Riposto (Catania), has taught Modern History in the Faculty of Magistero of the University in Catania.

In 1970 has founded the first chair of **History of Sicily** ; it is author of hundred books.

In the book **La Sicilia del Seicento, società e cultura** , (Mursia, 1976) dedication different pages (216-219) to the game of the chess and the book of Pietro Carrera (Il Gioco de gli Scacchi - printed in Militello - Catania, 1617).

In the pages 218-219 are brought the name of the first Sicilian woman that has played to chess:

the chess... it was also practiced in Sicily from the women, as is confirmed by the famous episode of Macalda ... that during his imprisonment in the castle of Matagrifone in Messina, it played to chess with the emir Margan Ibn Sebir, also him imprisoned of king Pietro III of Aragon.

This information is of extreme importance. Till now, in fact, the first ones Sicilians players on which a historical sign was had they were **Armini** , **Branci** and **Li Grechi** lived under the kingdom of Charles V. (*Armini, e Branci vissero sotto l'imperio del suddetto Carlo, furono Palermitani, e giocatori di molto nome ... Don Matteo li Grechi Siciliano della città di Termine fu celebre nel medesimo tempo, compose alcune stanze delle leggi del gioco de gli Scacchi ...* (De' Giocatori , e di Coloro, che scrissero del gioco, Cap. XII pag. 88 - Il Gioco de gli scacchi di Pietro Carrera - Militello - Catania - 1617).

Charles V reigned on Sicily from the 1520 to 1556.

The annotation it moves, therefore, of well 250 years the first historical documentation on a Sicilian player. The emir Margan Ibn Sebir, in fact, was held in imprisonment from September/October 1284 up to 1489. Macalda Scaletta was imprisoned in the jail of Matagrifone in 1284 (immediately after the departure of her husband Alaimo da Lentini - November 19 th 1284).

Therefore it is possible to date, in certain way the games to chess among Macalda Scaletta and Margan Ibn Sebir, among 1284 (after November 19) and 1289.

2 - Macalda Scaletta

In the chapter devoted to the Princes of Scaletta (seventh volume de **La storia dei Feudi e dei Titoli Nobiliari in Sicilia - The history of the Feuds and the Noble Titles in Sicily** of the great historian Don **Francesco San Martino De Spucches**) is read that the castle of Scaletta (in the province in Messina)

... was guarded by Matteo nicknamed "the Savage" on behalf of the Regal Court. The castle had been granted in 1220 , together with the territory, from the emperor Federico II. To the death of Matteo the castle passed to Giovanni of Scaletta that married a noble Sicilian of house Cotonò; from them they were born: Matteo and Macalda. ... Macalda married Guglielmo D'Amico owner of Ficarra. Remained widow Macalda married Alaimo da Lentini ... one of the heads ... of the Sicilian Vespro. ... They had two children Tomaso, Baron of Castelvetro and Alanfranco Barone of San Basilio.

Macalda Scaletta died in imprisonment in the jail of Matagrifone. (1)

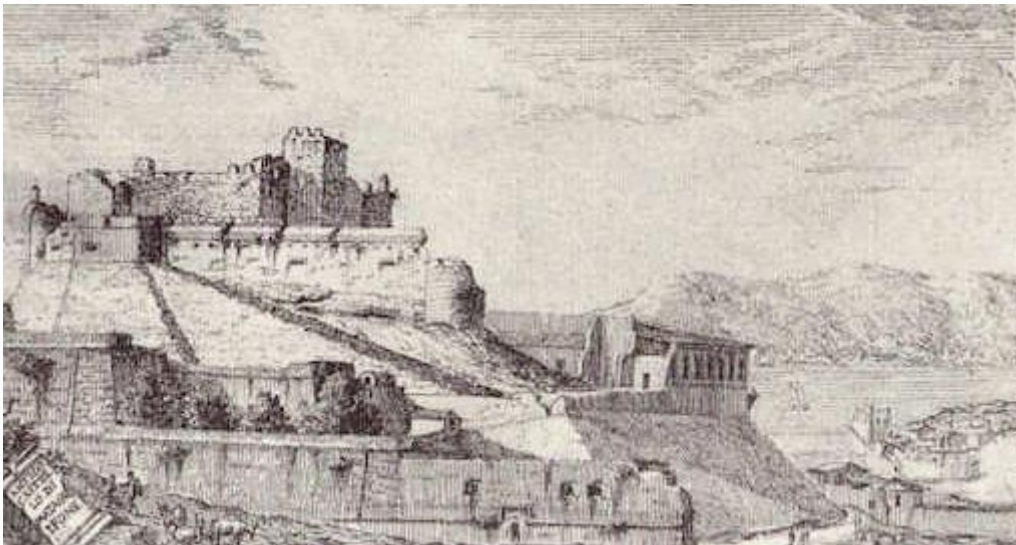
3 - The adversary to chess of Macalda Scaletta

The emir Margam Ibn Sebir was captured by the admiral Ruggero of Lauria in September of 1284 and kept imprisoned in

the castle of Matagrifone up to 1289 (when was freed for having paid the ransom - as it was in use to that times - or for political matters).

4 - The castle where the games were disputed

The Castle Matagrifone (also called rocca Guelfonia) it is found in Messina.



It seems that the name given to the castle derives from **MataGriffones**, that is **kills Greek**. (2)

It was perhaps the king English **Richard the Lion-hearted**, while it was being in Messina waiting for to embark himself for the consignment in **Terra Santa** around the 1190, that, realizing of it the important strategic position, it ordered the amplification and the strengthening of the structure preexisting.

Today, of the ancient fortitude, few ruins stay englobed only in the Santuario del Cristo Re.

Notes:

- 1) We reserve us to complete the search bringing other historical annotations on Macalda Scaletta and his portrait.
- 2) A part of the inhabitants of Messina they were considered Greek from the

foreigners.

Carmelo Coco. San Gregorio (CT) - 12/02/2006 [Copyright](#)

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