

The Legend of Chess

I

The Shah took the board and observed it attentively.

It was made up by rough wood, square-shaped and divided into small coloured squares. But the pieces were really refined. They were cut carefully by small blocks of alabaster and sculptured finely.

He recognized the chariots, the archers, the soldiers, the knights, the Sultan, the adviser. Two opposing armies.

It was the game of war

The foreigner, who had brought the gift, explained to him, every single move of the pieces and the general rules of the game. The aim was the same as all the battles, as all the wars: surrounding the opponent army, defeating it and killing the enemy sultan.

A great strategy and a lot of attention were necessary.

It was called the game of Chess.

The foreigner didn't know the inventor's name. He came afar, from lands nobody had ever heard of. He was captured some days before while he was going about near the royal palace. The guards were very suspicious. The neighbouring sultanates that were defeated and submitted, had sent hired killers to kill their Majesty purposely, many times. But the old man, being ragged and barefooted, didn't bring arms; but a gift to be handed over to the Shah.

The Shah liked this game so much.

The work was refined. The invention was audacious.

But he couldn't accept it as gift. On the contrary he would have bought it with much pleasure. Was it on sale?

The old foreigner submitted to the will of the Shah. In exchange for his gift he didn't want precious stones or gold but only some grain.

The Shah looked at him, astonished. Why did he ask just a few thing? Why didn't he dare? Perhaps did he doubt about his

magnificence? Couldn't he imagine that The Shah had the most powerful and richest reign all over the world?

One grain over the first square, two grains over the second square, four grains over the the third...

What a silly man. The old man could have asked anything. Or was it a trap? Perhaps did that board conceal a misterious and evil power?

He ordered to his adviser to satisfy his request and dismissed the old man.

The adviser was back after a couple of hours. He was upset. How could he say to his Shah and master what he had found out? As he was begging forgiveness for that a thousand times he prostrated himself at his Shah's feet.

It was impossible to pay the foreigner. The court mathematician was able to find the result but with complicated calculations. It was only an unrepeatable enourmous number. Maybe a sacred number.

All the granaries of the reign wouldn't have been enough to satisfy to the old man's request . Even all the granaries of the world wouldn't have been enough.

And so the Shah went on thinking, the game corresponded to all the reigns of the world, to every possible and imaginable wealth and anything more. That old wretched man was the master of everything. The Shah as master and king of endless wealth, was becoming his slave.

Why couldn't he accept it as gift when he was offered and why had he proposed to pay him? Now the old man would have claimed back the game to offer it again to some sultan of neighbouring reigns. Certainly a deadly insult.

He couldn't have allowed it.

He hadn't got long to decide. After denying the old rules which imposed hospitality, respect and prodigality to the foreign people, he decided to sentence his death.

Any trace of his name would have wiped out.

He ordered to have his head cut off.

As the Shah was lying languidly on soft cushions he could build again the battle against a rebel sultan.

The archers had inflicted heavy losses on the opposing army. Then it was the turn of the fast chariots.

They had overwhelmed and killed the enemy.

Mangled and reduced to the pieces.

And when the survivors with a desperate and insane gesture, had charged disorderly, he had launched into an attack his audacious knights, The enemy was put in flight, the sultan captured.

With satisfaction he thought again to the beheading of who had dared to challenge him in open field. In wartime he hadn't got any rival. The War was an art and that silly sultan didn't know it.

Now he had found out a new use of the game. Thanks to those pieces he could explain the tactics to his generals. They were ideal and precious allies. This game should have invented for the war's teaching.

It seemed logic that gift was reserved to him. Inevitable.

He ordered the pieces for a new battle.

It was growing darker and darker but he knew it would have been difficult to relax. He gave a little nod.

A slave came in with a splendid cup of precious metal. After few minutes the olibanum burnt silenciously. The slave covered the cup with a lid and the white smoke started lifting up, pervading the chamber.

The shah started to relax himself. He adored that balsamic scent. He observed the chessboard. The pieces were pervaded by the smoke. It wavered softly, touched them lightly, it seemed to invite them to the moving.

The alternation of the black and white squares was meaningful. The White and the Black. Good and Evil. Light and Dark. The eternal quarrel. The Birth and the Death. And , for each next game, the Rebirth. A magic game, undoubtedly.

Remembrance and warning of the terrible battles of the past between men and gods as the old blind wise man went on telling once again?

Should he have forbidden its spreading? Was it a sacred game?

Una partita. Doveva giocare la sua prima partita.

But where could he find an adversary? He was the only one who knew the rules. That slave who had been submitting for years, who could read and write, could he learn the moves and rules?

Certainly he was not experienced about militar tactics, he would

have represented for the shah another quick and striking victory.

They had been playing and they looked unconcerned by the time that was passing. The Shah resorted to every tactic stratagem and to every strategic subtlety to win rapidly. He launched his fast chariots, set out his archers and attacked with his brave knights.

But that slave looked master of new tactics. He had barred the outflanking, the central breakthrough, he was the winner of numberless hand to hand struggles. And now he was going on again, with an army was almost undamaged. But it was the turn of Shah to defend himself.

Five moves again, the slave counted and he would have imprisoned the rival sultan in a goal which he couldn't escape from. He risked his head surely. The shah would have him beheaded in the presence of the crowd for that affront. But the temptation was strong.

Slowly, very slowly, he pushed ahead a little piece.

The Shah thought for a long time. A long agony, before deciding to retreat the sultan. The slave chased him closely furthermore, without any way out, playing quickly.

The high and stately figure of White sultan stood like a giant in front of that Black small piece before him. But he was powerless to defend himself. That small piece had mocked him, it was being defeated him. There wasn't any mansion where to go, where to be in safe. Everywhere he turned, there were only gulfs.

The slave was longing to see the shah moving, trampling on those unwritten rules he had explained to him; he could, by his royal power, modify them at his own will.

"Shah mat", he decided to pronounce, lastly.

Two magic words put an end to the game. They meant defeat for one player and death for the other one. But the loser wasn't going to die as slave, now he was a free man. And so he would be ready to die. Free and winner.

The game was over.

The shah was petrified as looking fixed on the chessboard, at the defenceless sultan. How had that little worm dared?

Nobody was present at the game. Nobody would have known.

He got up and drew his dagger.

It was necessary once more blood.

He came up to him.

The slave didn't care of his menace. He turned his eyes to the big window and looked at the starry sky.

Even when the Shah was before him and his blade glistened to the light of the braziers, he didn't worry about his fate.

He stammered just two words, all the time the same ones:shah mat, shah, mat.

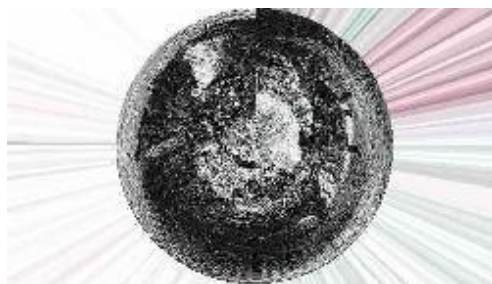
Then also the Shah looked up.

The stars were exploding. The sky was being ripped.
The whole universe began retreating and curling up into itself.

II

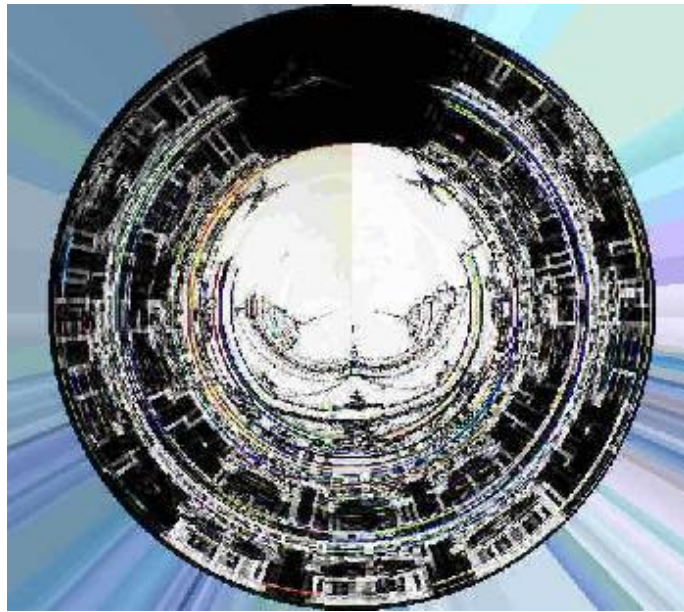
A very old legend handed down by an old wise man, tells about the creation of the Universe and the invention of the game of Chess.

A plasma sphere of very small dimensions, containing time and space, was placed in the center of the Chaos and it was given an order.



It started dilating fifteen thousand millions years ago and when it shaped the established diameter, it exploded.

The sphere scattered plasma, space and time till it got to the furthestmost borders-not-borders of the Universe.

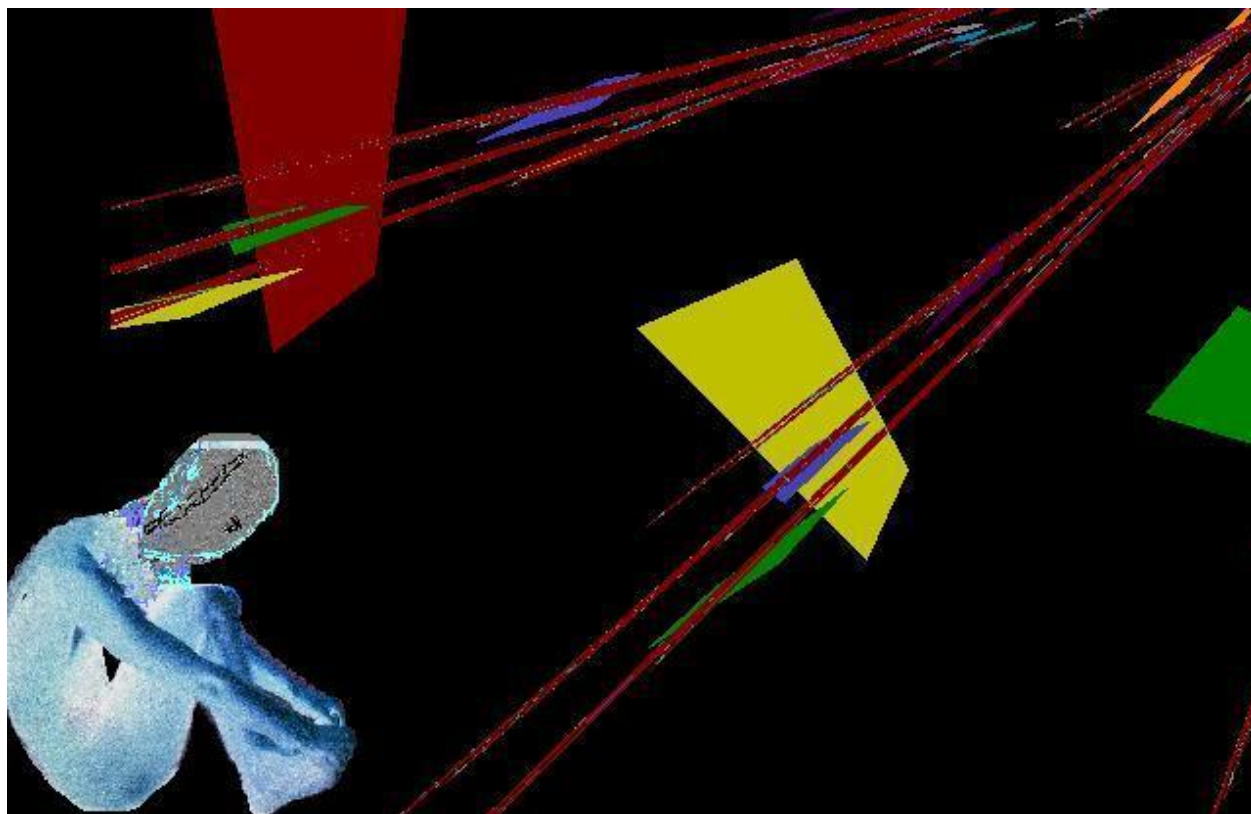


The plasma joined to the space and the time, took different shape and dimension and thickened.
From the darkness a myriad of shining points, spheres and filaments was emerging.



The gods, creators of the Universe, guardians of the knowledge and the logic, decided to animate the bleakness, the loneliness and the silence.

They carved on plasma mixed with the soil, a delicate profile quickly. To give him the life they directed towards him two tenuous bright beams. Then they gave abundant gifts to their newborn son.

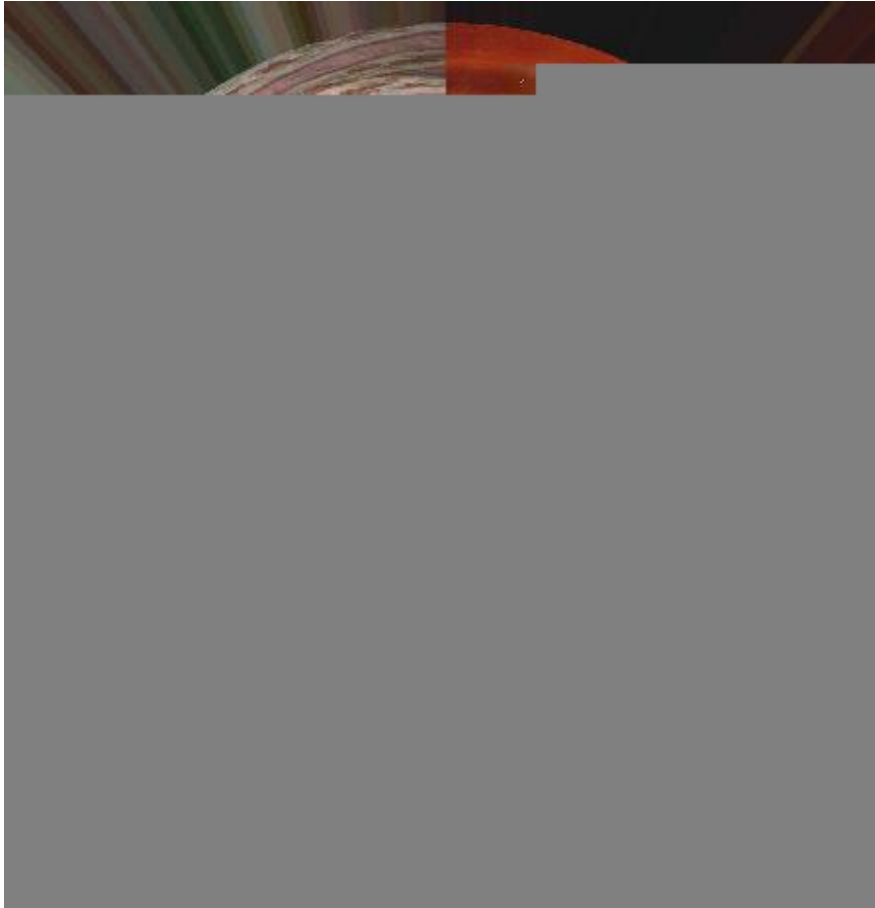


And when the sons of the gods' son were placed to the four corners of the earth, the gods were going to give a great gift to all mankind: just one game, the most favourite of theirs.

A game as a source of logic and knowledge.

A big sphere was put in the center of the Universe and it was given an order.

It exploded like a second creation.



A bright whirl reached the earth and struck the ardent and noble soul of a man. With the pieces kept jealously and the chessboard held tightly at his heart, the predestinate man had been travelling for a long time in every corner of the earth. He learned and trasmitted his new knowledge.

The game was being spread rapidly between men. They grew more and more experienced and skilful.

But the gods envious of men success, of their progress and of their skill, decided to bring their gift back.

They placed a dark sphere in the earth's sky and it was given a precise command.

When the sphere will be turning into red fire and will start ripping...

Today the legend tells that the gods fight against man vainly at the attempt to take him off the very old game of Chess.

(Carmelo Coco)

[Published in the book "La leggenda degli scacchi"]

[Back to Home Page](#)

[Back to Index "English version"](#)