Her Playing Eye: Courtesans at Chess in the *Book of Games* (c. 1283/84)

by

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ABSTRACT

In the medieval educational codex the *Book of Games: Chess, Dice, and Tables* (*Libro de los Juegos*) completed in Seville in 1283, there is more than what meets the eye. Featuring some hundred chess problems, another hundred board and dice games, each accompanied by miniatures depicting games at play, players sit across the board from each other. Enclosed, frozen on the frame in the illustrations, men sit against women, kings and queens, women and women, courtesans and knights, monks and men, nuns and children, young and old—a range of players of different faiths and backgrounds.

This thesis examines the covert complexity of women's relationships in the thirteenth-century Castilian court of Alfonso X, el Sabio (1221-84), through their representations at games of chess. Chess in the medieval imaginary was a game not only strategic, but one also laden with sexual connotations. It mirrored the site of battle and the court—the composite of a series of moves—it replicated the advance of courtship and seduced the mind for the forfeit of a hand. Medieval epics and material culture visualize this phenomenon: when a man and a woman are represented at chess, it is read as a game between lovers. In the *Book of Games*, what is going on between women—for whom the archive always limited and fragmentary—what have our eyes missed? To explore this question, this thesis represents a necessary exercise in speculation. It begins with a review of the state of the discussion upon the manuscript in question, delving into the various threads of movement encapsulated within, to query the notion of autonomy in making. Through a close reading of key illustrations bearing a trace of personal reception, it probes the central methodological question of seeking to see, theorizing gaze and *nazar* in sites of potential encounter. Understanding the encounter, and alternate forms of intimacy made possible through play, I observe the women looking at each over the chessboard in a moment of mutual regard. This thesis argues the *Book of Games* possesses an already existing unseen complexity—perhaps queer or perhaps questioning—lying latent, that we must learn to seek to see, looking otherwise.

Thesis Supervisor: Huma Gupta
Title: Assistant Professor

To my Naani—who jumped over her mother's leg for literature.
Thank you for teaching me to play chess.

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“There was something unbearable in the things, in the people, in the buildings, in the streets that, only if you reinvented it all, as in a game, became acceptable. The essential, however, was to know how to play, and she and I, only she and I, knew how to do it.”

—Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend* (2011)

Introduction

Playing the Field(s): The Case for Speculation

I began this research searching a way to write a personal history on medieval women, believing that there was more than what met the eye on the page and what was enclosed, frozen on the frame in the illustrations of the *Book of Games: Chess, Dice, and Tables* (*Libro de los Juegos*, c. 1283). An educational codex with some hundred chess problems, another hundred or so board and dice games, it features one hundred and fifty miniatures depicting games at play (fig. 0.1, 0.2), as well as illustrations of the makers of the manuscript themselves (fig. 0.3), and images we can presume to be portraits of the king—Alfonso X (1221-1284), King of Castile and León, the patron of this manuscript (fig. 0.4). This, however, is not to say that in *all* the illustrations where woman play, there is more than what meets the eye. The ones to which I was drawn and that I focus upon fall into two categories. In the first, there is a tangible mark of personhood. Someone has left their mark upon certain folios of the book, through inscription and defacement (fig. 0.5, 0.6). And in the second, players exchange mutual regard above the board (fig. 0.7).

It may be surprising to consider chess in the light of romance, but in the medieval imaginary, the game was laden with strategic and sexual connotations. Strategic, because it was known as a game of kings. But it was also widely represented at the time in spoken word, literature, and material objects. The hero plays against the heroine, he plays the guard at the tower where she is locked, they are watched or are by themselves (fig. 0.2). If a man and a woman are across the chessboard, it is read as a game between lovers. And, indeed, given its origins—from an ancestor in the Indian subcontinent to Iran and then the Arab world, a game which changed as it moved—

Fig. 0.1. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 8r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 0.2. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 12v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 0.3. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 1v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 0.4. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 1r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

so too was it a game imbued with an idea of the exotic, and of the "other." In the *Book of Games*, women play against women. Pages are marked by reception, elsewhere, they gaze upon each other. In this thesis, I build upon these associations to speculate on the latent complexity of possibility in women's relationships in the thirteenth-century court of Alfonso X, el Sabio (the Wise/Learned) through their representation at games of chess.[1]

The central methodological question of my thesis is this: how do we observe the unseen? I seek an approach to see what lies latent in this manuscript. Not precisely queerness, but the *question* of, in the vein of the etymological origins of "queer."[2] Following Francesca Canadé Sautman, I excavate the possibilities of 'questioning complexities' in women's relationships of the thirteenth century Castilian court, to see those that had "every reason," for the sake of their own lives, to make "themselves invisible."[3] Though the makers of this particular manuscript are unknown, but signs of reference to real correspondent people are strong, I make an argument for the case of greater autonomy on the part of the makers. Generally speaking, there is a sense of

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[1] When I say I am analysing women, I mean that in the most inclusive sense of the word: individuals who perform womanhood. It is these individuals on which I write. That is, the very specific experience of women's relationships, between themselves. Whether or not these relationships are queer or simply complex, I will spend this thesis exploring further.[1] The women in the manuscript I analyze are considered courtesans, whose lives were constrained by certain rules. In order to persist and make their way through complicated court dynamics, we can understand that they were obligated to see and understand through many eyes—including men. (See: Kimberle Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, 1989 U. CH LEGAL F. 139. Linda Gordon, "'Intersectionality', Socialist Feminism and Contemporary Activism," *Gender & History*, vol. 28 no. 2. August 2016, 340-41. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.) By writing on women who are courtesans, I do not deny the existence of men or non-binary individuals who are courtesans. I am well-aware of their existence and importance. There are many more possible queries which could be pursued within the *Book of Games*. For example, does the manuscript depict "women of colour," or is this phrase anachronism? We do not yet comprehensively understand the racial dynamics of thirteenth century Castile, as this remains a gap scholars work upon, whose fascinating research open up my study for debate and complication. (See: Pamela A. Patton, *Envisioning Others : Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). Pamela A. Patton, "What Did Medieval Slavery Look Like? Color, Race, and Unfreedom in Later Medieval Iberia," *Speculum* 97, no. 3 (2022): 649–697. These are directions I would like to take the research in the future.)

[2] Judith Ann Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 5.

[3] Francesca Canadé Sautman, "Invisible Women: Lesbian Working-Class Culture in France, 1880-1930," in *Homosexuality in Modern France*, Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York, 1996; online edn, Oxford Academic, 3 Oct. 2011)

Fig. 0.5. Two women at chess, a third upon a lute. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 18r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

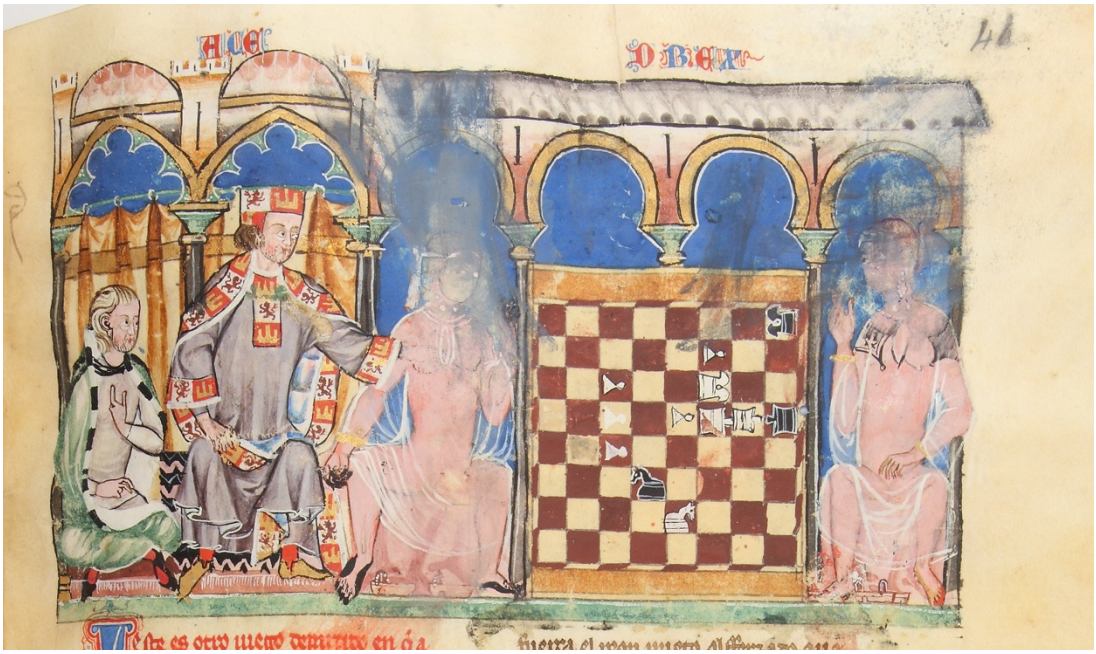

Fig. 0.6. Two defaced figures playing chess, a third figure reaching out to touch. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 48r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

expression upon the faces of the figures, in research there has been a desire to and debate over attaching figures to a real correspondent person.[4] For example, are the queen and king's Christian mistress represented in game nineteen, or is one a Muslim courtesan and the other a Christian noblewoman (fig. 0.4)? This illustration bears a strange inscription, proclaiming one of the figure's prowess and beauty. But which figure, and when was it added and by whom? And in folio 48r (fig. 0.7), why are the figures defaced? When was this done? We cannot know. This question of portraiture, of whether the figures of the illustrations do correspond to real people cannot be confirmed. But taken together, the inscription and defacement, would seem to indicate the possibility that these illustrations are referencing someone specific. Why else take the time and effort to rid someone of their face or to proclaim someone's identity?

We are operating then with some certainty that these illustrations are to an extent real: these women existed. And yet there is much that is uncertain. What is going on between these women, and what have our eyes missed? As I stated at the beginning, my inquiry emerges from the question: how do you write a personal history on medieval women? Although the women's private world is no longer extant in their own words, there can be no denying of its existence. For women, as for others in marginalized positions of society, the archive is often limited and when it exists, fragmentary. Yet here is the paradox: both the discipline of art history and the field of Islamic art require high evidentiary thresholds. Historic studies is generally less in favour of speculation. But this parameter is double-edged. There is neither certainty in our knowledge of what women in his court may have thought or how they could have acted, nor any certainty of

[4] Michael Pennell and Ricardo Calvo argued that fol. 54v represents Edward I of England and his wife (Alfonso's half-sister) Queen Eleanor, see M. Pennell and R. Calvo, "A Discovery," *The Chess Collector* VI.2 (Apr. 1997). Sonja Musser Golladay, "Los Libros de Acedrex Dados e Tablas: Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's 'Book of Games,'" ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, PhD Diss. (University of Arizona), 2007, 220-21, 740. Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of a Chess Queen: A History* (New York, Harper, 2004). Yalom follows Pennell and Calvo's theory, exploring it conjunction with the changes occurring in the game, from *fers* to queen.

Fig. 0.7. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 38v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

how they were *not* thinking or acting. How can one deny historical desire? Is there a difference between "acts" and "desires"? Does historical speculation approach fiction, what counts as real and what does not, can speculation be real?[5] This question of "historical legitimacy" divides.[6]

Speculation, or fiction, may show us mirrors we may not wish to see, because it cannot be qualified as real by the standards of evidence in the discipline of historical studies. Perhaps distorted, or elongated, or a mere fragment—it retains a trace of what was there, which to my mind, makes it real. Anna Klosowska, scholar of queer medieval France, wrote that, for her,

> all fiction corresponds to an absolute reality—not of existence, but of desire that calls fiction into being, performed by the authors and manuscript makers; and continuing desire for it performed by the readers, a desire that sustains the book's material presence across the centuries.[7]

I consider the "authors" of the illustrations not only the makers of the manuscript, but also the women who may have inspired the representations, and the individual(s) who marked the manuscript, continuing the narrative, calling it into being. Further, as Klosowska hints, does the viewer not also shape the manuscript? We interpret what we see between the lines. For I am writing precisely what my eyes sees—the viewer possesses the capacity to "shape the visible."[8]

This is where my central methodological question comes into play, as I *am* speculating. I believe it not only necessary, but also a powerful method to examine what cannot be seen—either because it did not want to be or because the archive has not favoured the keeping of such stories. If I do not speculate, the story is never told. I will not convince everyone, but the choice

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[5] Our speculation is a kind of fiction, and if whether we consider fiction as truthful or constructed, it does not mean deception, fiction may reveal some element of reality.

[6] Historians such as Judith Bennett and Jonathan Goldberg and more debate on whether "fictive" speculation can approach truth. Certainly, this depends on how you conceive of fiction—whether as truthful or constructed. But does constructed mean deception, and even in deception, is some element of reality revealed?

[7] Anna Kłosowska, *Queer Love in the Middle Ages*, 1st ed., The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 6-7.

[8] Wendy Shaw, "*Nazar, Subjectvity, and the 'Gaze',"* in *Nazar: Vision, Belief, and Perception in Islamic Cultures*, Islamic History and Civilization, Volume 191, ed. Samer Akkach (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 33-60.

is otherwise to consign these women to oblivion. So how can we reconstruct their world(s), their subjectivity, when their voices are inaccessible? Voice—words expressed and written—may not always grant us the opportunity to observe the reflections and relationships women developed between themselves, so often written in hands of men. How do you "look otherwise" and write on what is largely unknown? [9] The gaps in the archives of women's histories are space for speculation, and these illustrations present us with alternate worlds. Pushing the parametres of the field, I wish to go beyond simply observing women's bodies, bared to our eyes, but instead see *into*.[10] Considering autonomy, I seek to merge the visual representation of depicting women with the knowledge that we are looking at a surface where not everything is readily apparent. The latent encounter reveals slowly.[11] This thesis crosses epistemic boundaries to argue for the historical legitimacy of writing a speculative history through the fragment in the field of Islamic art, and in the discipline of art history.[12] I am seeking a way to see the unseen.

Chapter one, "What Meets the Eye? The State of the Discussion on the *Book of Games*," is a literature review regarding the manuscript, centred on the research of the section for chess, upon which my thesis exclusively. In "Noble Moves: Games of Great Migrations," chapter two, I examine the various threads of movement encapsulated, through the makers of the manuscript to the game of chess itself. Chapter three, "Idle, Volatile Eyes: Performing Gaze in Sites of

[9] Shaw, "*Nazar, Subjectivity, and the 'Gaze',"* 35.
[10] Rosalind Krauss, 'The Future of an Illusion," *AA Files* 13 (1986): 7.
[11] Book as bride—if you ask it will not show. But if you let it reveal itself to you, you will behold so much more. Shaw, "*Nazar, Subjectivity, and the 'Gaze',"* 44.
[12] The research I conduct operates within a program focused on Islamic art, a field within the discipline of Art History. But where do we place this manuscript? For it sits uneasily between labels. Does it fall under "Islamic art" or the "Western" art canon? The use of terms such as "West" and "western" are more and more precarious, as we question discipline and fields, but they maintain a usefulness in this context as a general descriptor of those European powers that are distinguished by "white, Christian, male hegemony." The *Book of Games* was commissioned and created in such a court, but a court we know to have been multicultural, and Castile was heavily Arabized at the time of Alfonso X. Sherry C.M. Lindquist, *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art* (Farnham, Surrey, UK, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate), 32.

Encounter," queries notions of gaze, examining the site of the bath as a parallel site of "encounter" to the chessboard. From medieval theories of perception to the simultaneous menace and possibility of the unseen, I consider perspectives on relations between women through the first category of illustrations—ones which bear a trace of the personal reception of the manuscript. Lastly, "Chess is For Lovers: Courtesans and the Courtly Unseen," chapter four, delves into analyzing alternate forms of intimacy at the site of the chessboard through a sample folio from the second category, where women are painted looking at each other over the chessboard in a moment of mutual regard. I believe that there is more than what meets the eye, so I am looking otherwise, into the unseen.

Chapter 1

What Meets the Eye? The State of the Discussion on the *Book of Games*

I. Introducing the *Book of Games*

Housed at the Library of the San Lorenzo de El Escorial, the *Book of Games* was moved from Granada to Madrid in the sixteenth century—at the time of the institution's founding by King Felipe II.[1] Since its "rediscovery" in the nineteenth century by Florencio Janer, this singular copy has been studied a great deal for transcription and translation, various forms of studies on the text and illuminations, since its singularity made it notable. This and the richness of the manuscript led many to believe it was intended for the exclusive use by the King Alfonso X (El Sabio, the Wise/Learned).[2] With startlingly potent colours, much of the manuscript is in good condition, save some folios where perhaps the effect of humidity has taken effect upon the pigment (fig. 0.3) and most significantly, the folios where some element was altered through a defacement or inscription.

The crux of the text comprises a collection of game problems to educate oneself and ameliorate one's game playing abilities. A large, illustrated codex (400 x 280 mm) with educational texts on a total of 103 chess problems, the first and largest section, after which combined there are 144 board and dice games, many featuring richly coloured illustrations to accompany the games.[3] The 150 such miniatures, in the Gothic style, represent much more than

[1] The *Book of Games* was moved from the Granada Cathedral on his orders. His justification was partially based on the poor storage of the manuscript. Laura Fernández Fernández, "*Libro de axedrez, dados e tablas* Ms. T-I-6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial Estudio Codicológico," in Libro de los Juegos de Ajedrez, Dados y Tablas de Alfonso X el Sabio. Scriptorium, pp. 69-116. Ulrich Schädler and Ricardo Calvo. *Das Buch der Spiele*. Wien: Lit, 2009. Julián Zarco Cuevas, *Catálogo de los manuscritos castellanos de la Real Bibloteca de El Escorial*, 3 vols, III (Madrid, 1924-29,) 496-500.

[2] Olivia Remie Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile: the "Libro de ajedrez" of Alfonso X, el Sabio," *Speculum* 82, no. 2 (April 2007): 301.

[3] Michael Allman Conrad, **"**The Playing Eye: The Epistemological Function of Game Miniatures in the Late 13th Century," in *Games and Visual Culture in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance*, eds. Elizabeth Lapina and

simply diagrams of the board at play. They capture the theatre of court: the comings and goings of courtiers, courtesans, kings and more, they depict the makers in "crafting images" and the king himself, ostensibly dictating the prefatory text (fig. 0.4) The manuscript begins with a prologue explaining the impetus for its creation, and delineating those for whom seated games are suitable, translated as follows:

> "Because God wished that all variety of joy should reside in men naturally, so that they could endure cares and hardships when beset them, men therefore investigated many ways by which they could obtain this joy (…) The other games which are played while sitting are such playing chess and backgammon and dice, and other games of diverse kinds. Therefore, all these games are very good, each in time and place which befit it, for these games played while sitting can be played at any time, by night as well as by day, and because women who do not ride and are housebound can play them, and likewise men who are old and weak or those who take their pleasures apart and privately, so as not to have annoyances or grief, or those who are in another's power, as in prison or captivity, so that they cannot ride or go hunting or anywhere else, and have perforce to remain indoors and seek some varieties of games with which they may entertain themselves and not be in tedium. And therefore, we, Don Alffonso, by the grace of God king of Castile, …order to make this book wherein we speak of the way these games are played best, such as chess, dice & board games."[4]

It is notable that this commandment, ostensibly written in the voice of the king, includes not only women "who do not ride and are housebound" but also "those who are in another's power, as in prison or captivity." Such games require a certain level of intellect to play, particularly so chess.

Vanina Kopp (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 238. There are various other types of games, such as nine men's morris and astrological games.

[4] John Esten Keller, *Alfonso X El Sabio* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), 148. Jens T. Wollesen, "Sub Specie Ludi...: Text and Images in Alfonso El Sabio's Libro de Acedrex, Dados e Tablas," *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 53, 3 (1990): 278. Transcription: E como quiere que todos estos iuegos son muy buenos cadaunos en el tiempo e en el logar o conuienen, pero por que estos iuegos que se fazen seyendo, son cutianos e se fazen tanbien de noche como de dia, e por que las mugieres que non caualgan e estan encerradas an a usar desto, e otrossi los omnes que son uieios e flacos, o los que han sabor de auer sus plazeres apartadamientre por que non reciban en ellos enoio nin pesar, o los que son en poder ageno assi como en prision o en catiuerio o que uan sobre mar, e comunalmientre todos aquellos que han fuerte tiempo, por que non pueden caualgar nin yr a cac ̧a ni a otra parte, e han por fuerc ̧a de fincar en las casas e buscar algunas maneras de iuegos con que hayan plazer e se conorten e non esten baldios. A. Steiger, '*Libros de acedrex*, *dados e tablas,*' *Das Schachzabelbuch Ko ̈nig Alfons des Weisen mit* 51 *Miniaturen auf Tafeln nach der Handschrift J.T.*6 *fol*. *des Escorial mit Glossar und Grammatischen abriss* (Genève-Zürich, 1941), 4.

That women and those in captivity are seen as possessing enough to play and to improve their strategy, by the King (or whoever it was that wrote these words), implies their equal status with whomever they may play. Simultaneously, the prologue is clear that this is the alternative for those who *cannot* go outside and must remain closeted.

Following this, the *Book of Games* provides an origin story for their creation. In the court of a king in India, each of his three wise men developed a game in response to the king's question: between skill and luck, which was superior (fig. 1.1)? The first counsellor returned with the game of chess. Intelligence was of greater value, he said, with chess as his evidence, a game of abstract strategy and intellect. The second counsellor countered with the opposite. He said luck was superior, because if Lady "Fortune was against you no amount of intelligence could matter," as demonstrated by games of dice.[5] But the last said it was both: one needed intellect and strategy, *and* luck. He combined these elements to propose games of tables. This exemplum underscores the notion of game playing, particularly chess, as part of princely culture. Teaching and learning to play games of strategy/intellect and luck was to teach rulers transferable skills to the realm of court and battle. Mirrored from the site of the battlefield, echoing courtly and political machinations, mastery of chess indicated an acumen for learning and strategy. This educative potential is visualized in illustrations where *infantas* are coached by an older counsel (fig. 1.2).

Following this framing fable, the text elaborates on how pieces should be made, their ranks, what positions they occupy and how they may graduate to higher ranks. The first 64 folios—

[5] Sonja Musser Golladay, "Los Libros de Acedrex Dados e Tablas: Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's 'Book of Games,'" ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, PhD Diss. (University of Arizona), 2007, 89.

from the introduction and the series of rules to each game to the book section of chess—corresponds to the number of squares on the chessboard. [6] But as the prologue established there

Fig. 1.1. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 2r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 1.2. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 58r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

[6] Conrad, "The Playing Eye," 241-43, for a discussion on the numerological properties of several numbers. Alfonso X, ed., *Das Buch Der Spiele*, translated by Schädler Ulrich and Ricardo Calvo, Ludographie - Spiel Und Spiele, Bd. 1 (Wien: Lit, 2009), 30-33. Golladay, "Los Libros," 538-57, discusses the potential that some folios are missing—as proposed by Piero Grandese in 1988 (Grandese, "Sulla Composizione del Libro dei Giochi di Alfonso X El Sabio," 171-81) but due to the importance of the number seven for Alfonso disregards this theory. The current number of folios, 98, is the square number of seven, multiplied twice (2 x 7 x 7).

is a clear hierarchy: chess comes first, "nobler" than games involving chance (dice).[7] Then table games, where chance and strategy meet, and so forth.[8] In the vein of Arabic chess treatises, the text for each "game problem" does exactly that—it describes a particular game problem. Many derive from their ancestors, the Arabic chess treatises, while others were creations under the court of Alfonso.[9] However, unlike most other chess treatises we retain, each game is accompanied by an illustration of figures at play.[10] The manuscript is filled with curious depictions of a wide cast of characters, seemingly from the Castilian court across the reign of Alfonso X. There are kings, knights, concubines, courtesans, monks, children, foreign dignitaries, slaves—the list goes on. Is it a glimpse into a world scarcely seen, are these images made in the word of the king, or are these the observations of a scriptorium under little supervision?

II. On Alfonso el Sabio, *convivencia* and *Reconquista*

Around the year 1237, a sixteen-year-old Alfonso read a book. Called the *Book of the Twelve Wise Men*, it was a mirror for princes.[11] That is, it fell in the literary genre through which political ideas were conveyed through stories. Mirrors for princes were dedicated to advising not yet rulers on how to live one's life, how to rule. Reading was a rare activity for his ancestors—but he did, in many languages: Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic. In later years, in Toledo, he patronized the translation of works—namely Arabic science and literature—the scholarly elite

[7] Golladay, "Los Libros," 133.
[8] Conrad, "The Playing Eye," 246-47.
[9] H. J. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913), 570-73. Ricardo Calvo "El *libro de los Juegos* de Alfonso X el Sabio," in *Alfonso el Sabio, Libros de ajedrez, dados e tablas,* (Madrid. Valencia, Patrimonio Nacional, Vicent García Editores, Ediciones Poninete, 1987, 2 vols.), 133-35.
[10] David Roxburgh, "Los Libros Árabes y el Scriptorium de Alfonso X," *Alfonso X El Sabio*, ed. Isidro G. Bango Torviso (Murcia: A. G. Novograf, 2009), 258–59. Conrad, "Playing Eye," 255, the only manuscript we retain from al-Andalus is *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad*, also believed to have been completed in the thirteenth century.
[11] Simon Doubleday, The Wise King" *A Christian Prince, Muslim Spain, and the Birth of the Renaissance*. (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

languages to other language he knew: the emerging Castilian, Toledo's vernacular.[12] It was the city in which he was born. He had his father's tomb, Ferdinand III, inscribed with the three languages. Alfonso was the product of an upbringing between multiple cultures, which reflected in his multicultural court, and he became almost synonymous with the heavily debated reactionary notion of "convivencia."[13] This endures. Though he does not necessarily hold a place in the public consciousness around the world, Alfonso el Sabio is still remembered very well in Spain—the "wise King" under whose rule a blossoming of arts at the nexus of Muslim-Christian-Jewish interaction occurred. His heavy role within the creation of this manuscript has at times been taken for granted, given his persistent interest in translation of Arabic literary and scientific texts (such as *Kalila wa Dimna*, the collection of animal fables that functioned as a mirror for princes and Ibn al-Haytham's treatise on optics).[14] But in chapter two, exploring the multiple elements of movement, I look into the possibility of autonomy of the makers.

At the height of his rule, he aimed for the title of Holy Roman Emperor.[15] His parents' marriage united the Christian kingdoms of Castile and León, previously allies, enemies, allies once again—power in the Peninsula was constantly under negotiation. Despite a possible interest in a world of dialogue, he himself was an agent and strategist of Christian conquest, even as prince. The historiographic term occasionally applied in this context to the Iberian Peninsula—the *Reconquista*—too is laden with presuppositions, invoking a flattening of years of negotiation,

[12] G. Bossong, "Creatividad lingüística en las traducciones alfonsíes del árabe", *Alcanate*, VI (2008-2009): 17.
[13] This notion of "coexistence" been particularly retroactively potent since the mid twentieth century, with the rise of the term "convivencia." As I discussed in Chapter 1, *convivencia* exceptionalized the Iberian Peninsula as the site of medieval inter-religious harmony amongst the Jewish, Muslim and Christian populations, in comparison to more northern regions of Europe. It was an attractive term for scholars battling notions of the so-called "Dark Ages," but most especially, it provided a strong counterargument against scholarship that emerged out of fascist era Spain, in the twentieth century.
[14] Murray*, A History of Chess*, 27. Golladay, "Los Libros," 102.
[15] Fidel Fajardo-Acosta, "The King is Dead, Long Live the Game: Alfonso X, El Sabio, and the *Libro de Acedrex, Dados e Tablas*," *Ehumanista* 31 (2015), 498.

conflict, conquest, alliances made and broken, to an overwhelming wave of Christian success to "reconquer" the peninsula from Muslim "occupation." The two—*convivencia* and *Reconquista*—intermingle. In her chapter "Visual Frames and Breaking the Rules of the *Reconquista*: Chess and Alfonso X, el Sabio's *Libro de ajedrez, dados y tablas*," from the 2017 book *Playthings in Early Modernity: Party Games, Word, Games, Mind Games*, Nhora Lucía Serrano argues:

> "as opposed to chess being the entertaining, microcosmic tableau that reflected the cultural milieu of the Catholic Monarchs, during the thirteenth century the treatise on chess was a politically as well as socially astute discursive plea in visual terms for the *convivencia*. Furthermore, with Christians and non-Christians translating side by side and oftentimes together, the portrayals of Alfonso and chess in the *[Book of Games]* can be seen as an especially apt, pluralistic metaphor for Alfonso X's notion of a Platonic cosmopolitanism because it visually inscribes antithetical outlooks, that is *Reconquista and convivencia*"[16]

Serrano takes up Américo Castro's 1948 term of "*convivencia*," the idea that Jews, Muslims, and Christians coexisted in inter-religious harmony in medieval Spain. The romance of "religious toleration" infused much of the scholarship emerging from the North American context in the second half of the twentieth century.[17] For one, *convivencia* was immeasurably attractive to medievalists "caught in the perennial battle against the libelous label of the "Dark Ages."[18] Moreover, however, it provided a strong counterargument against the scholarship that emerged out of fascist era Spain (1939-75). Obsessed with the roots of Spanish "decline—or—decadence" following the seventeenth century, "traditionalists" such as Ángel Gonźalez Palencia (1889-1949) premised their "narratives of Spanish history by downplaying the influence of Islam

[16] Nhora Lucía Serrano, "Visual Frames and Breaking the Rules of the *Reconquista*: Chess and Alfonso X, el Sabio's *Libro de ajedrez, dados y tablas*," in *Playthings in Early Modernity: Party Games, Word Games, Mind Games*, ed. Allison M. Levy (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2017), 264.
[17] Maya Soifer, "Beyond convivencia: critical reflections on the historiography of interfaith relations in Christian Spain, Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies 1, 1 (2009): 19.
[18] Soifer, "Beyond convivencia," 20.

and Judaism."[19] The most extreme denied entirely the Islamic conquest, like Ignacio Olagüe (1903-74), instead describing al-Andalus the "result of an internal process."[20]

Carrying decades of "romantic baggage," Américo Castro's notion of *convivencia* has in the years since it thrilled the academy, been largely categorized as "an idealist construct that aspired to describe mental processes taking place in the collective consciousness of the three cultures," one that "was never meant to be tested against the social and political realities of Jewish–Christian–Muslim interaction."[21] In her 2009 article titled "Beyond *convivencia*," Maya Soifer examines the continuation of the term. Reflecting on its use in previous historical writing and the possibility of its future us, she concludes that:

> Whether as an interfaith utopia, or as a pale Christian imitation of the Islamic *dhimma* model, or as a sign of Spain's supposed exceptionality, *convivencia* has consistently failed on empirical grounds. It is therefore ironic that the recent trend among historians of Jewish–Christian relations in northern Europe to de-emphasize persecutions and stress the peaceful aspects of interfaith coexistence has led to an embrace of the term.[22]

The uniqueness of Spain as the site of *convivencia* is laced into its theory, but Soifer urges against this exceptionalization. She stresses that "Iberianists should maintain constant dialogue with historians of interfaith relations in northern Europe, even if it means…acknowledging the basic similarities in the Christian treatment of religious minorities north and south of the Pyrenees."[23] This is not, however, to say that certain social, political, and cultural conventions

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[19] For more information Hussein Fancy, "The new convivencia", Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies 11, 3, 2 (2019): 296.
[20] As Fancy articulates, Olagüe argued instead "Islam arrived over a hundred years later with a handful of missionaries…" Olagüe's work was labelled antisemitic, it denied entirely Islam and Judaism. Strangely, Fancy writes, his work "found resonance" with "Andalusian nationalists and Spanish converts to Islam in a post-Franco Spain," for his "insistence on [al-Andalus'] unique and authentic place within Spanish history." See Maribel Fierro, "Al-Andalus/ España," in *Al-Andalus En El Pensamiento Fascista Español : La Revolución Islámica En Occidente De Ignacio Olagüe* (Madrid : Casa de Velázquez, 2012,) 329-33. Fancy notes that "these nativist accounts of al-Andalus went hand in glove with paternalistic support for Spanish colonialism in Morocco." Fancy, "The new convivencia," 296.
[21] Soifer, "Beyond convivencia", 20.
[22] Ibid, 31.
[23] Ibid, 31.

did not make "coexistence possible," but by the same token they "eventually failed to prevent its collapse."[24] The collapse in popular theoretical terms forms the ideological shape of the *Reconquista* or the so-called "reconquering" of the Iberian Peninsula by Christian forces from Muslim rule. This term, however, much like *convivencia*, is problematic for a multitude of reasons that space has not allowed me to cover here. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to understand that like *convivencia*, the *Reconquista* was a historiographical construction whereby centuries of negotiation and alliance and conquest between Christians and Muslims in the battle for control over the Peninsula was reduced temporally, to an overwhelming wave of Christian success, "reclaiming" their rule from those who were "other." It perceivably entangled with a similar obsession to that of the "traditionalists" —creating a national mythos of Spain in which its Christian rulers were triumphant.[25]

Alfonsine scholars have often brought these seemingly antithetical aspirations of coexistence and Christian absolutism into the fore when reading the ludic, metaphysical, and artistic attributes of the *Book of Games*, the last manuscript in a "vast body of scientific, legal, historiographic, and literary works" produced under the king.[26] Alfonso X ruled Castile-León and all other territories conquered by his father, including Sevilla, from 1252 until near the end of his life. At this point he dealt with a succession of malfortune: his heir Fernando died, his second son Sancho was in open rebellion, his wife left him (again) and sided with the son, as did most of the other noble houses and factions, thus forcing Alfonso to concede rule, in essence, to Sancho.[27] In this world, the *Book of Games* was made. Upon the death of king—just before or after the

[24] Soifer, "Beyond convivencia," 31.
[25] Martín F Ríos Saloma, "De la Restauración a la Reconquista: la construcción de un mito nacional (Una revisión historiográfica. Siglos XVI-XIX)/From the Restoration to the Reconquest: The construction of a national myth (An historiographical review. 16th-19th centuries)," *En la España medieval* 28 (2005): 379.
[26] Conrad, "The Playing Eye," 237
[27] Fernández Fernández "*Libro de axedrez,*" 72.

manuscript was completed—it was believed to have been placed in Alfonso's tomb, although we know now it in fact travelled elsewhere, and was in Granada before King Felipe II in the sixteenth century had it moved to the newly built El Escorial.[28] Record of it resurfaces in the late nineteenth century, as early scholars such as Florencio Janer made the miniatures known to the academic world of 1874.[29]

III. Literature Review

Upon his "rediscovery" of the *Book of Games* in the library of the Escorial, the writer, politician and historian Florencio Janer wrote twice on games. His first treatise focused upon the section devoted to dice, the ancestor of cards.[30] It is worth mentioning here that my focus on the section devoted to chess is not accidental, and arose from two reasons. First, space has not allowed me to pursue the full manuscript. Second, and perhaps most importantly, as Marie Louise Trivison points out (1986), the only section in which women feature as players of the game *is* in the first section on games of chess.[31] When depicted elsewhere they are spectators to the game, as in the games of dice.

Janer's second work (1874) examined closely the art and culture within the games more broadly.[32] He observes that the games show different social strata of Alfonso's time, and that like another manuscript produced under Alfonso, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Songs of the Holy

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[28] Alfonso X, ed. *Das Buch Der Spiele*, translated by Schädler Ulrich and Ricardo Calvo, Ludographie - Spiel Und Spiele, Bd. 1, (Wien: Lit, 2009).
[29] For some time it was believed to be one of another copy, as the one we retain misses two leaves and was not considered intact. But this theory has largely been overturned, and the field now overwhelmingly focuses upon the spectacular singularity of the *Book of Games* believing this other "ominous copy" never existed at all. Schädler and Calvo, *Das Buch der Spiele*, 14.
[30] Florencio Janer, "Naipes ó cartas de jugar y dados antiguos con referencia á los juegos del Museo Arqueológico Nacional," *Museo Español de Antigüedades* 3 (1874): 42-63.
[31] Sister Marie Louise Trivison, "The Medieval Woman: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Leisure," *Romance Quarterly* 33.3 (Aug, 1986): 377-83.
[32] Florencio Janer, "*Los libros de Ajedrez, de los Dados y de las Tablas*. Códice de la Biblioteca del Escorial, mandado escribir por D. Alfonso el Sabio: Estudio artístico-arqueológico," *Museo español de antigüedades* III (1874) 225-55.

Mary), they offer a glimpse into patterns of dress, weaponry, furniture, and more. As might be logically believed, he believed the illustration corresponding to the game problem appeared above the text—though this is not in fact true, as the text precedes the illustration. He closely examines the manuscript, offering analysis on details hinted upon but perhaps not actually be seen. His imagination is vivid: he sees conversations between players; past, present and future movement in the tableau. Janer's analysis echoes the tone of future scholars, who also see the strikingly natural in each representational tableau.

This feeling that they conjure a moment in real life that once was, led to the suspicion that perhaps these illustrations represented real, identifiable people. As early as Juan Bautista Sánchez Pérez (1929), scholars were making attempts to identify the figures and were calling the illustrations portraits. Although he studied only a sample of the illustrations, among those named there is: Alfonso, his father or the ruler of France (King Louise IX, a cousin of Alfonso), and for us most interestingly, the queen (Violante), Alfonso and his mistress' daughter Beatriz (later of Portugal) playing against the queen (fig. 1.3).[33] H.G. Murray's concurrent treatise on chess (1913) explores the history of the game itself, examining select problems.[34] Nevertheless, though all such precise identifications ought to be read with a grain of suspicion, Michael Pennell and Ricardo Calvo (1997) argued that folio 54v represents King Edward I of England and his wife—Alfonso's half-sister—Queen Eleanor (fig. 1.4).[35] It is more plausible that this folio referenced Alfonso and his wife than it referenced the king and queen of England, but that does not make it out of the question.

[33] J. B. Sánchez Pérez, *El ajedrez de D. Alfonso El Sabio* (Madrid: la Franco, 1929). He looks at fols. 1r, 6v, 7r, 8r, 9r, 15r, 16r, 17v, 40r, 47v, 48r and 54v.
[34] I will examine this in much greater detail in the second chapter.
[35] M. Pennell and R. Calvo, "A Discovery," *The Chess Collector* VI.2. Apr. 1997.

Figures—the portraits—remain a source of debate. Sonja Musser-Golladay (2007), for example, identified the woman in the translucent robe in game nineteen (fig. 0.5) as Alfonso's mistress and longtime love, Mayor Guillén de Guzmán, the woman in the green as Violante

Fig. 1.3. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 16r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

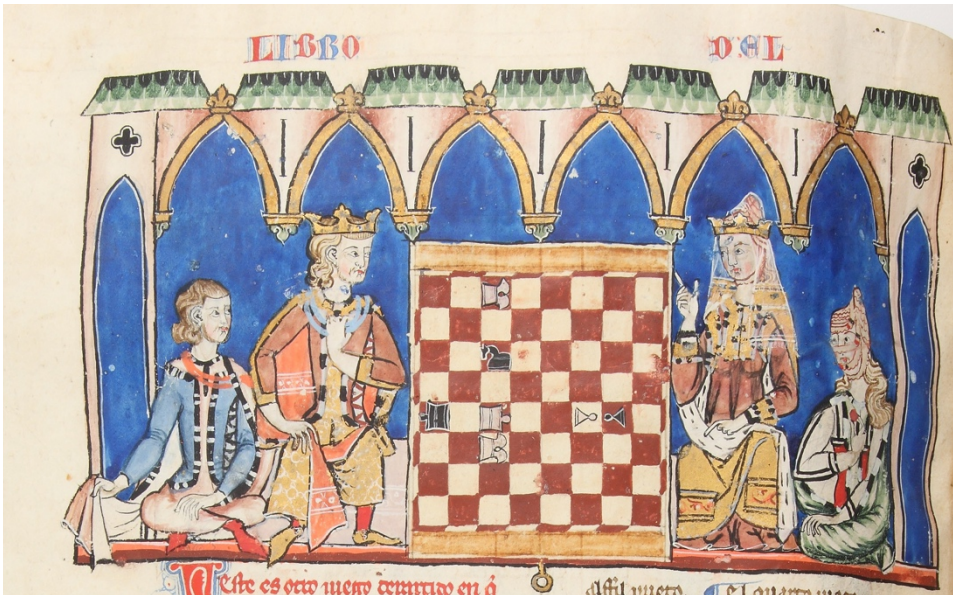

Fig. 1.4. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 54v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

(Alfonso's wife and queen) and on the lute Alfonso and Mayor's illegitimate daughter, Beatriz (of Portugal).[36] In chapter three, I will discuss more in detail her theories and arguments. But it is important to note that this is one of the illustrations which features an inscription, added at an unknown date, beholding the beauty and intelligence of the woman in the translucent robe. According to Golladay, this could only have been added by the king. She asks, who else would "dared?"[37] As I am sceptical about the heavy hand of the king in this manuscript, which I will explore more in chapter two, I entertain more speculation about who might have inscribed this particular folio or defaced game seventy-four. Although Golladay suggests Mayor is bested by her own daughter, "coached" by Alfonso, Cynthia Robinson (2004) saw this game very differently, as a representation of the *qiyan*—slave-singers in the court, known to have been circulating within Seville, a centre where they were educated in the arts of poetic recitation, conversation, music, literature and more.[38] They derive from an institution going back to the Abbasids.[39]

Even earlier, Carl Nordenfalk (1960), believing the manuscript to be documentary in nature, argued these women in translucent robes to be *soldadeiras*—women who performed and danced while troubadours sang, often who could often be taken advantage of sexually because of their liminal position in society.[40] Questions of dress were explored by Arnold Steiger (1941) and

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[36] Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 841.
[37] The inscription state: "esta mulher esta fremosa et sabia." High praise: "this woman is beautiful and wise / learned." She asks: who else other than the king himself, Alfonso *el Sabio*, would have "dared." Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 841, 743.
[38] Cynthia Robinson, "Going Between: The *Ḥadīth Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ* and the Contested Identity of the 'Ajouz in 13th-Century Iberia," edited Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi, *Under the Influence : Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile* (Leiden: Brill), 2005.
[39] Cynthia Robinson, "Preliminary Considerations on the Illustrations of Qissat Bayad wa Riyad [Vat. Ar. Ris. 368]: Checkmat with Alfonso X?" in *Al-Andalus und Europa zwischen Orient un Okzident*, 285-296.
[40] Bringing the *Book of Games* in comparison with the *Carmina Burana*, a medieval Germanic manuscript and Persian miniatures, he identified elements of dress and customs: heraldic hats of the king, the turbans of the Muslim players, the manner of sitting cross-legged, amongst other things. Carl Nordenfalk, "En Medeltida Schackbok," *Spanska Mästare (Arsbok for Svenska statens konstarnlingar)* 8 (1960) 20-35.

Carmen Bernis Madrazo (1956).[41] Bernis Madrazo looked at men and women from a sampling across the *Book of Games* (fols. 32r, 30v, 54r and 52v) as well as many from the *Cantigas.* Women, like men, wore *sayas* / *briales* (a more richly decorated version of a *saya*) which were loose or fitted, that did not touch the floor, they could be laced and if so were called *sayas encordadas*, and would wear another garment atop this, akin to an "over-tunic." To cover their hair, they wore a hair net at times, or a snood. There are also a variety of tall hats, all with bands that featured bands which crossed over each other in some manner.[42] Luis Vázquez de Parga (1987) suggested that the translucent robe worn in game nineteen and seventy-four, is a *gilala*, a robe of the bath.[43]

Across the manuscript, each miniature shares one similarity. Precise representations of the chess board made legible for its viewers—who have been assumed to have extended (originally) only to the elite circles of the court, if it at all left the private use of the king, given the exclusivity of its existence. Jens T Wollesen, in his 1990 essay on "Text and Image," points out that although written in Old-Castile, it was never made in copies for wider availability and use.[44] Comparing the manuscript and ruler to Alfonso's contemporary: Frederick II of southern Italy, he believes that it took large inspiration from Frederick's falconry treatise.[45] Not simply a text

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[41] Arnald Steiger, ed. and trans., *Alfonso El Sabio: Libros de acedrex, dados e tablas*. *Das* Schachzabelbuch *König Alfons des Weisen, nach der Handschrift J. T. 6 Fol. des Escorial, mit Glossar und Grammatischem Abriss Hrsg. und Übers.* Geneva: Droz, 1941.

[42] Carmen Bernis Madrazo, *Indumentaria medieval española* (Madrid: Instituto Diego Velázquez, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1956), see 21-25 for description of men's attire and 25-27 for women.

[43] This will be relevant for chapter three, in which I will explore the possibility that the women in the illustrations for these games are indeed represented at the bath. Luis Vázquez de Parga, "Alfonso X el Sabio," in *Libros del ajedrex, dados y tablas*, edited by Vicent García Editores, Valencia, and Ediciones Poniente (Madrid, Spain: Patrimonio Nacional, 1987): 21.

[44] Jens T. Wollesen, "Sub Specie Ludi...: Text and Images in Alfonso El Sabio's Libro de Acedrex, Dados e Tablas," *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 53 (3, 1990): 278. An English translation exists in the Cleveland Public Library John G. White Chess Collection (*The English Translation of the Alphonsine Manuscript from J. G. White's Long Hand Copy* by George Fraser." Among other translations there is one in German (Arnold Steiger) and a partial one in Italian (Paolo Canettieri).

[45] Wollesen, "Text and Image," 278

exploring various "problems," the *Book of Games* he says goes beyond "a manual of certain board games with moralizing connotations," and "a treatise on astrology following contemporary [Iberian] or Arabic patterns."[46] To his mind, because it was one of the first efforts of its kind—chess treatises in the Arabic tradition did not include such a cast of characters, but there likely did indeed exist precedent for the representation of the board—"many miniatures seem to have been clumsily grafted onto a text which does not mesh with the pictures."[47]

However, Kirsten Kennedy (2007) and David Roxburgh (2009) and have pointed out that simply because we do not retain Arabic chess treatises that include figures at play, does not mean they could not and never did.[48] There is a general loss of Arabic texts from the Iberian Peninsula, despite the knowledge that they were in circulation. We retain only one: *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad* (fig. 1.5- 1.6). Roxburgh and Kennedy both note the *Book of Games'* theatre of court type illustrates bear close similarity to illustrated versions of the *Maqamat al-Hariri* (fig. 1.7). Indeed, from what we know of the scriptorium (which is limited), we know that they likely worked in a set of teams for translation, copying, and illumination. María Victoria Chico Picaze emphasized the efforts of Jewish translators in the Arabic problems.[49] Ana Domínguez Rodríguez (1987) devoted a considerable amount of research into comparing the process of production between the

[46] Ibid, 306.
[47] Ibid, 307.
[48] Kirsten Kennedy, "Influence and Power: Arabic Iconography in Alfonso X's *Book of Chess*," in *Under the Influence: The Concept of Influence and the Study of Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. John. Lowden and Alixe Bovey (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols), 89-213. Roxburgh, "Los Libros Árabes," 263.
[49] María Victoria Chico Picaza, "El scriptorium de Alfonso X El Sabio," *Memoria de Sefarad* (Toledo: Centro Cultural San Marcos, 2002-2003).

Book of Games and the *Cantigas* (of which there are multiple copies), amongst other texts produced under Alfonso's patronage.

Left: Fig. 1.5, detail, Bayad playing chess. Folio 31r.

Right: Fig. 1.6, detail, Riyadh plays the lute in the garden to express her love for Bayad, in front of her Lady, and the elder woman narrating the story (from whom Bayad seeks counsel as well). Folio 13r.

Ḥadīth Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ (ca. 1240 CE). Vatican Arabo 368. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

Fig. 1.7. Detail, Abu Zayd (protagonist) at wedding banquet running from pearlescent bowl and attendees eating, *maqāma* 18, of Sinjar. From *Maqāmāt of al-Hariri*, copied and illustrated by Yahya b. Mahmud b. Yahya b. Abi al-Hasan b. Kuwarriha al-Wasiti, dated 7 Ramadan 634 (May 4, 1237), Baghdad (?), Iraq. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. Arabe 5847, fol. 35r. (Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France).

. It is her opinion that he played a heavy role in the shaping and creation of this manuscript. Domínguez Rodríguez also revealed that the text-image relationship was unambiguous and essential: text was prepared first, then image was placed within designed perimeters. The relationship is so tight that the text in fact does not detail the opening position—one must read the illustration in order to do so, but the miniature does not describe the moves of the game, the text does.

Within the *Book of Games* the two are halves of the broader game: there seem to be a multitude of little ironies and clues placed for the viewer. For example, as Calvo observes, winners are at times handed food and/or drink, and Robinson has also convincingly argued that the phallic tumbler goblets lying at the feet of the winning side do in fact represent sexual innuendo.[50] Laura Fernández Fernández (2010) has emphasized the experimental nature of the representations.[51] Like many others before her, she adds to the notion that there is a greater sense expressiveness in the features of the players and spectators. But since we know so little about the scriptorium, retaining only a sparse collection of names here and there, the labour and creation of the *Book of Games* too is a space for speculation, given certain laws of the time, and its substantial representational difference from other manuscripts under his production, such as the *Cantigas*. I will explore this in greater detail in chapter two, where I examine the scriptorium in greater detail.

On gestures, many of which are odd and seem to suggest their own language in the manuscript, J. B. Trend (1933), who focused on the "Oriental" influence—noting the frame narrative of the king of India, observing that players often wear "Oriental" dress—suggested, following Zarco Cuevas, that the positions of many players' hands is purposeful. They place in

[50] Robinson, "Going Between."
[51] Fernández Fernández, "*Libro de axedrez*." 106.

their hands in such attitudes to ward off the "Evil Eye."[52] More recently, María Teresa López de Guereño Sanz (2017) argued that the gestures reveal more than we think.[53] The hand, vehicle of movement, is capable of "almost the same fullness that words have," and they may speak by themselves.[54] Michael A. Conrad (2021) proposes that the diagrams depict what cannot be written, which will have value when I examine the notion of the "unseen" in chapter three, or what yet we have not seen. This aligns with other recent work. The notion that the manuscript is speaking to us on multiple levels, in ways we have not yet seen or understood, comes up in the work of Fidel Fajardo-Acosta (2015) who takes up the possibility of purposefulness. He speculates and suggests that the manner of depiction of objects and people, the geometric shapes created, are perhaps "anagrams" and "visual puns,"[55] which contain concealed messages. See fig. 0.4 from the beginning of the *Book of Games*, which he says "sets the tone for a book that is in itself a gigantic rebus game, a puzzle of objects rendered readable and living bodies transfigured into text."[56] The anagram can be read as the word "imperator," a position that the king had desired for himself "during the interregnum of 1245-1273."[57] So was it on purpose, or was it haphazard? This in sum brings us again us the question of how much we should expect the manuscript to represent real people in the miniatures enclosed, and how much we can believe there are conversations occurring—out of frame (before, later), within the frame (through other vehicles of communication: namely, eyes and hands). The work of this thesis follows from their

[52] J. B. Trend, "Alfonso El Sabio and the Game of Chess," *Revue Hispanique* LXXXI (1933) 5-15. On page 9 he cites: "Zarco Cuevas, P. Fr. Juan, *Cátalogo de los manuscritos castellanos de la Real Biblioteca de el Escorial*. (S. Lorenzo de el Escorial, 1924-29), III, 444- 45."
[53] María Teresa López de Guereño Sanz, "Arte y Gestualidad en el *Libro del Acedrex, dados e tablas* de Alfonso X el Sabio," *Laboratorio de Arte* 29 (2017): 23-52.
[54] López de Guereño Sanz, "Arte y Gestualidad."
[55] Fajardo-Acosta, "The King is Dead," 504.
[56] Fajardo-Acosta, "The King is Dead," 506
[57] Conrad, "The Playing Eye," 248.

interventions, and particularly that of Olivia Remie Constable (2007), whose article on the courtly environment made palpable through the illustrations leaves open the question of worlds beyond the frame. Like others before her, she hints that there are seem to be latent interactions inadvertent caught in representation through the site of the chess game.[58]

IV. Conclusion

The *Book of Games* is a manuscript which has clearly enthralled viewers and incited their imagination, mine included. Since it was "rediscovered" in the nineteenth century, at a politically tense moment that continued to impact the scholarship in the field from which it was studied, across all of its readings, in all the suggestions and arguments, I have not come across a queered, or questioning, interpretation. For chess, as I stated, was a game at this time both strategic and sexual. There is plenty that indicates a profane humour, there are illustrations recalling romantic medieval tropes between a man and a woman, and though there has long been believed a heavy hand of the king in the manuscript, there is a great deal we do not know. We notice the expressiveness, and the possibility that there are conversations held to which we are not privy—or that we simply do not yet know how to gauge, look upon—and we may note the evidence of personal reception. The next chapter picks up upon game of chess and how we may speculate on the moves the game is playing based upon our historical and cultural archive, and the physical evidence of the manuscript itself.

[58] Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile," 301-47.

Chapter 2

Embodied Moves: Making the *Games*

I. Immobility and Mobility in the *Games*

The question of this chapter is that of autonomy and materiality. How does the *Book of Games* evoke movement mobility and immobility? Is the manuscript also "toying" or "playing" with the viewer? As I demonstrated in the previous section through a literature review, there is a general sense of play across the manuscript. Odd iconography, strange gestures, inscriptions and erasure—riddles made by hands at present unknown. The play is on a ground composed of sides and squares, the chessboard, where figurines occupy different positions, constrained, able to move in certain ways. But a larger simultaneous "play" occurs across the tableaux of figures at the game, in which the court is at play. Figures occupy different positions, constrained, able to move in certain ways. Across the manuscript, on and off the page, in and out of frame, there exists seen and unseen movement, immobility, and formal fluidity. Movement exists in many forms: the migratory history of the game of chess, the notion of "the move" within the chess game, the bodily exertion of the makers of this manuscript, and for the purposes of my analysis, the movement of the women depicted in translucent robes.

How much freedom was exercised by the scriptorium in making the *Book of Games* specifically? And how much mobility was available to those who inspired the representations of what I—following Constable (2007), Robinson (2005), Doubleday (2015), and López de Guereño Sanz (2017)—believe to be the *qiyan* or Muslim courtesans? How does this polarity of immobility and mobility reflect within the game of chess itself? Given the limited information we have, in order to speculate, I seek to understand and begin unravelling these questions and our assumptions, examining our knowledge of the heavily Arabized world of thirteenth century

Castile. This is buttressed by a myriad of secondary sources and research on the scriptorium, to probe the differences between earlier manuscripts produced under Alfonso's patronage—such as the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*—and the *Book of Games*. The former overtly religious, the latter secular. Alfonso el Sabio's court, although Latinate Christian, included members of different faiths and backgrounds, as had courts before him.[1] It certainly interacted with courts from other parts of the world. And it certainly interacted with circles that brought the women in question into court. The overall purpose of this chapter is to uncover the possibility of real autonomy in the creation of the text, given the context, while simultaneously paying heed to the constraints of the makers and represented subjects. In the context of the courtesans, raising the possibility of autonomous movement is important because it reframes the strategic decisions of the chess playing women--constrained in their freedoms, free in certain abilities—to move figures, to not only possess but use intellect, playing a game where they capture a king. Visually, the possibility of autonomy lends credence to anticipation of lives beyond the edges, and "riddles" contained within we have not yet seen, or understood.

II. The Scriptorium in Seville

To frame our understanding of the manuscript, I begin with an overview of the notion of the scriptorium and its processes, as related to the king. Previous scholars have largely argued that the singular *Book of Games*—large and lavish—was a private project of the king, known to be closely connected with the world of knowledge production.[2] Scholars debate if he sought to

[1] Olivia Remie Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile: the "Libro de ajedrez" of Alfonso X, el Sabio," *Speculum* 82, no. 2 (April 2007): 334. Ricardo Calvo "El *libro de los Juegos* de Alfonso X el Sabio," in *Alfonso el Sabio, Libros de ajedrez, dados e tablas,* (Madrid. Valencia, Patrimonio Nacional, Vicent García Editores, Ediciones Poninete, 1987, 2 vols.), 132.

[2] Note that this was not a "general: knowledge production, it was knowledge afforded to courtly circles and elites. The production presented a particular vision that Alfonso X may have wanted to project of himself, as king, as possible emperor. See: Kirsten Kennedy, *Alfonso X of Castile-León: Royal Patronage, Self-Promotion and Manuscripts in Thirteenth-Century Spain* (Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West), (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

depict the demographic diversity of Castile, an unruly frontier society between Christian and Islamic ruled lands, in the waves of conquest-reconquest, or if the elderly Alfonso (aged sixty-two) was bitter, confined to Seville after his son Sancho effectively took the throne, and played out battles intellectually through the chessboard.[3] The *Games* is slightly implacable. The last manuscript produced after a vast array of scientific, legal, historiographic, religious works, it is not exactly moralistic or historiographic, nor scientific, it does not relate to the law exactly, nor religion; but it certainly engages with the visual rhetoric of courtly conduct—wine, women, song, games.[4] Simultaneously, the morality of such pursuits underpins the structure of the manuscript. The whole text can be read an allegorical treatise through which Alfonso demonstrated and tested different methods of governance—abstract strategy and intellect (chess), luck (dice), the two both combined (table)—as the narrative of the King of India and his three wise men frames.[5] However, given the political turmoil in which it was made and Alfonso's physical unhealth, ill with cancer, I suggest that its singularity is not the work of the king but perhaps the exercised freedom of an inventive scriptorium.[6] The *Book of Games* is a world painted and mediated by hands unknown, but it is only one of three texts under Alfonso X to

[3] Kirsten Kennedy, "Influence and Power: Arabic Iconography in Alfonso X's *Book of Chess*," in *Under the Influence: The Concept of Influence and the Study of Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. John. Lowden and Alixe Bovey (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols), 89. Manuel Sánchez Mariana, "El libro en la baja edad media: Reino de Castilla," in *Historia ilustrada del libro español: Los manuscritos*, Biblioteca del Libro 54, ed. Hipòlito Escolar (Madrid, 1993), 162-222, 197 specifically.

[4] See various essays in *Emperor of Culture: Alfonso X The Learned and His Thirteenth Century Renaissance*, ed. Robert I. Burns (Philadelphia, 1990), and *El Scriptorium alfonsí: de los "Libros de Astrologia" a las "Cantigas de Santa Maria,"* eds. Jesús Montoya Martínez and Ana Domínguez Rodriguez (Madrid, 1999).

[5] Michael Allman Conrad, "The Playing Eye: The Epistemological Function of Game Miniatures in the Late 13th Century," in *Games and Visual Culture in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance*, eds. Elizabeth Lapina and Vanina Kopp (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 238. Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture," 317.

[6] Political turmoil: his son Sancho in open rebellion. The court had already shifted to Seville by the time. "Delgado Roig's examination of [Alfonso's] remains confirms that the Wise King's illness, which he believed to be a sarcoma, was disfiguring and explains the suffering, often described in symptoms so vague as to hinder even tentative diagnosis, in several autobiographical *cantigas* including F 95, F 71, F 235, E 279 and E 367. *Cantiga* F 95 treats 'How King don Alfonso of Castile fell ill in Vitoria and had such a severe pain that he thought he would die of it.'" Sonja Musser Golladay, "*Los Libros de Acedrex Dados e Tablas:* Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's 'Book of Games,'" ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, PhD Diss. (University of Arizona), 2007, 730.

make itself known by dating and location. The colophon explicitly states the place in which it was made—Seville—and that it was completed in ERA 1321 (1283 CE).[7]

The term "scriptorium" indicates not only a place of work but also those who worked within: scribes, copyists, translators, illustrators.[8] Of names we have only a sample, amongst others:

> Pedro de Pamplona, who painted a Bible for the personal use of Alfonso X, today in the Colombian Library; Pedro de Lorenzo, painter of the *Cantigas*; or Johan Pérez, painter of the king, who in 1261 had a house in front of the Church of Santa Maria.[9]

Others still include Yehuda ben Mošé—who worked on the scientific texts, translating the *Book on Stars* and others—Isaac ben Sid, Bernardo al Arábigo—the only one known to have been of "Arab" origin," and many others.[10] Text was produced before illustration, as Dominguez Rodriguez and Menendez Pidal demonstrated, in a process of translation from Arabic into Latin or the vernacular language.[11] This was then copied onto the official parchment, with designated space left for the illustrations. Domínguez Rodriguez compared incomplete versions of *Cantigas*, in which we can thus see states of process, to the more "complete" *Games* manuscript, to see if the layered stages of production were applicable.[12]

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[7] There is debate about whether it was completed in 1283 or 1284 —before or after the death of Alfonso X in 1284. Conrad, "The Playing Eye." Kennedy, "Influence and Power," 89.

[8] Jesús Montoya Martínez, "El Scriptorium alfonsí," in *El Scriptorium alfonsí: de los Libros de Astrología a las "Cantigas de Santa María*," edited by Jesús Montoya Martínez and Ana Domínguez Rodríguez (Editorial Complutense: Madrid, 1999), XI.

[9] Jesús Rojas-Markos González, "La pintura y las artes ornamentales en la Sevilla medieval, " *Temas de estética y arte*, 29 (2015): 121

[10] Jesús Montoya Martínez, "El Scriptorium alfonsí," in *El Scriptorium alfonsí: de los Libros de Astrología a las "Cantigas de Santa María*," edited by Jesús Montoya Martínez and Ana Domínguez Rodríguez (Editorial Complutense: Madrid, 1999), XI. Laura Fernández Fernández, *Arte y Ciencia en el scriptorium de Alfonso X el Sabio*, Monografías de Alfonso X, Núm. 1 (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2013), 63-68.

[11] Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal, *La España del siglo XIII ledia en imágenes* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1981/86), 31, 104.

[12]Ana Domínguez Rodriguez, "El *Libro de los juegos* y la miniatura alfonsí," In Alfonso El Sabio, *Libros de ajedrez, dados e tablas* (Madrid, Valencia, Patrimonio Nacional, Vicent García Editores, Ediciones Poniente, 1987, 2 vols.) 30-121. On the process of painting see: Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal, *Romancero Español, Classicos Éxito, Volumen VII* (Madrid: Editorial Éxito, 1962). Kennedy, "Influence and Power," 92-93.

Essentially, the text was first either translated or composed, copied, and then in the designated space for the illustrations the illuminators made line drawings, over which they painted. For translation they worked in pairs, the translator typically Jewish with a Christian copyist.[13] Placed on a final sheet then is the work of the copyist. But as Solalinde has pointed out, the differences in language styles make it seem as though even the copying was done by multiple hands.[14] Within the *Games* we have a few material examples of these layers of labour, Golladay calls them the "incomplete sections."[15] She writes that the left side of the bench in 52v is missing, but I suspect this might simply have been the effect of humidity (fig. 2.1) More convincing is 57v, featuring unpainted corners in which we can see underdrawings lines (fig. 2.2). Folio 80r is missing pieces and the dice on the table. 88v has an unpainted cap, we can somewhat discern underdrawing (fig. 2.3). On folio 92v, in the corners, the crests are missing the rampant lion for León to complete the two crests of Alfonso's royal Castile and León. Golladay also says that the playing figure at the left is unfinished, missing the side cap garment all the other players wear.

[13] María Victorio Chico Picaza, "El estilo pictórico del scriptorium alfonsí," in *Alfonso X el sabio [exposición]* Sala San Esteban, Murcia, 27 octubre 2009-31 enero 2010 [comisario y director científico, Isidro G. Bango Torivso; coordinación para el catálogo, Maria Teresa López de Guereño Sanz (Murcia, 2009), 246-255.
[14] A García Solalinde. "Intervencion de Alfonso X en la redacción de sus obras," *Reviga de Filologia española*, II (1925): 283-288.
[15] Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 694.

Fig. 2.1. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 52v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 2.2. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 57v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 2.3. Detail, underdrawing: *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 88v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 2.4. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 92v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Although the illustrations were the second phase, they were not at all disconnected from the production of the text.[16] In the vein of Arabic chess treatises, the central component of the manuscript describes game problems and solutions from start to finish, move by move. With vivid detailing, illustrations enrich the depictions of the board and provide a glimpse of the demographic range in multicultural, frontier society Castile, with players of various faiths, genders, races, and ages.[17] There are slaves, kings, attendants, noblewomen, courtesans, concubines, monks and more—a visual repertoire of that so-called *convivencia*. As Ricardo Calvo and Cynthia Robinson have pointed out, the illustrations reference the game problem in some way—the winner of the game may be depicted with a wine decanter or is the one being served by an attendant.[18]

Of the 103 total chess problems, 80 originate from chess treatises in Arabic.[19] Such references do not depict figures at the board, rather only a diagram of the board at play.[20] This does not mean that they could not and never did. We suffer a general loss of manuscripts from the Iberian Peninsula, from al-Andalus retaining only *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad* (hereafter *BR*) the romance of a merchant and an enslaved singer/girl. Greatly deteriorated, now housed at the Vatican Library, it is believed to have been made in Seville. *BR* includes a game of chess at play; the composition and arrangement of certain musical players is very reminiscent of the players in the *Games* (figs. 05 and 1.6). Illustrations usually occupy around a third of the page, are usually

[16] Though most of the images follow more or less a similar pattern, some compositions are more inventive. here would have been discussion. Choices were made to represent certain players with certain games.
[17] Laura Fernández Fernández, "Libro de axedrez, dados, e tablas," In *Libro de los Juegos de Ajedrez, Dados y Tablas de Alfonso X el Sabio* (Scriptorium, 2010): 75
[18] Ricardo Calvo "El *libro de los Juegos* de Alfonso X el Sabio," in *Alfonso el Sabio, Libros de ajedrez, dados e tablas,* (Madrid. Valencia, Patrimonio Nacional, Vicent García Editores, Ediciones Poninete, 1987, 2 vols.), 122-235. The phallic nature of the bottle was also noted by Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture," 338.
[19] Murray writes that "89 of its 103 problems are of unmistakable Muslim origin," Murray, *A History of Chess*, 181. The Arabic style games are: 1-55, 57-60, 63-65, 69-72, 85.
[20] Kennedy, "Influence and power." David Roxburgh, "Los Libros Árabes y el Scriptorium de Alfonso X," *Alfonso X El Sabio*, ed. Isidro G. Bango Torviso (Murcia: A. G. Novograf, 2009), 264.

at the top, in rectangles, centred around an aerial depiction of the board. Such illustrations bear a closer resemblance to other northern European compositional traditions where the represented game is also enclosed within a rectangle, as seen in chess games at play in folios from the thirteenth to early fourteenth century *Carmina Burana* (fig. 2.5) and *Les voeux du paon* (2.6) manuscripts.[21]

In the *Games,* however, there exceptions to this, where the painter and scribe were more inventive with text-image relationship, for example in the L-shaped compositions (fig. 0.2).[22] These unframed images evoke the illustrations of Arabic manuscripts such as the *Maqamat al-Hariri*, of which there were 700 copies produced during the author's lifetime in the tenth century, that we know were in circulation within the Iberian Peninsula. Many illustrated versions were also subsequently made.[23] The libraries of the scriptorium were filled with not only such texts, but also volumes from other courts: the King of France bestowed upon Alfonso a Bible, now famous; there were many manuscripts from the Mamluk sultan of Cairo.[24] Clearly, the visual repertoire from which the scriptorium pulled was vast. But were the makers also similarly from a vast array of backgrounds. From the start, alongside the words ostensibly in the voice of the king, viewers can see its makers: scribes down the words of the prologue (fig. 0.4), sitting on benches in the scriptorium, bent over folios (fi. 0.3). The *Book of Games* is curiously self-referential. Such "crafting" images can be found across the manuscript: makers in the background crafting (fig. 2.7), handing a chess piece to a player (fig. 2.8). Like the court, they

[21] María Teresa López de Guereño Sanz, "Escenografía y discursos visuales en torno al ocio en el siglo XIII hispano, el Libro de los Juegos de Alfonso X el Sabio," in *Lienzos del recuerdo: estudios en homenaje a José M. Martínez Frías*, coord. por Marí Lucía Lahoz Gutiérrez, Manuel Pérez Hernández, José María Martínez Frías (hom.), (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2015), 326.
[22] López de Guereño Sanz, "Escenografía y discursos visuales," 326.
[23] Roxburgh, "Los Libros," 263.
[24] P. Martínez Montávez, "Relaciones de Alfonso X de Castilla con el sultán mameluco Baybars y sus sucesores", *Al-Andalus*, 27 (1962): 343-376.

were itinerant, but spent the most amount of time in Seville. As has been pointed out, manuscript production required a complex system of production, materials which were not

Fig. 2.5 *Carmina Burana.* Image 187.(CLM 4660) Germany. Library of Congress. 1230-1399.

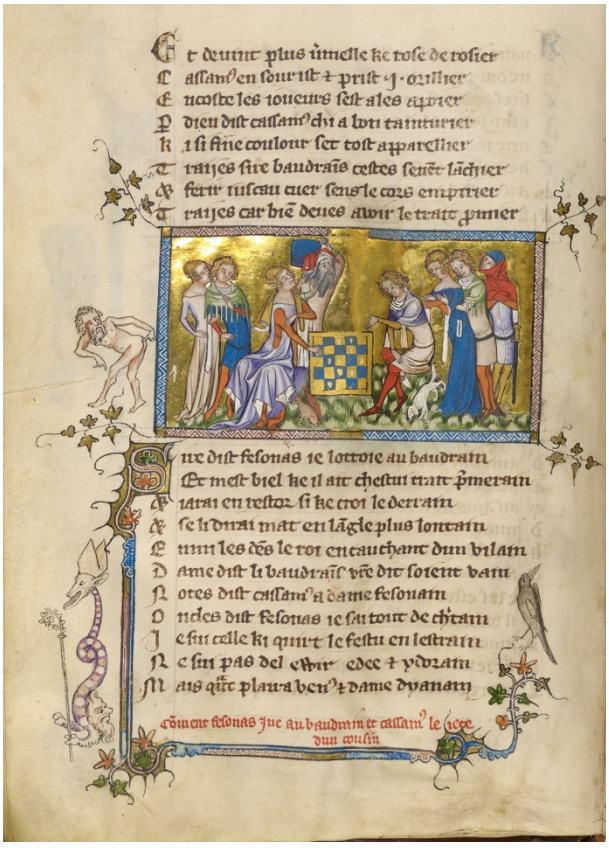

Fig. 2.6 *Les vœux du paon*. MS G.24, fol. 25v. Belgium. Jacques de Longuyon. The Morgan Library & Museum.1350.

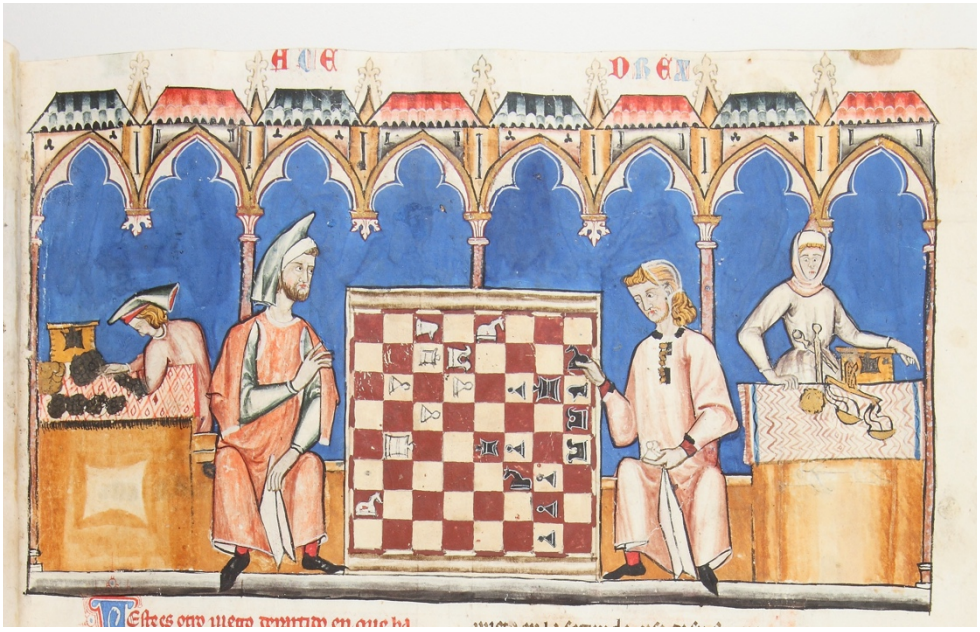

Fig. 2.7. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 23r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

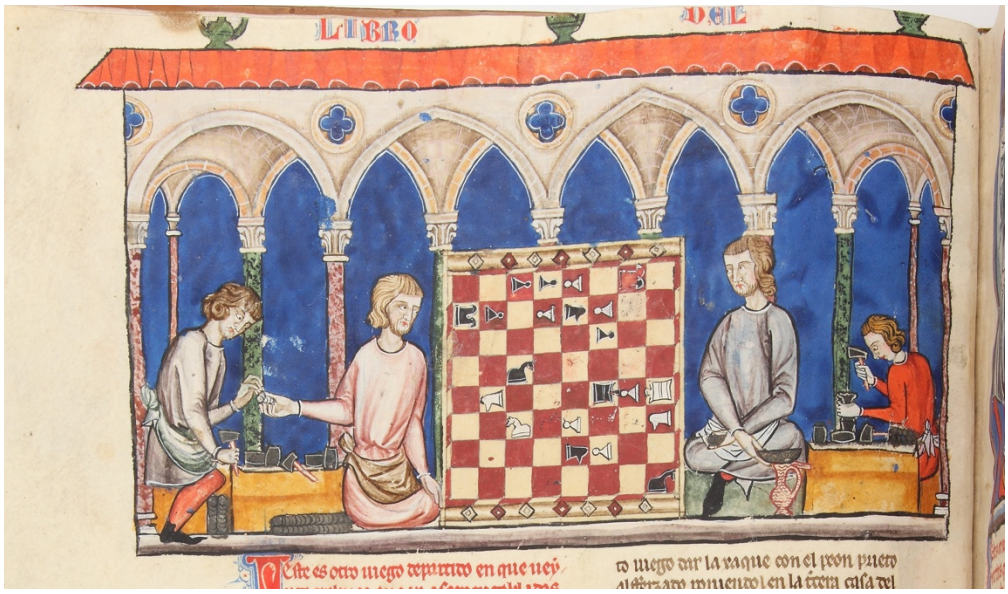

Fig. 2.8. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 23v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

available everywhere. There was some permanency to the larger scriptorium, especially in the later years in Seville, which was already a cultural centre under its previous rulers. Manuscripts had certainly been produced here for some time, and surely not only everyone who worked within the Muslim scriptoriums would have left.[25] Certain labour and tribute laws for "Moorish" artisans came into being under Christian rule in which they could "work off" their tribute taxes through labour services; concessions were made in such cases for tax purposes because of services rendered,[26] lead me to believe that the scribal team for the *Games* may have included mudéjars—those who remained.[27] Seville in the thirteenth century was a cultural centre surrounded by an Islamic past, with an influx of visitors and trade from around the world—Scotland, Genoa, Norway, Egypt. Kirsten Kennedy points out that this range of people would have made it possible for Alfonso to "employ artists of different nationalities, who could have worked according to different artistic traditions," thus saturating the *Games* with a range of artistic expressions.[28]

It seems eminently possible that the scribal team for the *Games* was different than other teams producing manuscripts under Alfonso's patronage. Not only do the range of players reflect the wide diversity of Castile, but perhaps so too does it reflect the vast composition of the makers themselves—from the scriptorium to woodworkers who carved the pieces and beyond. They seemed to have been able to access greater freedom in producing the manuscript. But within—if these are indeed referential portraits—as many have noted, faces bear expressions.[29] They seem

[25] Around the midpoint of the thirteenth century, with the Christian conquest of Murcia and large parts of al-Andalus, the Jewish and Muslim populations of Castile were significantly larger. This is why Castile is so often referred to as a "frontier society." Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X, the Justinian of His Age: Law and Justice in Thirteenth-Century Castile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).
[26] Manuel González Jiménez, *Diplomatario Andaluz de Alfonso X* (Seville: El Monte, Caja de Huelva y Sevilla, 1991), 114, 118, 126-27, 118. O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X.*
[27] "*mudéjars,*" from *al-mudajjan*, "those allowed to remain."
[28] Kennedy, "Influence and Power," 90.
[29] See discussion of scholarship in chapter 1, pages 27-35.

to communicate something about the relationship between two people beyond the game, that is also of course at play in the game. Still, the makers were restrained. That is, they do not name who is who, but seem to leave us clues that in fact so and so was someone. Such subtle rules and maneuvers of court reflect within the game of chess, for which readers are given a series of strict rules from the beginning, alongside scribal images and portraits of the king.

III. Chess as a Game Movement: Rules of the Game

In its prefatory text, the *Book of Games* describes why such seated games were recorded and who ought to play them.[30] Through a framing fable narrative, we are introduced to their origins: created and spread from the court of an ancient king of India, who asked his three wise men to rank intellect or luck as better than the other. Each brought games imbued with these inherent characteristics. One chess—a game of strategy, one dices—games of luck, for intelligence means nothing if luck is against you, and the last brought table games—both intellect and luck in combination. As an introducing frame to the rest of the codex, it demonstrates that there is more at play in games than what meets the eye. That is, these games are methods for understanding and dealing with the world, whether as a ruler or otherwise. Although the game problems which occupy the central part the treatise are essentially didactic, they simultaneously explore at the very least themes of intellect, strategy, and luck, as a representational metaphor for something else.[31] This thus leaves each game open to the potential of representational metaphor, or allegory, which holds value when we consider the possibility of certain illustrated tableaus as playing grounds for larger games.

[30] See page 18 from chapter 1 for translation of prologue ostensibly in the words of the king.
[31] On "allegorical interpretations of the games," see Conrad, "The Playing Eye," 238. In the case of the king this could be the idea that he sought to test different methods of kingship through the three games.

In this section I will go over the introductory parts of the manuscript, to understand how figures and their mirrored figurines are conceived of in terms of powers of mobility. As I believe understanding this manual on how figure(ines) operate in the *Games* can help us understand how figures within the world of the court (or the battle) may have likewise accessed their own mobility. Following the fable are "chapters" on why chess is first in the manuscript, how many colours all the chess pieces are meant to be, the movement of each piece and how each piece captures—some in all squares of the board, others only in some—and how they are all ranked. Though a game played while seated, the fable narrative already explicitly frames chess as a game of great movement. The introduction specifies that:

> [t]here are to be thirty-two pieces. And the sixteen of one colour should be arranged on the first two horizontal ranks of the board. And the other sixteen of the other colour are to be arranged on the other end of the board in that same way, opposite the others.
>
> And of the sixteen pieces eight are lesser, because they were made to resemble the common people who go into the army.
>
> And of the other pieces which are greater one resembles the king, who is the lord of the army and he should be in one of the two middle squares.
>
> And next to him in the other middle square, is another piece which resembles the fers (*alferez*) who carries the standard of the king's colours...And these two pieces each one plays alone and does not have another in all the sixteen pieces that resembles them.
>
> And in the two other squares beside these there are two other pieces which resemble each other and they call them fils (*alffiles*) in Arabic which means the same thing in our language as elephants, which the kings used to bring into battle and each one brought at least two so if one of them died, that the other would remain.
>
> And in the other two squares on the end [fol. 3v] there are two other pieces which also resemble each other and they call them rooks and they are made wide and stretched because they resemble the ranks of the soldiers.[32]

As this excerpt makes evident, chess terminology is analogous to the battleground, like its pieces.[33] For chess is a game of mirrors. At the start they reflect back to each other, their form

[32] Golladay, "*Los Libros,*" 134-35.

[33] Its regiments reflect the set-up of the Indian army. Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 147: validation of games for "noble entertainment" vs. condemnation of those for "base gambling." She writes that "Alfonso also takes great pains to explain that each chess piece's move and capture is analogous to the battle," or the court—the parallel is real and evident.

and formation deriving from the military. What makes each play different is strategy, and knowing the full capacity of movements each figure is able to pursue.

"The king should not rush into battles, but go very slowly and gaining always from the enemies...[he] is not to move more than one square straight or diagonally as one who looks all around him mediating on what he is to do."[34] The ruler should be careful and considering, looking at all mixtures of possibilities before he makes a move. The fers, right-hand man of the king,[35] "moves on squares diagonally and this is in order to guard the king and not leave his side and to shield him from the checks and checkmates," but may also make other moves, as "this is the manner of a good captain."[36] He is fluid, he may in "his first move jump to the second straight or diagonal square and even if another piece is in between." In this move he becomes a "foot soldier." [37] He is a guard to them; he becomes one of them. When the fers is "joined with the pawns, they call it flanked." This is a specific kind of move: the *alfferzada* denotes a "triangular position of reciprocal protection created by a fers diagonally in front of two pawns."[38] For the other pieces: the fils are like their namesakes, elephants who no one "dared to stand in front of," as those who rode them "made them move diagonally to wound the ranks of their enemies so that they were not able to guard themselves." [39]

Thus a piece "moves" in the way it would in real life, as Alfonso—or perhaps simply the scribe—insists. Knights "jump three squares counting one straight and taking the third diagonally in any direction." This, the text says, is like "the good captains who lead the ranks

[34] Golladay, "*Los Libros,*" 136 (fol. 2r-4v).
[35] Steven M. Taylor, "God's Queen: Chess Imagery in the Poetry of Gautier de Coincy," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 17 (1990): 403-19. Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen : a History*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004).
[36] Golladay *"Los Libros,*" 136.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 137.

turning their horses to the right and to the left in order to guard their men and conquer the enemies." Rooks meanwhile "play straight as far as they can move before them or behind or to the right or to the left…like the ranks of the soldiers which go forward as far as they can or in whichever direction they understand will be best…to more quickly be able to conquer those with whom they are fighting." Lastly, pawns only move one square at a time like the "foot soldiers of the army, they cannot move very far because they go on foot and they carry their weapons and other things they need on their backs." However, pawns may be played "to the second square on their first move and this is until they capture because afterwards, they cannot do it…this is like when the common people steal some things, that they carry them on their backs."[40]

Capture is different than movement. The king may capture in any of the squares through which he passes, unless "there is some other piece from the other side of that piece which shelters it." All other pieces—fils and knights and rooks—do the same, except for fers, which "cannot capture on the first move if it is played going to the second square but after it is played it will capture in the second diagonal according to its movement."[41] Pawns, "capture diagonally moving forward one space…[a]nd this is like the foot soldiers who cannot wound each other being faced off straight in front of each other, but he wounds the other who is to his diagonal because he does not guard against him as much."

A hierarchy is obvious and imbued even within these descriptions. Figures of different stature and status and position are able to move more freely or in a certain manner constrained, depending on what is most suitable for them given their position as part of a larger collective. They each have their roles. Certain pieces may "graduate" to higher levels and are thus able to move in different ways, but ultimately they obey the whims of the game—the court, the

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

battlefield. Still, the text clarifies exactly the rank, based upon the "advantage" the piece carries in terms of freedom of movement. First is the rook, who "can go in one move from one end of the board to other straight ahead…if there is not another of his own pieces on the row which blocks him or an opponent's piece that he captures because he will have to remain in the square of that one which he captured."

Next is the knight, "because he who knows how to play well with the knight by moving him from the first square on the edge of the board will capture as many pieces are they may be squares of the board…because he never fails to capture according to his movement." And fils, more powerful than pawn (at the bottom of the ranking) can "capture at a farther distance and they also make a flank." But the king, on the other hand, is "protected in such a way that he can capture everyone and none can capture him…like the king who can do justice on all those who deserve it but because of this none should place a hand on him in order to capture him nor wound no kill him even if he wounds or captures or kills." The king is "untouchable" but capturing him is the point of the game. He rules over the game, but he is bound within his own position as well. However, there are three ways the king may be "shamed." First, by "making him leave the square where he is," second "by blocking from him the square where he wishes to enter," and third, "by not letting him capture what he wants." In sixty-four moves, he "can move and capture…the square of the board." The fers can "cover in thirty-two moves all the squares of the board in which it should move," the fil is able to "move and capture in six squares of the board," while the pawn may be "made a fers in six moves." It would be impossible to count the rook, says the *Book of Games*, because it moves "far and near throughout the board wherever it wants." This is all to say that upon the board, some figures possess more moves at their dispersal, others less, and even the highest position—the king—does not mean the greatest number of

movements possible. All figures face the parametres of their position and must ascribe to a certain number of rules.

IV. Figures of the Court: Women Who Play

The women at the board, wearing translucent robes in games nineteen and seventy-four, have been called concubines, performers, houris—the women in Paradise that await the faithful—and *qiyan*—a class of slave singers.[42] These are all terms that connote certain imagery, interrelated but not exactly all the same. Some were extremely educated, exercised greater freedoms but all were also ultimately confined to their roles and positions within court society. It is their revealing clothing and gestures, the henna decorating their hands, which has led scholars to believe them Muslim concubines within Alfonso's court, or *qiyan*.[43] The *qiyan* were an Abbasid era institution that was brought into the Iberian Peninsula by Muslim rulers, the *qiyan* were women educated in singing, the arts of conversation, poetic recitation and *akhbar* (accounts that were historical or literary), calligraphy, sexual techniques, as well as "emotional manipulation"––a wide variety of literary and performing arts.[44] They were sold and trained at a young age, sometimes by older *qiyan*, moved from court to court city to city, and were often part of the courtly landscape.[45] Part of the allure was their unknowability. As slaves they had been removed

[42] Ana Dominguez Rodriguez calls them *houris*—those who await the Faithful in Paradise.
[43] Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture," 337. Cynthia Robinson, "Going Between: The *Ḥadīth Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ* and the Contested Identity of the 'Ajouz in 13th-Century Iberia," edited Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi, *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile* (Leiden: Brill), 2005.
[44] Dwight F. Reynolds, "The Qiyan of al-Andalus," in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, edited by Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 100.
Lisa Emily Nielson, "Diversions of Pleasure: Singing Slave Girls and the Politics of Music in the Early Islamic Courts (661-1000CE): Their Influence, History and Cultural Roles as Seen through the 'Kitāb Al-Muwashsha' ('Book of Brocade') of Ibn Al-Washsha, the 'Risala Al-Qiyān' ('Epistle on the Singing Girls') of Al-Jāhiz and the 'Dhamm Al-Malāhī' ('Centure of Instruments of Diversion') of Ibn Abi'l Dūnya," (University of Maine, PhD Dissertation, 2010), 104 (see al-Jahiz, 31-33.).
[45] Although this is a very complex discussion, there is a difference between *qiyan* and *jawari*, exclusive concubines, for this context see Reynolds, "The Qiyan of al-Andalus," 101.

from their families, and thus were orphans, with no claims to a family history.[46] They were not precisely concubines,[47] but these women could be sexually available to those who owned them. This caliphal institution is relevant for the Alfonsine court and thus the *Book of Games* because they were known to have been circulating within the Iberian Peninsula, even in Christian courts, from around the tenth to thirteenth centuries.[48] Biographies of certain famous *qiyan* in al-Andalus come from writers such as Ahmad al-Tifashi (1184-1253), who described an account on the processes behind their purchase in al-Andalus, and the most well-known music of his time. He wrote:

> "Among the cities of al-Andalus, this music is primarily located in Seville where older professional women singers teach singing to female slaves whom they own,"[49]

It was not necessarily the case that *qiyan* were always young—some of the most successful ones were older, who with age and acclaim could then retain quite a large deal of their own power and control.[50] They may have received gifts from admirers, which could be very valuable. And yet it should be remembered that the social function of these women, as well as others, was to provide entertainment to gathered men.[51] Singing, playing instruments, dancing, conversing—the courtesan's use of her body was essential to the performance. If she was required to seduce, she must possess an ability to read people, what to say when and where, and how. For this role, her

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[46] They were often "acquired through conquest or trade, and therefore kinless...[t]o emphasize their change in status, they were given new, Arabic names when captured or acquired. These names were descriptive," Nielson, "Diversions of pleasure," 102.

[47] Or, *barraganía*, which was more accepted within civil law, as it functioned akin to marriage, it could be "long-lasting" and "based on friendship, love, and fidelity," but it did not possess the same legal protections. O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X,* 144. In the mid to late medieval, concubinage could also approach something resembling what we might now call a partner, particularly for the common populations. See: Susan McDonough and Michelle Armstrong-Partida, "Amigas and Amichs: Prostitute-Concubines, Strategic Coupling, and Laboring-Class Masculinity in Late Medieval Valencia and the Mediterranean," *Speculum* 98, no. 1 (2023): 49–85.

[48] Citation They are perhaps represented on the red velvet pillowcase of Queen Berenguela, Alfonso X's ancestor

[49] Reynolds, "Qiyan," 116-117.

[50] Nielson, "Diversions of pleasure," 102. Reynolds "Qiyan."

[51] Iman Said Darwish, "Courtly Culture and Gender Poetics: Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and Christine de Pizan," (American University in Cairo, MA Thesis, AUC Knowledge Fountain, 2014), 55.

dress involved an "extrasensory performance" that made pone aware of her body, and of one's own your body in relation to hers, through the use of certain kinds of fabric, jewellery, gesture, scent, and so on.[52] Their "freedom" was limited to these confines of performance. But their education meant they were worth more and had a higher social status than many other enslaved, and could live apart from men. It is not unimaginable that some ended up in the court post-Christian conquest of Seville.[53] Cynthia Robinson has argued that by adopting the elements of their courtly style, the *Games* consciously visually represents Christian rulers dominance over Islam.[54] Her argument follows that this is at its height in the representations of the "once noble *qiyan*" to Robinson's mind, desecrated in their depiction at the board in games nineteen and seventy-four.[55] Given that we are uncertain who made these illustrations, who defaced the figures in the latter game and added an inscription in the former, I employ the term courtesan. Space does not allow me to reflect whether or not the overall manuscript of the *Games* seeks to demonstrate Christian dominance, but future studies will consider this in greater detail. At present, courtesan encompasses the multiple possibilities that the women in games nineteen and seventy-four may reflect: perhaps people trained for entertainment through music and other forms, who simultaneously maintained "opportunities for independence."[56]

V. Conclusion

As the history of the game shows us, rules can be changed. Just as each piece moves across the board in particular ways, so too has chess itself moved in a particular way across space and

[52] Nielson, "Diversions of pleasure," 101.
[53] Space has not allowed me to fully uncover what happened to the *qiyan* after the conquest of Seville by Christian forces, but future studies will examine this in greater detail.
[54] This follows in the vein of conquerors adopting certain elements of style from those who had previously ruled.
[55] Robinson, "Going Between."
[56] It reflects both the contemporary understanding of the term for a "kept" woman, and the historic sense of the term, a courtier who attends to a ruler. Nielson, "Diversions of pleasure," 102. For the role of race within this context, see references to Pamela Patton in chapter 1.

time. For chess is a highly migratory game that has been shaped by its movement through various domains, as reflected in the frame fable. Indeed, this narrative follows generally how the game is believed to have originated, in the Indian subcontinent. H. J. Murray's seminal *A History of Chess* (1913) offers an ancestry, from "the first appearance of its ancestor, the Indian *chaturanga*," a game of four of players, "in the beginning of the seventh century of our era," to the game familiar to early twentieth century European players.[57] Murray traces the game as it travels in East Asia, in Iran under the Sasanians, where *chaturanga* became *chatrang*, medieval chess literature both didactic and moralizing, and chess under Islam: the game of *shatranj* (fig. 2.9).[58] *Ash-shatranj* ("the chess"), becomes *ajedrez* in Iberia.[59]

Some pieces retained the phonetic sounds of their older names—*rukh* becomes rook, for example.[60] But there are many differences between the versions of the game. In one example he gives of *shantranj*, the players and games are more prone to the chase. And in the European context, amid changing meanings of power and queenship, what was originally the position of the fers—the king's right hand man and advisor—becomes the chess queen.[61] Although this change is not reflected within the *Book of Games*, material evidence of chess queen figurines dated to around the same time suggest that its entrance into the Iberian Peninsula was relatively concurrent (fig. 2.10).[62] In this manuscript, however, there are no female identified chess

[57] Murray, *A History of Chess,* Preface; 5.
[58] Murray, *A History of Chess,* Preface; 5.
[59] Murray, *A History of Chess*, 395.
[60] Unlike most of the predecessors he references—Englishmen: Hyde (1694) and Forbes (1860), who concentrated on "Oriental" chess, and Von der Lasa (1897), the German writer, who worked on the European version of the game—Murray looks at both "Oriental and European chess," building upon the scholarship of Van der Linde (1874-81) who also looked in tandem at the two. Referencing several like-minded contemporaries, he also seeks to correct Forbes' misinformation.
[61]It is difficult to say exactly why the scribes did not wish to include this newer, slightly unknown piece within the manuscript. Though a number of the game problems were composed in Alfonso's scriptorium, perhaps they simply did not wish to include a new unruly, experimental piece within the manuscript. Yalom *birth of chess queen*
[62] Yalom, *Birth of The Chess Queen*, 42. the chess queen makes her appearance north of Spain in Christian Europe by the "year 1000," but "she was nowhere to be found on the Iberian Peninsula at this time, even in the Christian North."

figurines, but they do contain representation of women as chess players. Amongst a wide array of individuals, the women in games nineteen and seventy-four, either represent courtesans or *qiyan* or possible something else.

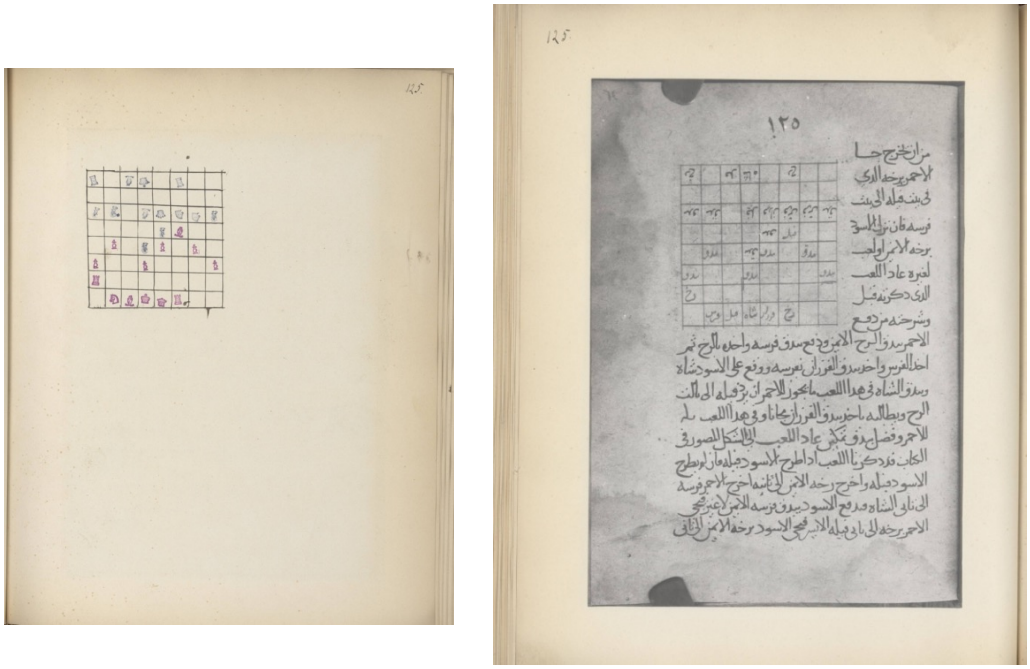

Fig. 2.9. Photographic Copy of Risaletu-I Lajlaj fi Bejani, La'bi ash-shatranj, or, Kitab ash-shatranj, fol. 125v, 125r. Creator: Abu al-Faraj Muhammad ibn 'Ubaid Allah, al-Lajlaj (900-970). Contributors: White, John G. 1912. Cleveland Public Library.

Fig. 2.10. Chess piece of a queen. Spanish. Late medieval (?). Walrus Ivory. The Walters Art Museum.

As the material we retain on the makers of the *Games* is scant, I rely on studies comparing it to other manuscripts produced under Alfonso X, as well as our knowledge of texts in circulation within the Peninsula at this time that may have been found in the scriptorium's library, particularly given Seville's position in trade. Like the court, the scriptorium was itinerant. Given its synthesis of representative styles and the expressiveness of faces, I am not convinced this manuscript was a private project of the king, ill at the time of its creation. Within the *Games*, there is a great deal occurring that we have yet to understand. It cannot be discerned immediately, it waits. The more you know, the more it divulges. The contribution of this chapter is to demonstrate the extent of our knowledge on the makers and the subjects, who embody all the movement required to realize manuscript, and simultaneously are frozen upon the page, reflecting confines in which they exist. And in addition, in examining the rules of the game, mirroring the site of the battle/court, we understand a taste of the manners of strategy required in movement. For the women at hand, whose role *was* to be surveyed, there may be a great deal happening that cannot be seen—because it exists between themselves. Between women.

Chapter 3

Idle, Volatile Eyes: Performing Gaze in Sites of Encounter

I. On Perspective and Optics

Hasan Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040), Muslim optician, penned the highly influential seven-part *Book of Optics* (*Kitāb al-manāẓir*). Focused on the "natural conditions and functions of seeing," which included the "natural perspective (*perspective naturalis*)," his treatise centred around the notion of perception: how the outside world of dimension is "is visually processed by the eye and perceived by the brain."[1] Already a significant resource in the medieval Islamic world, very likely it was translated from the Arabic into Latin under Alfonso X, in Toledo—where we know with certainty two of Ibn al-Haytham's works (*Configuration of the Universe* and *Cosmography*) were translated.[2] With the subsequent proliferation northward of his optical theory under the titles *Perspectiva* and *De aspectibus*,[3] the *Book of Optics* rose to great importance within medieval Europe, especially across in the 1260s and 1270s. In the curriculum of medieval European universities, his influence is palpable, he lingers in the words of scientist and philosopher Roger Bacon (c. 1214-92); John Pecham (c. 1235-92), like Bacon also a Franciscan friar; and the theologian Witelo (c. 1235-75?).[4] The Christian court was thus an important locus of translation that was directly engaged with Islamic learning and thought, including treatises and explorations on optical theory and sight.

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[1] Samer Akkach, "*Nazar*: The Seen, the Unseen, and the Unseeable," in *Nazar: Vision, Belief, and Perception in Islamic Cultures,* edited by Samer Akkach (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2022), 23-24.
[2] Olga Bush, *Reframing the Alhambra: Architecture, Poetry, Textiles and Court Ceremonial,* 41. Julio Samsó, "Alfonso X," in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, edited by Thomas Hockey et al. (New York: Springer, 2007), 29-31.
[3] A. I. Sabra, *The Optics of Ibn Al-Haytham*, vol. 2 (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1989), lxxiv, and under "Commentary," 122. Bush, Reframing the Alhambra," 41.
[4] David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 58-86. Bush, "Reframing the Alhambra," 41.

This chapter argues that analyzing gaze and how it is performed, in the site of the bathhouse, which existed in the medieval man's imaginary as potent sites of possible transgressive sexual encounter can help develop our understanding of the *Book of Games*, as containing exchanges and encounters that go beyond what is represented at the surface. Expanding the possibility of what is depicted in the text, I seek to fill a gap in the literature by providing a queered—or questioning—reading of game playing women in the manuscript, perhaps portraits, over and above the interest in connecting the representations to specific individuals. The women's bath, unseen, is a source of frequent worry, a site of encounter, a site of play. I argue that the women in translucent robes are represented within the domain of the bath, in games nineteen and seventy-four. And the sight of women's bare bodies for (male) consumption are a clear mode of representation in the medieval, but here they are in rooms of their own. I turn to the question of writing on the absent archive of women's relationships through visual representations, where I examine what *my* eye sees.

On domains of women's representation in the medieval period, in treatises authored by men, Louise Mirrer writes that the primary method involves the body. Entangled in "medical, legal, literary, and spiritual discourse, their representation often obscures the female subject." However, it is the images that are essential to opening up discourse beyond how women were regarded by men to the "alternate possibilities" medieval women may have possessed.[5] To be clear, I do not aim to present a "new" queer subjectivity. I believe it already exists in some latent manner in the text. Whether through its makers, its musical players, the women depicted—it is already there. Queer subjectivity within the literary tradition has a longer lineage and is more vast, in the sense that in the domain of language, interpretation "in between the lines" is more permissible. This is

[5] Louise Mirrer, "Women's Representations in Male-Authored Works," in *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, ed. Linda Mitchell (New York: Garland Pub., 1999), 319.

an effort to see *into.* But interpretation into the unseen—which I use her as a code for relationships that certainly existed, that we cannot all "see" with all of our eyes, because the self is predisposed to seeing certain elements over others—has been difficult.

Though this is not necessarily an articulation of *only* queer subjectivity, I nonetheless write within its lineage. As well as the lineage of friendship, or in the case of women, perhaps kinship. In the triangular relationship of the subject, the modern viewer, and the medieval self, viewers and subjects are often conceived of as inherently different. But queer theory takes this up and confronts the notion of an inherent difference. It possesses the singular ability to disrupt our conventional conceptualization of time—as linear and progressively different from the past, present, and future.[6] It makes us question: assumptions, time. This reflects the etymological nature of the term "queer": to question.

II. Nazar: Looking, Seeing, Glancing, Contemplating (the Other and the Self)

In my reading, to see is not to oversee. Looking is not gazing is not insight is not perceiving. However, all these methods of regard exist upon a spectrum. What is in a gaze, what does it mean to look? It may be a powerful, transcendental sensorial experience. Without words, conversations are held between eyes. We are taken aback by the force of someone's gaze upon us, we shock others with our own regard. The eyes are such a vessel of mastery. They challenge, they comfort. Eyes draw us in, influencing our minds and bodies; the way we behave. Dizzying, exalting, intoxicating—there is an element of loss in looking. Famous Narcissus, confronted with his own reflection in a pool of water--he gazed and gazed and gazed, senses lost, in love with his representation, unable to look away—and drowned.

[6] Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Tison Pugh, "Introduction: Queer History, Cinematic Medievalism, and the Impossibility of Sexuality," in *Queer Movie Medievalisms* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009).

Glance—*laḥẓ*—confined temporally to a moment, is a term which describes "the glancing act itself, the quality of the eyes doing the glancing," as well as this singular moment (*laḥẓa*) "that takes the eye to glance."[7] As Samer Akkach points out, here the "the act, the instrument, and the time" are brought together.[8] In the Arabic context, there is a blur between seeing—*ruʾya*––and *ruʾyā*—a dream or revelation. That is, seeing as a physical action is in such proximity to the "imaginative act of dreaming" that the boundary of reality becomes obscured.[9] Akkach writes: "[s]eeing and being seen are complex acts with personal, social, religious, political, and moral implications."[10] I write in such great detail on scientific writings in Arabic because Alfonso himself and his scriptorium was so deeply involved in their translation and the transmission of their knowledge. Castile at the time of Alfonso was a composite of frontier societies, it was at the edge of worlds, and it remained heavily culturally Arabized. The *Games* then, ought to be viewed with these perspectives (so to speak) in mind.

Commonly used to "mean 'vision', 'sight', and 'gazing', as well as 'reasoning', 'thought', and 'reflection,' *naẓar* is a broad and complex Arabic-Quranic term, with differing conceptions and definitions. Abū Hilāl Al-'Askari (d. 1005), renowned literary scholar of his time, describes it in *al-Furūq al-lughawiyya* (Linguistic Dissimilarities) as "an act of *seeking to see* rather than direct seeing." With this analytic scope, *naẓar* can be understood as a functional processes of the eye—it is "a seeking (*ṭalab*) to reach a thing through either vision (*baṣar*) or thought (*fikr*) (*ṭalabu idrāki -l-shayʾ min jihati -l-baṣar aw -l-fikr*)."[11] This language of seeing, seeking to see, and beyond, are all heavily intertwined with the religious discourse, from culture to practice.

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[7] Akkach, "*Naẓar*," 12.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid,
[11] Abī Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, 1998, *al-Furūq al-lughawiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-ʿIlm wa -l-Thaqāfa), Chapter 3, 74. (From Akkach, "Naẓar," 14).

How do we look, consciously, at that which cannot be seen? The absent archive of not only women's interior lives, but unwritten longings and desires? What role does *baṣar* (vision) play within visual experience? To gaze upon the unseen and unseeable was a process involving three elements, as identified by Muslim scholars: "eye contact, vision, and seeing." First is *naẓar*. In order for optic awareness to take place, an encounter is required, where one comes into contact through the eyes and face with the object of regard. Having sought to see, one has attained the capacity for vision. This is closely associated with the notion of light and the necessary environment for seeing—when they are functioning and in conjunction, then can one can we see (*ruʾya*). How this is relevant to the study of the *Book of Games* is it offers us a method to understand what we yet cannot see, but are seeking to see: the queerness in the text.[12]

Andalusi Sufi master Ibn ʻArabī (d. 1240) saw "*baṣar*, the power of vision, as the divine essence, the invisible spirit that brings seeing to life." Our perception is something we have been granted by God, created in our eye, in accordance the intentions of the viewer to see from what is visible. [13] The role of intentionality is not to be dismissed here: he says, "intentionality in itself can become a visualisation, or a point of view, literally, according to one's visual capacity."[14] A viewer has the capacity to "shape the visible" and thus in this unbreakable bond between that which is regarded and the one who regards, the element of agency permits the unknowable to occur. Or what might be unknowable to some—but not to all.

In seeking to see, the "appearance" of things may differ than the actual act of seeing things. An onlooker might "seek the appearance of softness in a dress" or of skin, through touch, to

[12] Akkach, *Naẓar*," 18.
[13] He was a "mystic, keen to identify a divine essence in every thing." Indeed, Akkach continues: "what the viewer 'intends to see' is commensurate with his or her aptitude and disposition, and, being endowed with extraordinary powers, the Prophet was thus able to see what others were incapable of seeing." Akkach, "Nazar" 18.
[14] Akkach, "Nazar," 18-19.

place it in comparison to other kinds of softness previously experienced. Wendy M.K. Shaw points out then that *naẓar* "functions less as vision and more like 'the gaze' which seeks to apprehend the world, and in doing so, apprehends the self."[15] But there are several different ways of approaching the lineage of gaze(s), and as such there is no monolithic gaze. A sea of difference exists between glances and contemplation. In Western philosophy, a common iteration ranges from the Cartesian subject—"self-contained, self-knowing, self-complete, …all-seeing," through to the late nineteenth and twentieth century of European critical thought: Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Jacques Lacan (1901-81), Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) theory of psychoanalysis. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note many of these "universalizing theories" are seen to be seemingly the product of and immersed in "one cultural lineage." Further putting Eastern and Western subjectivities at poles, art historian Norman Bryson considered how to pursue "a different model of subjectivity," through a Buddhist leaning gaze. But as Wendy M.K. Shaw points out, these theories are products of close attention to the other. Lacan's theory, deriving from the Louis Aragon's poetry, a response to the Arabic tradition during the circumstances of Algerian War for Independence, which in turn is quite similar to the model of subjectivity through Buddhist thought that Bryson articulated.[16]

When the Self regards the Other, through the mirror—Narcissus with himself—in the Lacan's theory of gaze, there is a kind of terror. This confrontation of Self and Other has long been subject to debate within theories of looking and the formulation of subjectivity. The difference between absolute truth in Christian and Islamic doctrine – in the former, the "unseen"

[15] Wendy M.K. Shaw, *Naẓar*, Subjectivity, and 'The Gaze'," in *Naẓar: Vision, Belief, and Perception in Islamic Cultures*, Vol. 191 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2022), 36.
[16] Wendy M.K. Shaw, "*Naẓar*, Subjectivity, and 'The Gaze'," 34-35.

is dangerous, in the latter, the "unseen" carries distinct connotations of the divine.[17] To Shaw, the unseen exists between different epistemes: it is "the mutually unintelligible space between one system of knowing and the other." But we can cross these spaces. To move our eyes is not only to "look *elsewhere*, but to look *otherwise*."[18] When we look and consider the world of representation, we often forget that as viewers, we are part of this process of representation. We are also in the picture—so then how can one escape the hall of mirrors? By disappearing, she says. "The recognition of the gaze is a means of replacing the visual with the visible, the absolute subject with the subject who can be seen."[19]

III. Game Nineteen: In a Room of Their Own

Against an ambiguous blue background, intense in hue, two women are at a chessboard, a third upon a lute (fig. 4.1). They sit upon some sort of seated furniture, that also forms the ground. There is, at once, a sense of immediate intimacy. One wears wispy fabric, barefoot, her skin gleaming underneath. This seems at odds with the other two—clothed and covered. To be sure, outlines of their limbs may be discerned, but the skin of their bodies is not made visible to the viewer as that of the woman in the middle. This is game nineteen. Although it has been suggested we are afforded a glimpse between the queen and the mistress, and a referential portrait is indeed perhaps possible if we are to give credence to my proposition of a more autonomous scribal team (chapter two), it seems more certain to say that this is a scene explicitly

[17] You as yourself are limited in what you can see—which is why the Prophet was able to see and experience the "unseen" and why we cannot. In fact if we were to truly experience it, it would be too grand, it would annihilate. Shaw, "*Naẓar*, Subjectivity, and 'The Gaze'," 38. I make a note here to recognize the references are limited in this section—time did not allow my own exploration of sources first hand, so I rely on Akkach and Shaw's excellent weaving together of sources to query and question the unseen. This is foundational for the methodology I begin to develop in this thesis, that combines representational theory, game theory, and queer theory, in looking at the "unseen."

[18] Shaw, "*Naẓar*, Subjectivity, and 'The Gaze'," 35.

[19] Shaw, "*Naẓar*, Subjectivity, and 'The Gaze'," 53.

about a game between two women, of disparate social standing in the court or who may share the same background.[20]

In game nineteen (fig. 3.1), unlike other illustrations like folio 48r (fig. 3.4), the architectural confines are limited in detail. We do not know where they are located, somewhere indoors, perhaps in the privacy of their rooms. Adorned in thick golden bangles, her slight, filmy garment, open-legged posture, kept decent by a strategically placed hand and thin piece of fabric, mark the middle woman as a courtesan.[21] The gesture is teasing, coquettish. It hides her from the third figure and the opponent, but the extrasensory dress makes it difficult not to notice everything else. Her hands, decorated with henna, seem to suggest her status in the Christian court: she is a Muslim courtesan. She is also the only one not looking at the board. Both lute player and the comparatively more dressed woman in green, perhaps an elite Christian or perhaps another Muslim woman, also wearing henna of some kind—have their eyes upon it, made clearly discernable for the viewer. This is part of the puzzle—in order to read the illustration, you must read the chess board. In order to begin with the game you must read the chessboard with the opening position. With her right hand, the courtesan gestures to the player on the other side of the board, as if to indicate it is her turn. It hints at the how the game will end, for the text of this scene will triumph in a white win.[22] She levels her gaze upon her opponent, whose eyes, fixed

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[20] Sonja Musser Golladay, "*Los Libros de Acedrex Dados e Tablas:* Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's 'Book of Games,'" ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, PhD Diss. (University of Arizona), 2007, 839. Golladay suggests we are afforded a glimpse of the queen (in the green), Alfonso's mistress and longtime love (in the translucent gown), and at the left on the lute, his daughter with the mistress, supposedly his favourite. It is her opinion that these two women repeat in several other folios across the manuscript, including 48r, where she says Alfonso "coaches" the daughter to win. This is argument is weak, in my opinion, given the expression upon Alfonso's face—if we are to believe Alfonso himself decided and dictated everything for this text, it seems highly unlikely that he would represent people close to him in this manner, for others to see. The two cannot be held together: either Alfonso played little to no role and the scribal team represented these women in this way of their own accord, or, these reference someone else, amongst other options. Maria Teresa López de Guereño Sanz, "Arte y gestualidad en el *Libro del acedrex, dados e tablas* de Alfonso X el Sabio," *Laboratorio de Arte* 29 (2017): 36.

[21] Sherry C. M. Lindquist, *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

[22] Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 220.

on the board, consider and weigh. The opponent raises her hand in thought, her own fingers seemingly painted, the other hand pointing downwards, as if tracking imaginary moves in her mind.

Fig. 3.1 *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 18r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

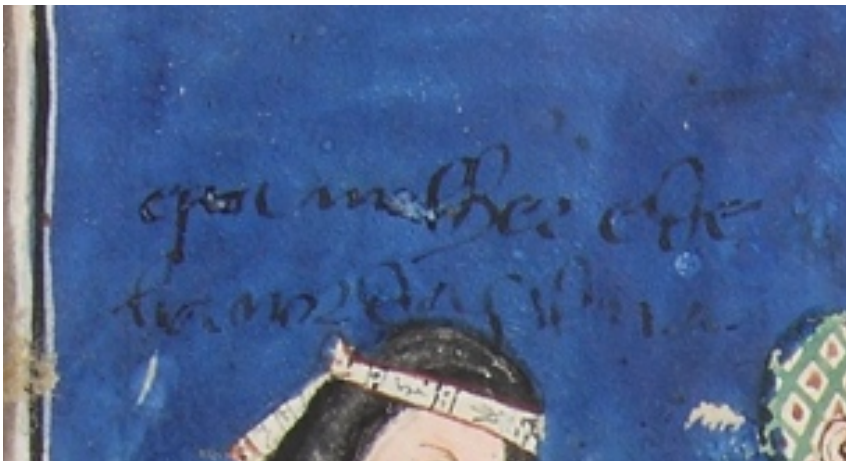

Fig. 3.2 Inscription detail: *esta mulher esta fremosa et sabia*, meaning: “this woman is beautiful and wise/learned.”

Fig. 3.3 *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 47v (left) and 48r (right). MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

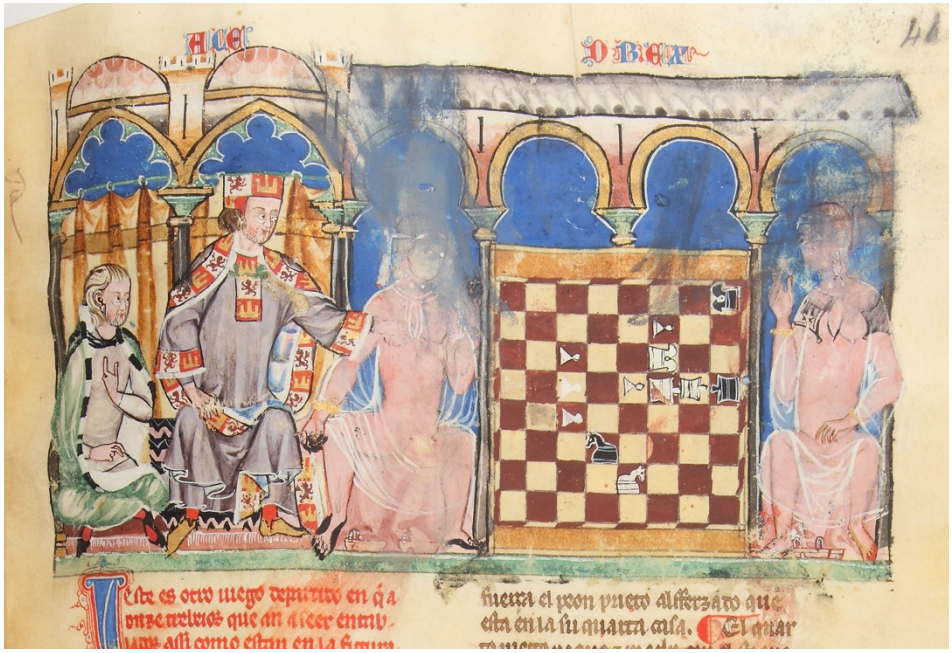

Fig. 3.4 *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 48r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

The intriguing part of this image is what was added at an unknown date. In the lefthand side corner, there is an inscription (fig. 3.2)—very faint, slightly illegible, it seems to read: "esta mulher esta fremosa et sabia." High praise: "this woman is beautiful and wise/learned." Why inscribe this, over generic representations—or are these portraits? Who, then, is this woman—*fremosa et sabia*—is it the courtesan? The lute player? Is it the opponent losing the game? Who wrote these words? Are they about a lover? If so, whose? As of yet, we cannot know who is responsible, why they chose to inscribe specific image, and we cannot know when they did so. But the existence of the inscription indicates a reception, and that perhaps one (or all) of these women did exist. She was known by someone else capable of writing. She was known by someone who admired her, perhaps even loved her. Perhaps it was a figure represented within the illustration. The courtesan and the lute player are grouped together on the same side, albeit dressed very differently. For the musician is clothed, her hair covered. The combination of different modes of dress, this contest of eyes, the inscription, make this illustration confounding in many ways.

If we look lower in the illustration, near the feet of the woman in the middle, there are the wooden shoes worn in the bath. Her embroidered translucent robe has been called a *gilala*—a robe of the bath.[23] Given the state of dress: shoes and robe, The lack of architectural detail here, the implacability of the site of their game, the thick humid blue at the back, it all leads to the question if it is in fact a reference to the intimate space of a (private) bath, or somewhere whose privacy leads to a sense of intimacy. To answer this, it is important to understand what bathing images looked like at this time. In a late thirteenth, early fourteenth century manuscript from central Castile, three men immerse instruments into the *mikveh* (Jewish ritual bath), which makes

[23] Also known as a *jilāla*, this was a routine part of Muslim women's dress in private, or in the bath. Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal, *La España del siglo XIII ledia en imágenes* (Madrid 1987) 95-96.

up the architectural frame of the folio (fig. 3.5). This example is one of the few depictions of what a bath in use may have looked like, although they could differ greatly. A Jewish *miqveh* was predicated on ritual immersion, but in other baths there were a series of rooms which a bather could go between.[24] Another popular bathing story derives from the moment when David spies Bathsheba, bathing.[25] In the late medieval, there begins a profusion of this depiction of this moment of regard, the hinge moment of their downfall (fig. 3.6). The site of the bath held some nature of potential, for looking, and perhaps more.

IV. The Bath as a "Site of Visual Encounter"

From ninth century Islamic Spain, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Habib writes, warning women: "[f]lee the *hammam* for it is one of the houses of heresy and one of the doors to fiery hell." Although "bathing had been considered a normal and respectable activity for most of the medieval period," by "the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, [it] became seen as an activity that was both religiously and morally suspect."[26] These fears were not new. The institution of bathing and the bath, part of a long tradition within the region of the Iberian Peninsula and the broader Mediterranean, though a seemingly innocuous habit and place of cleanliness, had long held connotations of (potential) vice in the eyes of men—the lawmakers.

Cross culturally, the public bath figured as a place to cleanse and socialize, performing a social function for women as much as a hygienic one. But, in the medieval man's imaginary, the bathhouse emerged as a place of unsanctioned looking, perhaps touching. Each camp feared the

[24] Oliva Remie Constable, "From Hygiene to Heresy: Changing Perceptions of Women and Bathing in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia," in *La cohabitation religieuse dans les villes européennes*, Xe – Xve siècles, edited by Stéphane Boissellier and John Victor Tolan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 199.
[25] Converso texts would pull on this story, see conclusion.
[26] Abd al-Malik ibn Habīb, *Kitāb 'Adab al-Nisā' [aw Kitāb al-Ghāya wa-l-Nihāya]*, ed. Abdel- Magid Turki (Beirut, 1992), p. 235, number 157, from Alexandra Cuffel, "Polemicizing Women's Bathing Among Medieval and Early Modern Muslims and Christians," in *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 171.

Fig. 3.5 Haggadah for Passover (the "Hispano-Moresque Haggadah," Mikveh. Folio 90. Oriental 2737. Spanish, Central (Castile). Last quarter of the 13th century or 1st quarter of the 14th century, c. 1300. British Library.

Fig. 3.6 David spies Bathsheba bathing, and looks up to God, from the Psalter of St. Louis. MS. fr.2186. Folio 58v. Paris, c. 1250-60. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale.

gaze of women of the other religion. Eyes become gendered, akin to that of a man. The site produced cross-cultural naked anxieties (or jealousies) of what went on behind closed doors and what happened right outside of them? The requisite bareness made it rife with possibility—a site of potential (sexual) encounter. To keep the bath a "place of purity," legislation separated men and women temporally, allowing them to use the space at different hours of the day and days of the week.[27] When men occupied the space, lawmakers feared prostitutes, turning the bath into a site of licentiousness. When women occupied the space, they feared men peeping into windows, loitering outside to accost and assault.

The punishments varied in severity: prostitutes, found to be at the bath with men, did not have the same protections as women, as they were considered less than citizens.[28] Punishment was different for men found where they should not be and for women.[29] It could thus be made impure by the idea that other people could see, who ought not to possess access at that moment in time, and simultaneously, because of what could be happening within. The act of bathing, of cleaning, fining men for looking through windows, is indicative of the fear that those on the outside would be able to look. But then there were of course people *inside* who could look. The fear was thus dual and simultaneous: unable to see what was happening, and that others were able to see.

In the stories where a woman is glimpsed bathing there seems an idea—or perhaps a desire—that the bare woman "performs" for the viewer, the voyeur. As I articulated earlier, in the manuscript the *Book of Games,* there is a searching desire to uncover the "real correspondent

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[27] Ibn ʻAbdūn, *Hisba* Manual (early twelfth century), "Market Regulations in Muslim Seville," in *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish sources*, 2nd ed., eds. Olivia Remie Constable and Damian Zurro (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 230.
[28] Constable, "From Hygiene to Heresy," 200.
[29] Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X, the Justinian of His Age: Law and Justice in Thirteenth-Century Castile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

person," which is certainly the case in the Umayyad era bathhouse of Qusayr 'Amra, located in present day Jordan. Built by the future caliph al-Walid II while yet prince, the audience hall in the bath features a plethora of frescoes recently restored. They have long captured the interest of academics and visitors alike—princely cycles of the hunt, sport, and Byzantine-like portraits of six kings.[30] On their right, in the centre of the panel, resides a tall woman, bathing and nearly in the nude (fig. 3.7). Her meaning evades the non-contemporaneous visitor—she features no inscription. Why would a woman attired in a scant bathing suit have been placed to the six kings? For the contrast, or is she simply decoration?

Elided by many of the scholars in favour of the kings, her meaning has often been understood as an iconographical image of Aphrodite, the favoured Grecian deity in the east, familiar to the realm of the bathhouse. I am unable to cover the whole cycle of arguments, but briefly—Fowden (2004) argued convincingly that in line with the statements made of genealogy and rule with the kings, she may be a representation of the captive Sasanian princess Shah-i Afrid, concubine of caliph al-Walid I following the fall of Iran to Arab conquest.[31] However, Ali (2021) more recently provided the context of Roman entertainment in the public form in which prostitutes would play the role of the goddess Aphrodite, miming her in a theatrical show designed for universal display.[32] Indeed, to the right of the woman a man depicted in clothing characteristic of actors mimes a revelatory gesture, for the viewer's own eyes. But most importantly, here, the set-

[30] Caesar (of Rome), Kisra (Khusraw of Iran), Roderic (a possible specific reference, or a general title attributed to the preceding Visigothic rulers of Spain), the Negus of Aksum (Absyinnia)—their titles inscribed in Green and Arabic. Though the last two lack inscriptions, they have been suggested to be either the Khaqan or the Emperor of China, and the last either a Turkish or Indian ruler. These unblinking, face-forward monarchs stand with their hands stretched out in either supplication or to honour a recipient: the seventh king, the future caliph himself depicted on the adjacent wall, representing the Umayyad dynasty. Garth Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 202-05.
[31] Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra*, 243.
[32] Nadia Ali, "'His Eyes Were Aware of the Pointed Corners of His Eyes': Reflections on the Gaze in Umayyad Painting," AKPIA Lecture Series, presented September 23, 2021, Harvard University.

up has been constitutionally reversed: the bathing lady looks back at us. She observes the spectator as they participate in the obscene joke of the caliph to his audience, looking at her.

Fig. 3.7 Audience hall, western wall, bathing woman. Fresco, *in situ* at Qusayr ʻAmra, Jordan.

Photo: Haupt & Binder. From Art Destination Jordan, in cooperation with the Jordan Tourism Board.

From the late antique period into the medieval, this interplay of concealment and revelation is conducted within the realm of the sacred. The revealed figure is typically of religious importance—Aphrodite, the Virgin Mary—and the viewer peeks into a painted world mediated and protected by saints.[33] But saints do not protect the viewer from the possibilities of optic intoxication under the potent, watchful gaze of the bathing woman, where private revelation is made public. Is she Aphrodite? Is this blasphemy? Or is this deliberate irony, a prostitute pretending to be Aphrodite, laughing at the viewer, al-Walid revealing the "underbelly of Christian sacred practices"?[34] We cannot know, but we cannot look away. My questions are

[33] Ali, "The Gaze in Umayyad Painting."
[34] Ali, "The Gaze in Umayyad Painting."

similar in the *Book of Games*, except that the gaze of the object is not returned to the viewer. Instead we watch looks being exchanged, as in game nineteen.

Bathing is also referenced within literary production under Alfonso X. In the thirteenth-century *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Songs of the Holy Mary), some four hundred devotional poems of Marian miracles, many of whom are believed to have been written by Alfonso X himself, a Christian woman takes her daughter to bathe in the city's bathhouse, before her marriage—in the way of Muslim and Jewish.[35] And in cantiga 205, Christian forces besiege a fortressed city (fig. 3.8). In the citadel, a Muslim woman clutches her child, the tower ablaze, and they watch her, she resembles to them the mirror image of the Holy Virgin Mary with her son. They raise their hands, ask for her to be spared, and so the tower falls gently, the "Holy Virgin Mary…set them down in a meadow." At last, the Christian knights take her to see the statue of the Virgin Mary, her mirror image, the source of her deliverance. Upon meeting her gaze, so moved is the rescued Muslim woman that she decides to convert to Christianity.

In the last frame, we see her with her child in the nude within a large goblet-like tub. She is drenched with the large pail, watched not only by the attendant who ordains her baptism, but those same Christian knights as well. But on the other side of the conversion story, if a hinge moment in story of romance and conversion from the chanson *Huon de Bordeaux* was at a game of chess, in other Arabic epics and texts the Muslim hero the encounter a Christian woman in open water, at a river or a lake, "wrestling naked" with her handmaidens.[36] There is a queer reading to the term "wrestling," a kind of code for an existing relationship between women in the

[35] Constable, "From Hygiene to Heresy," 200.
[36] Alexandra Cuffel, " Polemicizing Women's Bathing Among Medieval And Early Modern Muslims And Christians," in *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 181.

story. Perhaps evident to contemporary readers, it was also clear to Muslim authors of the early conquest period to the time of the crusades, who worried not only about the threat of Christian women for Muslim men, religiously and sexually, but also the "temptation to Muslim *women.*"[37] At the end of these tales, the young woman converts to Islam, but more significantly, no longer potentially engages in amorous activities with other women.

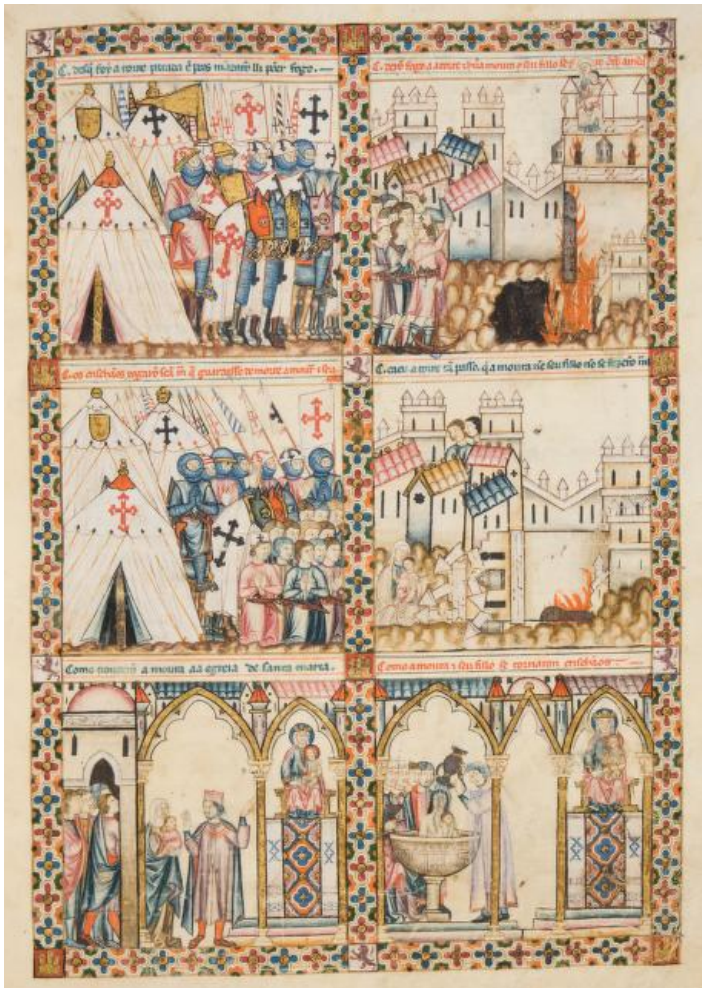

Fig. 3.8. *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, completed 1283. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS. B.R. 20, fol. 6r. (right: detail)

[37] Remke Kruk, "The Bold and the Beautiful: Women and 'fitna' in the *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma*: the Story of Nūra" in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. Gavin R.G. Hambly (New York, 1998), pp. 99–116; Nadia el-Cheik, *Byzantium as Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA, 2004). Also Cuffel, "Reorienting Christian 'Amazons.'"

V. Between Women: Encountering Each Other

In the bath, these gazes were unseen by their writers—men. Yet they expound upon them. They warn, in tandem with a practice of writings on "lesbianism" (*sahq, sihaq, and sihaqa*) as a medical condition and category. Al-Kindi (Abbasid Baghdad), in the ninth century, wrote: "[l]esbianism is due to a vapor which, condensed generates in the labia heat and an itch which only dissolve and become cold through friction and orgasm…"[38] Sahar Amer (2009) suggests the "Arabic terms for "lesbianism" (*sahq*, *sihaq*, and *sihaqa*) and "lesbian: (*sahiqa, sahhaqa,* and *musahiqa*) were largely behavioural, indicative of an action that she proposes was considered the "treatment:" rubbing.[39] In his work *Nuzhat al-albab fi ma la yujad fi kitab* ("A Promenade of the Hearts in What Does Not Exist in Any Book), physician, philosopher, and poet Shihab al-Din Ahmad al-Tifashi (d. 1253) describes a "lesbian community" and their internal teachings—a tradition of women teaching women how to achieve pleasure in the "game of love." There are other, specific stories. The *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* (*Jawami' al-ladhdha*) dating to the end of the tenth century, authored by Abul Hasan Ali ibn Nasr al-Katib, describes an oft-repeated anecdote of two women of fierce loyalty, and perhaps love. Hind Bint al-Nu'man, Christian daughter of the last Lakhmid king in Hira in the seventh century, and al-Zarqa' (Hind Bint al-Khuss al-Iyadiyyah) of Yamama in Arabia.[40]

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[38] Also appears in Ibn Nasr, Sahar Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2009): 216-17.

[39] "The root of these words (*s*-*h*-q) means "to pound (as in spices) or "to rub) so that lesbians (*sahiqat*), like the Greek tribades, are literally those who engage in a pounding or rubbing behaviour, or make love by pounding or rubbing. In fact, some of the medieval medical views of lesbianism, reported in the Arabic sexological tradition, point to rubbing as an essential cause of the practice." Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2009): 216. Abul Hasan Ali ibn Nasr al-Ratib, *Encyclopedia of Pleasure,* ed. Salah Addin Khawwam, trans. Adnan Jarkas and Salah Addin Khawwam (Toronto: Aleppo, 1977), 189.

[40] Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians," 218.

When al-Zarqa' died, Hind "cropped her hair, wore black clothes, rejected world pleasures, vowed to God that she would lead an ascetic life until she passed away." As she awaited this, Hind "built a monastery which was named after [al-Zarqa'], on the outskirts of Kufa." Upon her death, she was "buried at the monastery gate." Ibn Nasri al-Katib goes on to say that this example was echoed by other women, who "continued to shed tears on their beloved ones' graves until they passed away."[41] This anecdote as well as others related to lesbian lovers shows up in other writings and poetic works—in *The Catalogue* (al-Fihrist), al-Nadim (d. 995) inscribed the "names of twelve lesbian couples who were known in the tenth century but about whom nothing else has been preserved."[42] Of course the veracity of all this *information* I cannot confirm without doubt, so I hold it with a grain of salt, as it is men writing on relations between women as *he* perceives. Still, it is of considerable value, as it affords us *a* representation.

Judith Bennett offers the term "lesbian-like" to expand the scope. She writes, "[i]f women's primary emotions were directed toward other women, regardless of their own sexual practices, perhaps their affection was lesbian-like." If they were averse to marriage, if they did not marry, she suggests this singleness as well can be read as "lesbian-like." Significantly, women who were sex workers, or, she writes, "flouted the norms of sexual propriety, we might see their deviance as lesbian-like."[43] While I do not completely agree with all of Bennett's propositions, particularly with her suggestion that prostitutes, who may have been women forced into sex work or could have gone into it of their own accord, were deviant.[44] Nevertheless, understanding of the possibility of such interaction clearly endures—we see it in the fears of what goes on behind

[41] Ibn Nasr, *Encyclopedia of pleasure,* 88. Amer "Medieval Arab Lesbians," 218.
[42] Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians" 219
[43] Judith M. Bennett, "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, nos. 1-2 (2000): 10.
[44] Although this is a part of queer theory as I will discuss later: living in the outside of the norm and the joy of being outside.

closed doors. As Amer observes, “Arab lesbians were both named and visible in medieval Arabic literature.” And in the French chanson de geste *Yde et Olive*, the protagonist, a woman, cross-dresses as a man for almost the entirety of the story. She goes so far as to marry another woman––and there is recognition of womanhood on both of their parts after the wedding.[45]

In many of these epics, there are references to the nature of the game of love. When referencing the bath as a plot device, there is something about the environs of water and the bareness implied. It conjures a feeling of potential, of encounter. But what is that? What is a “site of encounter”? In the vein of theories of play, I would like to propose it analogous to a “forbidden spot” that Johan Huizinga writes of in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1955). Places of play exist within limitations of time, but also limitations with space. He writes that play exists and moves within a demarcated play-ground, marked “either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course.” He says, as there is no difference between play and ritual (e.g., is bathing play or ritual, is it not both?), the “consecrated spot” is formally the same as the “play-ground.” Formally and functionally they exist within their own domain, “[t]he arena, the card table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage,” as play-grounds. That is, they are forbidden spots, removed from the world, a place where “special rules obtain.” Characterised by a temporariness, the world of the play-ground exists in the every day world, but is the site of focused performance.[46]

An essential quality of play is its possibility for repetition. Both alike and unlike re-winding space and time, you may once again enter that moment where the world was suspended, and you existed in the realm of play. Primordial, Nature “could have given us other outlets,” “[b]ut no,

[45] Mounawar Abbouchi, "Yde and Olive," *Medieval Feminist Forum, Subsidia Series* no. 8, Medieval Texts in Translation 5. (2018): 1-131.
[46] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (New York: Roy, 1950), 10.

she gave us play, with its tension, its mirth, and its fun."[47] The bath, a place of habitual ritual, and perhaps a place of play, is laden with spectatorial anxiety, with temporal and spatial limitations. Perhaps, if we take Huizinga's argument that play precedes culture —that is "culture first comes into existence in the form of play" —the realm of play allows certain "cultures" to develop that are elsewhere challenged. Sites of encounter are sites of play—they function akin to the play-ground, a world with rules of its own. There is a sense to it, for "[i]n play, there is something "at play" which transcends the immediate."[48] Can this be seen? Could a spectator see what is "at play"? It seems to conjure this feeling for those who pen and develop stories involving the bathing ritual. We come again to the question of fictionality: does fiction provide us with truth?

VI. Identities Erased: A Defaced, Watched Game

Blue, again, two women at a board, in game seventy-four (fig. 3.4). The same diaphanous garments, the outlines and skin of their bodies bare to our eyes, limbs splayed revealingly, but this illustration is in many ways extremely different. For one, the scene of play involves a higher degree of architectural detail in comparison to game nineteen, and for another, they are watched by men within the illustration. But perhaps most stark is the change to their faces, expressionless—for they have been defaced. Robinson (2005) identifies these "crudely portrayed" women as "the once-noble *qiyan* of classical Arabic poetry."[49] Elsewhere they are identified as Muslim concubines, I proceed with the understanding that they are courtesans. A figure reaches an arm out to the woman on the left. At the leftmost position, an attendant or a prince, watches the scene unfold. They are separated by the columns, four horseshoe arches

[47] On the notion of play as an "outlet," for energy, he examines the biological and physiological explanations of play. He writes, biology and psychology see play as an outlet, a restorer of energy— there assumption of biological purpose. But they do not truly consider the question of what "play" is in itself and what it means for the players. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 3.
[48] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 1.
[49] Robinson, "Going Between," 229.

containing the women and the two polylobed arches enclosing the viewers/voyeurs—Golladay suggests this may be a method of indicating each individual's relative rank.[50] This arch shape continues from the details of the preceding page, folio 47v, where a man and a woman play (fig. 3.3). Both this man, with grey hair, seated on the floor, and the younger one in fig. 3.4. seated above the women in a manner that the eye might mistake for a seat upon a throne, wear crowns with the emblems of Castile and León. The robe in 48v is a little more subdued, with edges in gold that also depict the crest but only of León (perhaps the parts with Castile were never painted or were tampered with, or perhaps disintegrated).

Though the portrait of the Castilian royal in fig. 3.4 has often been attributed to Alfonso, reaching with one hand to touch the women on the left who will win the game near him, to fondle, his expression prurient, Olivia Remie Constable proposes otherwise.[51] To the courtly audience acquainted with the trope of youthful royal virility and the Castilian regnal family at large, this may have read instead as profane mockery: a figure in the image Prince Sancho, at the time of the manuscript's creation in unconcealed rebellion against his father Alfonso. It was, in other words, a familiar mixture of "biting satire" and "sexual innuendo" characteristic of elite poetry in the Alfonsine court.[52] Whether or not it is true, I cannot say, but what is pertinent is her note of the possibility of mockery, as I believe this mockery pervades the text: a book of games.

There is something lurid about game seventy-four in comparison to even game nineteen. Their bodies are on display, but in game seventy-four the faces are smeared. They eye cannot see

[50] Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 915. Polylobed arches found in the architecture of the Umayyads, who are credited with bringing it to fruition. They can be seen in the Great Mosque of Cordoba, very prominently.
[51] Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture," 337. Robinson, "Going Between," 229. Attribution to Alfonso: Vazquez de Parga. Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 916. Golladay argues that it is Alfonso here, and he is reaching out to guide the player, who is in her belief the illegitimate daughter with his mistress.
[52] Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture," 337. Benjamin Ming-Hwa Liu, "Equivocal Poetics and Cultural Ambiguity in the "Cantigas d'Escarnho e De Mal Dizer," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1996). Further reading: Benjamin Liu, *Medieval Joke Poetry: The Cantigas d'Escarnho e de Mal Dizer*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

what exchanges may have occurred in the circuit of gazes Though it has been suggested a move precipitated by jealousy, which I believe possible, I think we can speculate further given the specific targeting of the face. The representation is not real, it is a representation and thus retains elements of the real. If we speculate, I think it is also possible that someone was afraid for their faces to be seen. For in this illustration the site of the bath has been entered, I argue that the women in game seventy-four are represented in the bath, and in game nineteen are in some locale of intimacy. Men's fears of the unseen are assuaged by this representation of women interacting with each other. They are granted a figure—the royal or the leftmost figure—to experience looking upon and nearly touched them. Could the defacement not be the removal of identity but the protection of a face?

Given all these notions of the bath, fears of not being able to see what went on, knowing the multiplicity of sources at their dispersal, the dress of the women—I see several reasons for this homage to the bath. One, the horseshoe arches bear a resemblance to "El Banuelo," the baths in Granada built by the Zirids in the eleventh century (fig. 3.9). It has been proven that the makers of this manuscript pulled from various sources—textual and visual—and it seems eminently possible that the team may have been a collection of various people from various places, given trade in Sevilla at the time. The spatial arena is confusing, clearly a dramatization, but in game seventy-four, the horse-shoes arches contain only the women, and the men are underneath polylobed arches, continuing from the previous folios. It as if the women are meant to be conceived of as if in a room of their own, which the men are reaching into – physically and visually. The separation of space between the men and the two women is clear, delineating this reach into the women's world. Two, their diaphanous, translucent robes are known as *gilalas*, robes of the bath. Embroidered with patches, arms, ears and necks adorned with jewellery, hair is

pulled back with a cloth at the brow, and lastly, third, they have worn and taken off bathing shoes.[53] These shoes are discarded at the bottom of the illustration in both game seventy-four and by the woman of the middle in game nineteen.

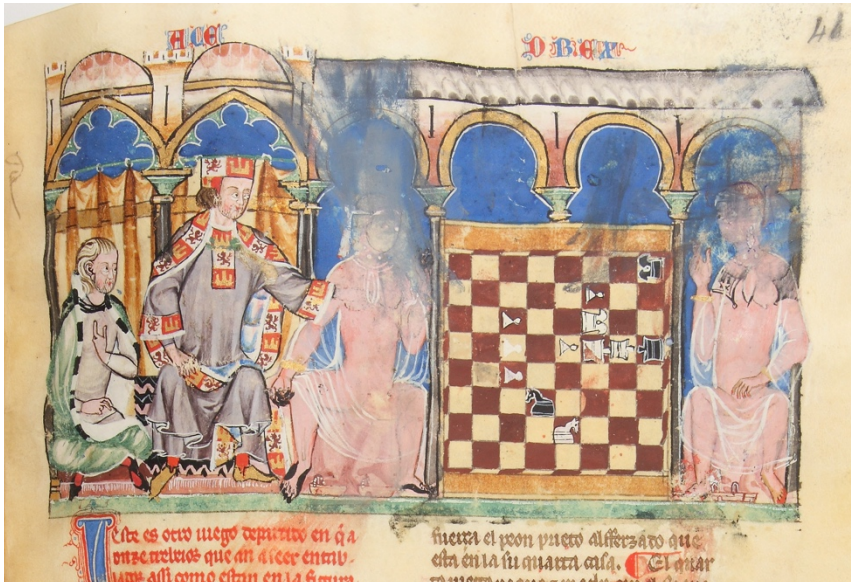

Fig. 3.4 *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 48r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 3.9 El Bañuelo, arcade. (the Hammam al-Yawza, or Baño del Nogal) 11th century(?). Zirids of Granada (1012-1090). Granada, Spain. Source: ArchNet.

[53] Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 917. Golladay calls them yankas, wooden sandals. They are reminiscent of hammam shoes, it is possible at the time they were called by a different name.

The removal feels startingly deliberate. Whoever it was, they did not wish for the expressions of this individual to be seen or recorded, as the bodies remain—the outlines of their breasts and open legs did not face the same treatment. Though it has been suggested a move precipitated by jealousy, which I believe possible, I disagree with Golladay's belief that it was done by a jealous Queen Violante.[54] . The representation is not real, it is a representation and thus retains elements of the real. If we speculate, I think it is also possible that someone was afraid for their faces to be seen. The defacement may not be the removal of identity but the protection of a face. There are manners yet in which the figures toy with the frame, the elbow of the lady on the right protrudes. And the defacement is the biggest play of all: someone outside of the frame has altered the world within, bringing our attention ever closer, illuminating ambiguous, confusing relations.

VII. Conclusion: Can the Question Be Seen?

Rhetoric of the seen, the unseen, and the unseeable played a conceptual role in changing visual cultures within the pre-modern Islamic world.[55] As art historians we have described the desires and fears of men and their theories—but are we really *looking*? To look at a place like the bath, do we require ourselves to enter a different episteme, where we sit with the knowledge that we cannot see everything, as a viewer/researcher? And that the "object" has desires of its own—as a text overall, and within each folio—which may only reveal itself to you if do not demand. Queerness, the questioning of, the "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality are not made (or *cannot be* made) to signify monolithically," may exist as a

[54] She writes: "the damage seems likely to have been done by someone jealous of the woman and Alfonso's true first-born child and therefore making Queen Violante the most likely candidate." Gollladay, "*Los Libros*," 917. But when would she have had the time to do so?
[55] Akkach, "Naẓar," 30.

kind of unseen in the absent, latent archive.[56] Can we sit comfortably with the unseen? The unseen here is a kind of "potentiality" —a fiction or narrative which we cannot say is unreal. It simply cannot be seen. To be queer is often to exist "outside" —and there is joy to be found in existing outside. The framing of the *Book of Games* invites the subject "to inhabit" the experience of mutual regard—that is: live the experience of potentiality of encounter.

In the early eighth century, Lord Julian, a Christian noble of Ceuta, sent his daughter to the court of the Visigothic King of Spain. He was a colleague, so to speak, a peer in business. She went for her education, perhaps to make a suitable match. Instead, Roderic, happening upon the young girl, was overcome with desire. In earlier versions of this record the glimpse takes place in his court, but in later iterations, she is bathing. Nevertheless, he takes her to bed. Her father, enraged, provides aid to the Muslim armies contemplating conquest of the Iberian Peninsula—so the story goes, recorded in both Latin and Arabic chronicles. Blame begins to be ascribed to the girl—known as Florinda—recorded in a *converso* treatise dating to the fifteenth century, for the "fall" of Spain to the Umayyads. Known by the epithet: la Cava / Caba, literally meaning "the hole," or "the whore," parallels to Eve and the fall from the Garden of Eden are evident and have long been made.[57] Indeed the *converso* text pulls upon this historical trope, comparing Roderic to the "great kings" David and Solomon.[58] The story is very similar. David, happens upon a bathing, already married Bathsheba, and watches her (fig. 3.6). The fall of water, the secret discovery of skin—such attributes prove irresistible.[59]

[56] This is not to say that queerness *should* be unseen, but that there is an element to it that goes hand in hand with keeping things concealed.
[57] Constable, "Hygiene to Heresy," 186. Patricia E. Grieve, *The Eve of Spain: Myths of Origins in the History of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).
[58] Constable, "Hygiene to Heresy," 186.
[59] In repercussion for what ensues, including orchestrating her husband's death, their first child dies.

This glimpse I write of—the potency of looking, is central to my analysis of the unseen queer encounter. Containing a spatial condition of darkness (an "unseen" for those who do not possess access) in the site of the bath, eyes are idle, eyes are volatile. There is much notable about the shift from court to bath, in the story of Roderic and Florinda, where the locale changes in the converso text so that he spies her bathing with her handmaidens. What happens when a forbidden spot becomes watched? The question is not only about looking, who is looking, but also, who is allowed to look? Such attitudes expressed towards seeing a woman bare serves as my entry point to examining sites of "encounter." This chapter is then an examination of the institution and site of the bath, relations between women in this period, and the possibility of looking, as a parallel site of "encounter" to the chessboard, which I will turn my attention towards fully in the fourth chapter. From medieval theories of perception to the simultaneous menace and possibility of the unseen, I begin to probe the role of gaze within the visual encounter.

Chapter 4

Chess is for Lovers: Courtesans and the Courtly Unseen

I. Regarding Each Other

In game fifty-five of the *Book of Games,* two figures are seated at a board (fig. 4.1). They are clothed, covered, everything concealed from our eyes—save their eyes. They regard each other, the left player waits for the right to make her move. At the sartorial opposite of games nineteen and seventy-four, this scene is strange in its contrast. Does it depict women, does it depict Muslims?[1] It is difficult to say, but I proceed with the belief that they are Muslim women. They are of a time unknown, as the many possible representations of Alfonso at different ages seems to signify the *Games* spans a certain era. This illustration comprises my example for the second category of analysis.[2] That is, scenes in which women, playing chess, regard each other. They attend to each other's eyes, even for a moment, which we have captured. Having sought to understand the notion of the unseen through the site of the bath—the dominion of men's worries where they eagerly, anxiously turn their eyes—I turn to the question of looking in scenes of chess in the *Book of Games* without spectators.

A game of chess, conducted in a series of moves, mirrors the game of courtship. This popular plot device in medieval epics is found across a myriad of personal objects, like mirrors, from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. For lovers, secrecy is paramount. They depend on remaining

[1] Florencio Janer, "*Los libros de Ajedrez, de los Dados y de las Tablas*, Códice de la Biblioteca del Escorial, mandado escribir por D. Alfonso el Sabio: Estudio artístico-arqueológico," *Museo español de antigüedades* III (1874): 246. Janer believes they are Muslim women, as does Arnald Steiger, *Libros de acedrex, dados e tablas: Das Schachzabelbuch König Alfons des Weisen* (Geneva, 1941), XX. As does Pilar García Morencos, *Libro de ajedrez, dados y tablas de Alfonso X el Sabio: estudio por Pilar García Morencos* (Madrid: Editorial Patrimonio Nacional, 1977), 24. But the following scholars believe them to be men, wearing turbans: Luis Vázquez de Parga, "Alfonso X el Sabio," in *Libros del ajedrex, dados y tablas*, eds. Vicent García Editores, Valencia, and Ediciones Poniente (Madrid, Spain: Patrimonio Nacional, 1987). Gonzalo Menéndez Pidal, *La España del siglo XIII ledia en imágenes* (Madrid 1987), 22.

[2] Though there are certainly more within the manuscript which exhibit the same tendency, space has not allowed me to pursue it further: see folios 49v, 24v, 32r, 32v, 35v, 56r.

unseen. The encounter of love, here in the visual materialized through a chess game, takes on the edge of the unreal. It can exist in the world of play, a "forbidden spot." But an essential characteristic in these scenarios—a game of chess that may be "questioning"—is that it is a spectacle, a performance, that others watch. Underneath the surface there lurk games to which not everyone is privy. I seek to apply the methodology of regarding the questioning unseen in an exercise of speculation. This chapter then examines the encounter of the chess game, where players meet each other's gaze, to argue that the scenes in which there is a continuous circuit of gazes, the viewer is invited to inhabit the experience of the absent spectator. As modern day viewers, art historians, we look, but are we really seeing? In play, there is something at play. What alternate forms of intimacy lie unseen? Can we see now what may possibly lie latent in illustrations of mutual beholding?

II. Competing for Love: A Lady's Hand

In the thirteenth-century French epic poem *Huon de Bordeaux*, the titular hero, Huon, finds himself in a court scene in "Babylon." The Muslim Emir challenges him to a game of chess: if the hero wins against his daughter, an undefeated opponent, then he may lay in her bed for a full night and treat her as he would a wife. If he loses, he will die. When she is called into the audience chamber, she is taken aback by the beauty of her opponent. As they sat down at the start, Huon asked: what game she will play? She responded: as custom, "to be mated in the corner."[3] At the board they spar verbally, the entire court watching in silence. Dazed and charmed by Huon, his valor and his looks, she forgets the game perhaps on purpose—she wants

[3] "Mated," here meaning the manner of play. John Bourchier, Lord Berners, *The Book of Huon de Bordeaux* (Adapted from French Sources, 1523-1533), (Printed by Wynkyn de Worde 1534; Second edition in 1570, now lost, Third edition by Thomas Purfoot 1601, Critical edition by S. L. Lee for the Early English Text Society, 1882-87), 53.

to “play wife for a night.”[4] So he wins. With good humour he calls off the deal and says she owes him none of her nights. She leaves the room, cursing him and herself: “for if I had known that thou wouldest thus have refused my company, I would have mated thee, and then thou hadst lost thy head.”[5]

Fig. 4.1. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 38v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

[4] *Huon de Bordeaux*, 53.
[5] *Huon de Bordeaux*, 54.

Huon's opponent, the Muslim princess, is behaving strangely. For beauty has addled her perception and undone reason. "Man's struggle" to attain reason, to keep reason in the face of love, was a frequent theme in medieval literature.[6] This struggle was realized in the confrontation of beauty. It distracted, thus causing unreasonable behaviour. Most often, the man is undone by the lady's beauty. But in *Huon de Bordeaux*, the unreasonable nature of her desire is the joke.[7] She lost, perhaps on purpose, to grant him access to her bed, and his honourable response is distasteful to her. This scene, however, in is only one of many such examples. The chess game device occurs also in the eleventh century *Chanson de Roland*, *Tristan and Iseult* from the twelfth century, as well as *Flores y Blancaflor / Floris and Blancheflour* (1160). It is not an uncommon phenomenon in the medieval to conceive of the game of chess as a thematic site for lovers. It occurs watched, often with commentary, as it was played in the courts of Abbasid Baghdad. Given this culture of conceiving, does the manuscript exhibit these typical depictions of chess?

One game is similar in terms of forfeit: game fifty-eight (fig. 4.2). In this illustration, a man and a woman are across the board. The lady, on the right, wears a translucent veil to cover her hair. Ermine around her shoulders, she raises an arm, a ring clasped in her fingers, held aloft over the board. Her eyes are upon her opponent, his intent on the ring. Golladay suggests that this is Beatrice, Alfonso's oldest child born out of his marriage, known to have rejected a marriage proposal.[8] They are seated here upon some striped rug, over top the floor. The thick, blue background, repeated everywhere, is bordered simply, with corners featuring the emblems

[6] Kristin Juel, "Chess, Love, and the Rhetoric of Distraction in Medieval French Narrative," *Romance philology* 64, no. 1 (2010): 75, 85, 93. Alexandre Micha, *Lancelot: roman en prose du XIII siècle*, textes littéraires français 247, 249, 262, 278, 283, 296, 288, 307, 315, 9 vols, (Geneva : Droz, 1978-83).
[7] This almost certainly has to do with her being Muslim and him being Christian – her desire is unreasonable because she is other, and this is seen as characteristic. Juel, "Chess, Love, and the Rhetoric of Distraction."
[8] Golladay, "*Los Libros.*" But this was from the Mamluk court and she was only nine, so it is more likely the rejection came from te king and queen, her parents.

Fig. 4.2. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 40r. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

Fig. 4.3. *Libro de los Juegos: açedrex dados e tablas*. Folio 12v. MS T.I.6. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Completed 1283/84.

of Castile and León. Is this then a referential couple?[9] Black, at the right, will win this game.[10] The man will not win her hand. But his expression is expectant, awash with certainty of his win. Their gestures, holding the ring, eyeing the ring, are what lead us to believe there is a forfeit on the game.[11] Another example in which players bet a hand upon the outcome of a game of chess can be seen in game eleven, where there are four figures (fig. 4.3). The L-shaped composition is different than the typical rectangular frame norm in the *Games*, the visual set-up reminiscent of *Flores y Blancaflor*, in which the Christian hero plays the guard at the tower where the Muslim princess is kept. As Patricia E. Grieve points out, the stories that involve the "conquest" or winning of women "become metaphors for the broader conflict between Christianity and Islam."[12]

Here, we do not know if one is a guard, or if both are competitors. The two men, wearing similar translucent robes to the courtesans in games nineteen and seventy-four, except they wear theirs overtop other robes, point at the chessboard, and gesture upwards, looking above them. Hands upon the window ledge or sill, she—perhaps the object of their affections—looks downwards, not exactly leaning. It is difficult to be precise with the direction of her eyes and where exactly her gaze is directed. Is it upon the chessboard, or one of the players? The same could be said for the player on the left, who is without eyes. I do not think he has been defaced. But there has been some kind of damage, we cannot know where his eyes would have taken us. Perhaps it is disintegration with time, or perhaps only his eyes were scratched out. On either side of the players are their scabbards, enclosed with swords, bearing different allegiances. Whereas

[9] Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture," 324-25. Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 894-95.
[10] For a description of the moves in this game see Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 284.
[11] María Teresa López de Guereño Sanz, "Arte y Gestualidad en el *Libro del Acedrex, dados e tablas* de Alfonso X el Sabio," *Laboratorio de Arte* 29 (2017): 35.
[12] Patricia E. Grieve, "Granada is the Bride," in *The Eve of Spain: Myths of Origins in the History of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Conflict*," (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 49.

the player on the left is less clear, s series of lines and dots and various shapes, the player on the right includes crests which are follow other representations of the Castilian-Leónese family: the castle (Castile) and the rampant lion (León). White—left—will win this game.[13] The fourth figure, an attendant, is barefoot, one arm holding a pitcher/jug of some kind, the other holding refreshment or food. He too is looking at the woman in the window, an altogether not very impressed expression on his face. Is she telling them what moves to make, in the game, in the pursuit of her? Is she simply watching, are they making their moves based on the quality of her expressions—judging their own strategies. It is hard to say; a whole story is encapsulated in these lost looks.

III. A Game of Smothered Play

These stories and illustrations demonstrate the manner in which the chess game can be read as a "metaphor for sexual desire," in which players may be distracted by beauty, lose reason.[14] One side may watch, as you think of your next move, or they may busy themselves with food or drink. But it seems most likely that they are watching you deliberate. Your face, still or revealing, bares the mechanisms of your mind for their consideration. It is important to maintain composure against the perception of beauty. How may your opponent distract you? Skin and eyes, the sound of bangles, the tone of their voice—the extrasensory rhetoric of distraction, as courtesans were taught to do, employing their body as part of the performance.

Game fifty-five is curious for a number of reasons. When compared to the revealing nature of games nineteen and seventy-four, everything is concealed, tucked inside, even the hanging piece pouch is tucked underneath the board. This is not the only place in which the piece bag, of

[13] For a description of the moves see Golladay, "*Los Libros*," 200.
[14] Elina Gertsman, "Playthings: Ivory on Ivory," in *Games and Visual Culture in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance*, eds. Elizabeth Lapina and Vanina Kopp (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020).

an Arab origin, is included in the illustrations.[15] The extent of the covering extends into the game as well, for this is a smothered mate. In this type of checkmate, the king is essentially "smothered" by his own army and cannot escape the check—the capture or death—by the figure of the knight.[16] He becomes trapped in place by his own pawns. This sense of enclosure fills the illustration: a detailed architectural frame, with polylobed arches typical of the building program during the Islamic rule of Seville and across al-Andalus.[17] But there is a greater sense of depth because of the domed structures.[18] The same blue repeated across the manuscript covers the background, they could be inside or outside a courtyard, within a room in a tower. They are alone, without spectators, but perhaps not in the intimacy of their own rooms—given the public nature of their dress. In unknown rooms where they are alone, they behold each other, and we see simply their eyes and gestures.

As I mentioned, their gender has been subject to debate. The turban like headdresses lead Vázquez de Parga to think they are both men, but I follow in the vein of G. Menéndez Pidal, who believes they are veiled women, given their delicate frames, as do Janer, Steiger, García Morencos, Golladay, and Rachel Arié.[19] The figure on the left, playing black, will win. She raises two fingers above, indicating something to her opponent, who gestures to the board, as if about

[15] But the ring is only depicted here, and in other illustrations as well (39r, 44r, 47v, 64v and 63r). We see the full bag in 38r, 39v, 43v, and 52v-53v. Kirsten Kennedy, "Influence and Power: Arabic Iconography in Alfonso X's *Book of Chess*," in *Under the Influence: The Concept of Influence and the Study of Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. John. Lowden and Alixe Bovey (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols), 92.
[16] Golladay, "*Los* Libros," 891, 280. Ricardo Calvo, "El *libro de los Juegos* de Alfonso X el Sabio," in *Alfonso el Sabio, Libros de ajedrez, dados e tablas* (Madrid. Valencia, Patrimonio Nacional, Vicent García Editores, Ediciones Poninete, 1987, 2 vols.), 209.
[17] The polylobed arches bear similarity to the Alcazar of Seville – if they are in Seville. For more on the architectural spaces, see Rafael Comez Ramos "La arquitectura en las miniaturas de la corte de Alfonso X el Sabio," *Alcanate VI* (2008-2009): 207-225.
[18] As Ana Dominguez Rodriguez points out, the makers combined many elements of Gothic and Mudejar architecture in a dramatic manner.
[19] But I am happy to be proven otherwise. See footnote 1 for discussion.

to reach out and move a piece.[20] Her feet barely begin to escape the frame, the circuit of their interaction is through their hands, articulating a gesture, and their eyes. Their heads lean towards each other, an unknown conversation taking place. This illustration is from a sample of the second category of illustrations, where there is a mutual regard. By mutual regard, I mean a recognition, and an awareness of the opponent. They hold each other in their gazes. There is something in the quality of the reciprocal eyes, something in the frozen glance. The game and this moment—if we are to observe the question—exists as a brief, temporal space where they *may* look.

IV. Allegories of Desire

If a man and a woman are across the board, more often than not, it is tinged with tension. Thomas Rendall remarked that the game of chess "between a knight and lady is often a pretense for courtship."[21] Viewers, all-seeing, watch what iconography may them to believe is a game between lovers. This secret, between two people, is as Michael Camille says, "so crucial to the excitement of love."[22] This distance, across the board, is what lets the eyes do the touching, as they move figures closer and closer to the death—capture—of the king.[23] There is precedent for games creating the spatial conditions by which lovers may interact safely, where their interaction is not untoward.[24] A "mock-courtship," the game allows a certain amount of intimacy between players. Indeed, in the manuscript *Voeux de Paon*, such "mock-courtship" style games are

[20] On the notion of the court as a culture of gestures, see López de Guereño Sanz, "Arte y Gestualidad en el *Libro del Acedrex, dados e tablas* de Alfonso X el Sabio," *Laboratorio de Arte* 29 (2017).
[21] Thomas Rendall, "*Gawain* and the Game of Chess," *The Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 27, 2 (1992): 186.
[22] Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Abrams, 1998), 124.
[23] Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 124.
[24] The game of *Roi qui ne ment* (the king who does not lie) did so, a kind of precursor to "spin the bottle." Richard Firth Green"*Le Roy Qui Ne Ment* and Aristocratic Courtship," in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context. Selected Papers from the Fifth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Dalfsen, The Netherlands, 9-16 Aug.* 1986, eds. Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Utrecht Publications in General and Comparative Literature, 1990), 213.

precursors to real coupling between men and women.[25] In this game and in games nineteen and seventy-four, we cannot know whose desire is being represented, because we do not know who made these images.[26] But it is clear that in the medieval imaginary the game of chess functioned as a site of encounter, laden with potential. Sites of encounters are spaces of play in which time is suspended. With a series of moves, chess not only mimics courtship, but the sexual act itself. To touch and move figures in a series of moves to the inevitable capture the king, death is akin to *le petit mort*—the pinnacle of pleasure.

A popular motif upon ivory mirror backs of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries (fig. 4.4), the sexual connotations of the chess game are palpable in other representative mediums as well. Like the illustrations, they do not touch each other, but the expectation of touching beyond what is occurring at the moment is expected, anticipated. Michael Camille calls the mirror an "elaborate allegory of desire." Seated under a tent, the man leans closer with his leg crossed, holding onto the centre of the tent, a pole resembling "a phallic lance," while the woman on the other side, leaning back slightly, wears flowing, "Gothic folds, emphasising her penetrability."[27] To Camille's mind, the parted framing curtains are a sign: "curtains around a bed," "the anatomical opening of a woman's body."[28] I do not know if the same could be said for game fifty-five, although certainly the figure on the right, her legs not quite crossed, could follow along Camille's suggestion that their flowing robes indicate an openness, of course in complete contrast to the feeling of containment in this illustration. More importantly, however, Camille's analysis supports my reading of the game as a series of plays mirroring stages of seduction. For

[25] Although there is a game of chess represented visually, it is not between lovers—for a player is in love with another. Green, "*Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*," 213.
[26] The latter two games of the first category demonstrate a personal reception, and these other games represent another form of encounter, featuring mutual regard.
[27] Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 124.
[28] Ibid.

these women there may have been a before, now we see a moment—in which they look upon each other—and perhaps there will be an after. In the game, they possess the freedom to meet as equals. He notes, "[c]ourtly couples were constrained by a series of moves, which made love into

Fig. 4.4. A Game of Chess. Mirror case. Elephant ivory. Paris. ca. 1300 (*made*). Victoria & Albert Museum.

a game."[29] If love itself is the game and chess the play-ground, the site of encounter, the potential of lovers at chess brings together all the pull and push, the inherent conflict. Indeed there is an inherent conflict my own analysis: I am seeking to see individuals who had every reason to be forgotten and to remain invisible.

[29] Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 124. Thomas L. Cheney, "A French Ivory Mirror-Back of the Forteenth Century," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 28, no. 8 (1941): 124-5. Gertsman, "Playthings: Ivory on Ivory."

What did it mean to be "questioning" in the thirteenth century? The *Siete Partidas*, a statutory code of laws composed during Alfonso X's reign, decrees homosexuality as a "sin against nature." To those dominions and rulers that allowed its existence, "it brought *mala fama* and other evils."[30] In 1255, through the *Fuero Real* (Royal Law), ostensibly Alfonso himself proclaimed: "[a]lthough it is offensive to us to talk about something that is very bewildering to think about: sinning against nature."[31] The *Fuero de Alarcón* (Law of Alarcón) stated that: "any man who is found fucking another man is to be burnt."[32] In the year 1277, Ruiz de los Cameros was burnt in Treviño. His co-conspirator in the matter of "things'" —Fadrique—was strangled to death in Burgos. It all happened very quickly, they were suddenly imprisoned and to be executed without trial. This seemingly arbitrary decision was perplexing to the elite, given the fact that Ruiz de los Cameros was one of the most well-known and influential noblemen in Castile, and Fadrique was Alfonso's brother. The reason Alfonso gave, in the *Crónica de Alfonso X* (Chronicle of Alfonso X), was "and because the king came to know some things of the Fadrique and Simón Ruiz de los Cameros."[33] We cannot know with absolute certainty, but the possibility is strong. Homosexuality was prohibited from even being referenced, in prose or even the profane poetry, characteristic of the Alfonsine court.[34] Although there is certainly a difference between male and female homoerotic relations, and I am by no means equating the two and supposing that punishment was the same, the knowledge of the ultimate disciplinary punishment

[30] Leonardo Funes, "Alfonso X" in *Spanish Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, edited by David William Foster, 29. "todo aquel hombre que fuere hallado jodiendo a otro hombre, sea quemando" ("*Siete Partidas* 7, 21, 1) (Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X, the Justinian of His Age: Law and Justice in Thirteenth-Century Castile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 219.
[31] "Aunque nos agravia hablar de algo que es muy desatinado de pensar: pecar contra natura," Funes, "Alfonso 29.
[32] Funes, "Alfonso X," 29.
[33] "y porque el rey supo algunas cosas del infante don Fadrique y de don Simón Ruiz de los Cameros," Funes, "Alfonso X," 29.
[34] Ibid.

to men who engaged in relations with other men suggests reason enough to remain hidden. Future iterations of this work will explore such differences in greater detail.

I do not want to diminish the very need to make invisible what I am seeking to see, and that this latent possibility of conflict constitutes an important part in the experience of the question. This disciplinary technique (or technology), in the words of Michel Foucault, has a direct effect on the sense of self. [35] Though he lists four different technologies of (production, sign systems, power, and the self) he also notes that through their exercises of application, are essentially linked. While these offer a method to examine the representations of chess playing women, and it may in fact be possible to place them within the four, as Judith Peraino (2005) states this delineation would simply "call attention to the inadequacy of Foucault's technological metaphor for subjectivity." I substitute her study of music for the chess game, representing women's relations to us visually, which then "serves as a site or an action of resistance—the queer technique that unsettles the technology."[36] The chess game, as a place of play, has its own rules. To play is to exist in a world of your own. But I argue that the game of chess goes beyond this, for in creating a safe space where interaction was not suspect—in all its latent notions of strategy and seduction, watched, mirroring not only courtship but the sexual act itself—chess was a site of resistance.

We do not know when game fifty-five takes place. Is it the imagined interaction in Muslim spaces before the Christian conquest of Seville? Or is it contemporaneous to the making of the *Games*, a representation of *mudéjar* women in his court? Temporally, the manuscript exists

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[35] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self" (1982), in *Ethics: Subjectivity, and Truth,* ed. Paul Rabinow, vol. 1. of *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–84,* trans. Robert Hurley et al., 3 vols. (New York: The New Press, 1997–2000), 224–25. See also "Sexuality and Solitude," in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth,* 177. There are many scholars to which Foucault is indebted that he addresses in such essays.

[36] Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Siren: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 5.

across a plane of time.[37] We do not and cannot know. At present, I simply operate under the assumption that they are representations of relations which had reason to remain hidden, depicting mutual regard, that allows us to access a perception we may not otherwise catch. Diagrams, Michael Conrad writes, communicate things to us which language could not.[38] His example is oral traditions, mine is the relationships women held between themselves. The diagrams and representations then make the unspeakable, seen.

Each illustration bears one striking similarity, the aerial view of the chess game at play. It is so immediate and visible that in some ways it is the unnamed figure of each illustration. Following Fajardo-Acosta, I propose the chessboard, the spectre in each game, in all its courtly associations of romance and war and conversion, acts as a "surrogate self" for the king.[39] It could be understood as a technology of power. Consider the game as a metaphor for the power dynamic between its players: two women compete over a game of chess embodying the ruler, realizing figurative competition of women in the court vying for power. Alfonso is the board: he sets the confines of their game; he articulates its rules. He is the chess figurines: touched by their hands, waiting for them to move him. He can be won, he can be lost. But this is exactly what makes the chessboard not only a "play-ground" where exchanges are permissible that elsewhere are not, for the questioning subject, their existence at the chessboard marks it as a site of resistance. There may yet be games afoot of which the king and prospective viewer across time

[37] Recall that Alfonso is near the end of his life and there are representations of a ruler in his prime in portrait illustrations, it spans at least the length of his rule or his life.
[38] Michael Allman Conrad, "The Playing Eye: The Epistemological Function of Game Miniatures in the Late 13th Century," in *Games and Visual Culture in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance*. Edited by Elizabeth Lapina and Vanina Kopp (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 252.
[39] Borrowing Linda Nochlin's theory of the surrogate self. Although I am slightly dubious regarding his proposition that there are secret encoded messages, I find credence in other possible suggestions. Fidel Fajardo Acosta, "The King Is Dead, Long Live the Game: Alfonso X, El Sabio, and the Libro de Acedrex, Dados e Tablas," *Ehumanista* 31 (2015): 489–523.

remain unaware. It could be read as a game over the king, it could be read instead as a game of which no one except the players is aware. Our search will never be over, because these are women who had every reason to hide. To borrow Camille's words, the secret is again part of the "excitement of love." Here, however, it must never be overcome.

V. Conclusion

In these illustrations of mutual regard, such as game fifty-five, where there is no illustrated spectator, we as viewers inhabit the experience of the spectator to the game. The representations turn *us* into the spectator of their game. The inexorable link between chess and romance and strategy makes it a site of encounter, and for questioning figures it becomes a site of resistance. When we peer into such moments, we may be afforded a glimpse of what could not be written. Though this illustration of mutual regard is one of others within the *Games,* I am by no means saying all illustrations where women play against each other are representations of games between potential lovers. However, I am emphasizing the importance of the question, the gap we miss—it *could* have been. These illustrations certainly may represent a particular vision or version of Alfonso's court, but as I wrote in the introduction, even fictionalizations, visualizations, provide a trace of what was once there. And thus it is real—for the question has *always* been there. As spectators, I urge us to see the question, the unseen.

Epilogue

Her Move and Mine

In autumn of 2021, when I began studying the *Book of Games* for a seminar paper in Nasser Rabbat's course "Orientalism, Colonialism, & Representation," I knew little about Alfonso X or thirteenth century al-Andalus/Spain. In many ways, the beginnings and curves of my research reflects the trajectory of the study of the Iberian Peninsula since the twentieth century. From *convivencia* and *Reconquista* to complexity and de-exceptionalization, I sought to understand how to read the manuscript, so thoroughly believed to be a private project of the king, heavy with his influence and hand. Writing on representing the "other"—Muslim women in the Christian court and kingdom—I believed Alfonso's prescriptive role as well. Game nineteen (fig. 3.1) was the first illustration which drew my attention, it was also the main illustration I encountered again and again in my research. From early on, however, it was hard to believe game nineteen was a representation of Alfonso's mistress and his wife as opponents, and that Alfonso himself had inscribed the folio. Certainly it was possible, but the problem was perplexing and almost irritating, who had really written the inscription? When? Why? Who in the folio did it reference? It seemed clear that the game and illustration played parallel to scenarios of the court, conversations lost to time. And so my attention turned towards other folios where the personal reception was evident, where the exchange of gaze seemed to demonstrate by their mutuality something which could never elsewhere be shown. However, as I stated in the beginning, my question goes beyond the sample of folios I have looked at, because they are indeed a sample. The question is methodological: how do we observe the unseen, the questioning encounter?

Per Alfonso's words from the preface, the games showed us who could be playing them: women who are housebound, those in another's power, as in captivity. But the court and kingdom was in some sense under the ruler's power, obliged to obey their whims. This is where chess is fascinating, for as I articulate in the fourth and last chapter, I argue the site of the chess board functions as a site of resistance to the hegemonic powers at play that would seek to eradicate the "question" entirely. If we are to look at the text itself, simply what the text depicts us, the possibility cannot be ignored. A game that is both strategic and sexual, played in rooms public or private, watched by spectators, touched by spectators, we observe this all, and fail to see what is before our eyes. But did we always? Olivia Remie Constable writes: "[t]he close links that existed between chess, romance, and sexuality that existed in both traditions [Islamic and Christian] make it highly likely that the medieval audience would have appreciated and understood the narrative intent."[1] Pursuing the question reveals: in the triangular relationship between the modern viewer, medieval subject, and medieval self, the modern viewer has eclipsed the medieval self. The question disappeared. Personal reception, the site of encounters, the gazes—they make it *possible*. It is clear the medieval self-understood how these representations functioned, to a degree, and thus the question could be seen by those who sought to see it.

Michael Allman Conrad writes: "[i]t...seems that one of the main functions of the game miniatures...was to compensate for epistemic losses caused by the necessary limitations of verbalization."[2] Yet as he also points out, in the verbal transcription some element of play is lost. To Conrad, "playing exists in an intermediate realm between orality, mimesis, and literary." If we

[1] Olivia Remie Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile: the "Libro de ajedrez" of Alfonso X, el Sabio," *Speculum* 82, no. 2 (April 2007): 332.
[2] Michael Allman Conrad, "The Playing Eye: The Epistemological Function of Game Miniatures in the Late 13th Century," in *Games and Visual Culture in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance*. Edited by Elizabeth Lapina and Vanina Kopp (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 252.

are to believe in the autonomy of representations to play games on the viewer, that a representation may take on a life of its own and exist in its own world, each of these representations are in fact their own world, then—following the sample of this study—representations involving women depicted with other women, playing—in the bath, at chess, or other sites of encounter—already possess the encounter. The game has already happened, not a single move has been made. But a representation is not our reality, and our reality is not theirs. Dominions of play exist as dominions of encounter: forbidden spots. These are 103 dominions of play, 64 illustrated folios.

If chess at this time is a game both strategic and sexual, the site for lovers in *chansons de geste* and represented iconographically in material culture in this manner, and the *Book of Games*, a compendium on games made by unknown hands, represents for us 103 chess problems, 144 board and dice games, what else does it represent? If we are to take the title seriously, as a *Book of Games*, *Libro de los Juegos*, it represents 103 chess problems, sites of interaction, but does it represent 103 games? Is this really a "book of games?" A book of types of human interaction possible through games, representations of an unspoken situation—"the necessary limitations of verbalization." In the *Book of Games*, visual representation returns the situational experience. Worlds of play exist as spaces of encounter, with their own rules in which the natural order of time is suspended. This playing with linear notions of time is characteristic of queer studies. Confronting the questioning encounter—the modern notion of the queer encounter is informed by our modernity, which we often conceive of as inherently different to the medieval—questioning subject. The move I make is this: I bring together different methodologies—game theory, theories of representation, medieval queer knowledge and studies—to begin proposing a new hybrid method in which the triangle of the modern viewer, medieval self, and medieval

subject, are not configured as essentially, drastically different, that recognizes play brings together possibilities, different worlds, across epistemic differences. It is a question of possibility. This is modal logic—the possibility cannot be eradicated because of how humans interact with each other, across time. If we follow Johan Huizinga, that "play is primordial," interactions of various kinds may be conceived of in this manner. There are many more sites of encounter, and these conclusions lead to more questions I intend to pursue.

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