

Different traditions

After the Arabic manuscripts, the traditional collections were compiled in Latin, the usual language in Europe for books of any subject, with some exceptions, as for instance the correspondence and archive books of merchants. However, collections of endings in vulgar languages did appear early, indicating that the spread of chess extended farther than the limited world of scholars and noblemen. We have thus two parallel traditions: the Latin manuscripts, the vulgar ones. In principle, more variety can be expected within the latter channel: several different translations, excerpts, additions. And often this is indeed the case. For instance, if a translator of a Latin text is working on his own book, he will likely cut many parts of the text, limiting the translation to a few essential indications near the diagram.

The discrimination between the two traditional channels (let us say, high and low) for the reproduction of these works must not be considered in too strict a way - sometimes a vulgar specimen was a true translation of the *canonical* Latin text, whereas other Latin texts strongly deviated from it.

Obviously, the study of the manuscripts can only be performed on known specimens, or at most on some *new* copy which can be found in the meantime. Several ancient records are kept of manuscripts which have been lost. Only a rough idea (as for myself, I could even admit, no idea at all) can be obtained now on the whole set of manuscripts which were circulating at a given time and how small the fraction of the remaining ones is.

There is, at least in principle, another channel to consider: the oral tradition. It is for us the least important, since it is now impossible to check, but it certainly existed. The books were studied and copied; the basic items of the written collections were part of the chess knowledge of most players and gamblers of the time. Zanobi Magnolino, the greatest Florentine master, regretted that he could not obtain a copy of the many endings which a Spanish colleague knew by heart.

Authors of specific collections

Another important question, enlarging that of the author of a given ending, deals with the author of the whole book. We cannot expect that any individual author of one of these books provided a great contribution, in addition to the choice and ordering of traditional specimens. He could change their order, eliminate unsuitable exam-