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UNCANNY FRIENDS

What Connected the Chess World in the German Reich
with the Nazi Regime

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What Connected the Chess World in the German Reich with the Nazi Regime

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ABSTRACT: This essay asks what connected the Nazi regime and the world of chess in the German Reich. There appeared to be a large distance between the two realms, yet strong links, both direct and mediated, existed between, on the one hand, the Nazi state and the NSDAP, and the Greater German Chess Federation and the Kraft durch Freude chess department. The royal game was transformed from an end in itself into a means to an end, and in return enjoyed manifold support from the National Socialist regime. Nevertheless, it was not possible to turn chess into a quasi-National Socialist game – the significance of Jews in chess could not be erased. With the cultural practice of individual appropriation, however, chess was indeed charged with content that was also highly valued by the National Socialist regime. And it was precisely the rich chess culture that made it susceptible to enrichment with such content.

1. Introduction and objective

He had found the “chess egg of Columbus,”¹ wrote Edmund Nebermann in April 1942. In order to counter the increasing theoretical knowledge of chess players and to throw them back on their natural abilities alone, Nebermann did not want to intervene too deeply in the royal game; interventions such as expanding the chessboard from eight by eight to ten by ten squares or even adding additional pieces. No, with the mere reversal of the pawn rule – now a pawn should capture vertically forward and move diagonally forward – Nebermann saw himself on the path of the famous seafarer and world explorer.²

There had already been moderate interventions in the rules of chess, for example in the early modern period, and the “draw death” and possible changes to the rules are still being discussed today.³ The particular significance to Nebermann’s request of April 1942 is who he addressed it to: Hans Frank, Governor General of occupied Poland, war criminal and chess enthusiast. Nebermann asked Frank to consider his

1 BArch, N 1110/67a, fol. 375 (reverse): Letter from Edmund Nebermann dated 3 April 1942 to Hans Frank. Original quotation: “Schachei des Columbus”. On such submissions, see Kochanowski (2014), pp. 182–193.

2 Cf. BArch, N 1110/67a, p. 375 (front and back): Letter from Edmund Nebermann dated 3 April 1942 to Hans Frank.

3 See Ehn (2014), pp. 14–19.

proposal and suggested organising a tournament in this form of play. Nebermann suggested that the variation he had invented in 1926 should no longer be called “Berolina chess” (Berolina-Schach) but “German chess” (Deutsches Schach).⁴ Frank passed the petition on to his right-hand man, Heinz Eisenlohr, who then turned to Ehrhardt Post, the managing director of the Greater German Chess Federation (Großdeutscher Schachbund, GSB). Eisenlohr asked Post, on behalf of Hans Frank, “to inform Mr Nebermann that he is currently not in a position to comment on Mr Nebermann’s idea, as he is currently extremely busy dealing with war-related matters”.⁵ Post then implicitly apologised to Eisenlohr and Frank and suggested that chess-related submissions could in principle be examined by him beforehand in order to decide whether they should be passed on to the Governor General at all. After all, “it is of course important to us that Governor General Dr Frank is not bothered with worthless things”.⁶

At first glance, this may seem to be simply a quirky episode. However, a closer look reveals that two worlds that appeared to have little in common actually collided on this occasion. On the one hand, there was the radical nationalist, dictatorial and openly criminal Nazi regime, which trampled on the rules of civilised coexistence and killed masses of people. On the other hand, there was the time-honoured royal game, which was played according to set rules, in which values such as equality, fairness and sportsmanship were culturally engrained and which brought people together worldwide regardless of who they were. A greater distance seems hardly conceivable, but in fact there were many connections. The name GSB spoke for itself; the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin were quickly followed by the “Schach-Olympia 1936” in Munich. During the Second World War, the best chess tournaments in the world were held in the German Reich and world chess champion Alexander Alekhine served as a figurehead for the Nazi regime.⁷ This contradiction has not yet been sufficiently analysed academically. In general, there is very little research on the history of chess that meets academic standards.⁸

Michael Dreyer stated the political instrumentalisation of organised chess by National Socialism, whereby the “how” and the contribution of chess players in the German Reich was an open question.⁹ This article starts one step earlier and aims to answer a seemingly simple question: What was the connection between the Nazi regime and the world of chess in the German Reich? The Nazi regime refers to the system of government and order in force in the German Reich between 1933 and

4 BAArch, N 1110/67a, p. 375 (reverse): Letter from Edmund Nebermann dated 3 April 1942 to Hans Frank. See also Hooper/Whyld (1996), p. 38. On the connection between Hans Frank and Schach, see Rohrer (2021), pp. 27–28.

5 BAArch, N 1110/67a, p. 382: Letter from Heinz Eisenlohr dated 15 April 1942 to Ehrhardt Post. Original quotation: “Herrn Nebermann mitteilen zu wollen, daß er z.Zt. nicht in der Lage ist, zur Idee des Herrn Nebermann Stellung zu nehmen, da er z.Zt. außerordentlich mit der Erledigung kriegsgewichtiger Angelegenheiten überhäuft ist.”

6 Ibid., p. 384: Letter from Ehrhardt Post dated 22 April 1942 to Heinz Eisenlohr. Original quotation: “uns natürlich daran, dass Herr Generalgouverneur Dr. Frank nicht mit wertlosen Dingen behelligt wird.”

7 See Rohrer (2021), *passim*.

8 This study owes much to various works, above all: Bruns (2003); Dreyer (2002); Strouhal (1996); Woelk (1996). For a current research overview, see Rohrer (2021), pp. 11–13.

9 Cf. Dreyer (2002), p. 29.

1945, while the world of chess is constituted by the totality of people who were permanently and seriously involved in chess. Both definitions are deliberately kept general, and accordingly the following does not claim to conclusively analyse all connections in their ramifications. Firstly, programmatic and ideological points of contact will be investigated. Then we will examine where and how organisations and individuals established links between the chess world in the German Reich and the Nazi regime. From here, the question of the instrumentalisation of the one by the other, the limits of instrumentalisation and circumventions or overcomings of such limits can be answered. And finally, the perspective of possible mutual usefulness must be supplemented by a broader perspective.

2. Chess as a means to an end: derivatives of National Socialist ideology

There is no direct programmatic or ideological connection between the Nazi regime and chess. In Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, for example, chess merely appears as a common metaphor in the context of international politics. This is quite different for sport in general, and other sports were mentioned there not simply as illustrations, but functionally. Hitler saw "athletically impeccably trained bodies" as the ideal prerequisite for building an army. And: "Boxing and jiu-jitsu have always seemed more important to me than any bad, because only half shooting training."¹⁰

It is against this background that we should view the fundamental reorganisation decreed by the new president of the GSB, Otto Zander, for the chess world in the German Reich in mid-July 1933. He assumed that the majority of German chess players were "hostile or indifferent to the great goal of National Socialism, the creation of a Volksgemeinschaft"¹¹. This was now a thing of the past: "If chess draws strength away from German reconstruction work, then its organisation must and will be eliminated. It only has a right to exist if it achieves something towards the goal of bridging class and social differences."¹² Zander then went into detail in two directions for integration by means of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community): he called for the recruitment of manual labourers, because they actually wanted to be intellectually active. However, the chess clubs were almost entirely a "bourgeois affair", from which manual labourers had kept their distance.¹³ Zander also called for organised chess to be brought into line: "Fanatical nationalists and genuine socialists should take over the management of the clubs".¹⁴ Furthermore, in an often-quoted phrase,¹⁵ Zander was

10 Both citations in: Hartmann (2016), p. 1377; see also p. 1606, fn. 157. Original quotations: "sportlich tadellos trainierte Körper"; "Boxen und Jiu-Jitsu sind mir immer wichtiger erschienen als irgendeine schlechte, weil doch nur halbe Schießausbildung." See also Coesfeld (2016), pp. 125–147; Bahro (2013), p. 37.

11 Zander (1933), p. 209. Original quotation: "dem großen Ziele des Nationalsozialismus, der Schaffung einer Volksgemeinschaft, feindlich oder gleichgültig".

12 Ibid., p. 210. Original quotation: "Wenn das Schach der deutschen Aufbauarbeit Kräfte entzieht, so muß und wird seine Organisation beseitigt werden. Sie hat nur dann eine Existenzberechtigung, wenn sie etwas leistet für das Ziel der Überbrückung der Klassen- und Standesunterschiede." The word "leistet" is blocked in the original.

13 Ibid. Original quotation: "bürgerliche Angelegenheit".

14 Ibid. Original quotation: "Fanatische Nationalisten und echte Sozialisten sollen die Leitung in den Vereinen übernehmen".

absolutely unequivocal about who did not belong to the *Volksgemeinschaft* of chess players in the German Reich: “We cannot use Jews for our work; they have to disappear from the clubs, because they were the inventors and promoters of the class struggle in Germany and are now inciting the other nations against our fatherland with their lying propaganda.”¹⁶ With these remarks, Zander had set a course that could not be overestimated: Chess was no longer simply a game, but Zander had set out at what points and in what way chess had to serve the regime. Chess was no longer just an end in itself, but also and above all a means to an end.

Zander’s explanations lead directly into the core area of the ideological foundations of National Socialism. There was no uniform National Socialist ideology, but rather the worldviews of many National Socialists, only a few of whom also had political power. Nonetheless, despite all the differences and with certain uncertainties, it is possible to identify pillars of National Socialist ideology that were common to all National Socialists. These pillars included: 1) a historical dogma based on the concept of “races” – not nations, not states. These “races” were conceived as unequal, with the “Aryan” at the top and the “culture-destroying Jew” at the bottom of the hierarchy. 2) Social Darwinism, the right of the strongest, was the central motif in a cosmos in which peoples were in constant struggle with each other. 3) The *Führerprinzip* (leader principle) and the unity of leader and people determined the internal structure of society. The desired ideal of this society was the “racially” and biologically homogeneous *Volksgemeinschaft*, in which the “Aryan” people, the *Volksgenossen*, were to be different but of equal value, whether they were farmers, craftsmen, scientists or wealthy industrialists. 4) Internally, the boundaries to those who were not supposed to belong to the *Volksgemeinschaft* were drawn using enemy stereotypes. Among others, Jews, communists, democrats and liberals were declared enemies. 5) These enemies were also to be fought externally in the medium and long term. Education and military armament in particular served to “fortify the German people”. The foreign policy dogma was to conquer *Lebensraum im Osten* (living space in the East) as a way station on the path to world domination.¹⁷

Chess was played, organised and discussed within this political and programmatic framework in the German Reich from 1933 to 1945. The world of chess had to relate to this regulatory framework because its degradation to a means to an end created pressure to legitimise itself. Organised chess in particular had to spell out its substance for itself and identify specific areas in which it could make itself useful to the Nazi regime. It was no coincidence that Zander prominently emphasised the ideal of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in July 1933. The longing for the “national community” was by no means specifically National Socialist. Rather, it was part of the political programme of the Weimar Republic, from left to right, to pacify the political and social situation, which was perceived as fragmented, by merging into a *Volksgemeinschaft* – sometimes based on class, sometimes on “race”.¹⁸ In July 1933, however, Zander found common

15 Citing the quote in the title: Dreyer (2002), p. 23.

16 Zander (1933), p. 210. Original quotation: “Juden können wir zu unserer Arbeit nicht brauchen; sie haben aus den Vereinen zu verschwinden, denn sie waren in Deutschland die Erfinder und Förderer des Klassenkampfes und hetzen jetzt die andern Völker mit ihrer Lügenpropaganda gegen unser Vaterland.”

17 Cf. Becker/Bongartz (2011), pp. 10–12; Breuer (2001), passim; Kroll (1998).

18 See Gessner (2019), p. V–VII and p. 1–6; Wildt (2014).

ground with the *Volksgemeinschaft* at a point where chess could make a very concrete contribution that was directly useful to the Nazi regime. Not abstractly, for example, because the starting position in chess visually manifests equality and it can be played inexpensively and almost unconditionally by anyone and everyone. In analogy to the Winter Relief of the German People (Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes), which supported the needy with donations in kind or money during the winter months,¹⁹ the GSB proclaimed “spiritual winter aid” (geistige Winterhilfe), for example, in the course of which manual workers and the unemployed were to be admitted to chess clubs. Later, large numbers of inexpensive chess textbooks were distributed to workers by the Nazi organisation Strength through Joy (Kraft durch Freude, KdF) and to soldiers by the Wehrmacht. A comprehensive analysis of the relevant chess publications would probably show that the invocation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was particularly strong in the first period after the takeover and then again in the period immediately after the invasion of Poland and the start of the Second World War in September 1939. However, it should be understood as a recurring motif throughout the entire Nazi era.²⁰

The world of chess in the German Reich linked itself to the Nazi regime at another central programmatic point: with hastily pursued anti-Semitism. While the *Volksgemeinschaft* aimed to include “Aryan” people, it used exclusion to distance itself from the outside world. When Zander announced in July 1933 that Jews were no longer allowed to be members of chess clubs, the ostracisation or exclusion of Jews had long since begun. The highly deserving previous head of the German Chess Federation (Deutscher Schachbund, DSB), Walter Robinow, had already resigned from office in April 1933. In those days, the Saxon Chess Federation had already issued an unrestricted “Aryan paragraph”.²¹ This organisational exclusion could build on the fact that the identification and degradation of “Jewish chess” had long been thought of and had become part of the chess discourse in the history of ideas. Alexander Alekhine’s series of articles “Aryan and Jewish chess” and “Jewish and Aryan chess” from 1941 was the high point in this respect, but neither the starting point nor an isolated case. The world chess champion himself, who was thus aligning himself with the Nazi regime, broke down the dichotomous concept of “Aryan”/Jew down to chess. Here the “Aryan” as a bold attacker who takes risks, who plays chess for the sake of art and aesthetic enjoyment, there the Jew who defends himself, is cowardly and opportunistic, has his eye on material gain and plays above all for the sake of earning a living.²² With his series of articles, Alekhine was following in the footsteps of the early 20th century. The Viennese chess publicist Franz Gutmayer, for example, had taken up arms with anti-Semitic prose against the scientification of chess, to which Jewish world-class players such as the “praeceptor Germaniae” Siegbert Tarrasch, the long-time world chess champion Emanuel Lasker and his predecessor Wilhelm Steinitz had contributed. Dressed up as an anti-modern and anti-capitalist critique of the times and set down on paper with biologicistic word pictures of

19 Cf. Tennstedt (1987), pp. 157–180.

20 Cf. Bruns (2003), pp. 191–195; Wolf (1934), pp. 184–185; N.N. (1939), p. 157; Majer (1941), p. 65.

21 Cf. Kiok/Römmig/Krüger (1933), p. 113; Negele (2005), pp. 22–27; Krämer (2008), p. 46.

22 See Rohrer (2021), pp. 29–30; Dreyer (2013), pp. 381–383.

the most primitive level, the juxtaposition of the courageous “Aryan” and the cowardly Jewish chess player can already be found in his work.²³

In the field of education, too, the programmatic connection between the chess world in the German Reich and the Nazi regime was easily and quickly established. The educational value of chess was considered in several directions with different scopes. Like chess, sport in general was not simply an end in itself, but also a means to help implement National Socialist ideology and ideals. And just as physical sport was intended to serve the physical health of the *Volkskörper* (people’s body), chess was touted as a means of mental training.²⁴

However, the educational value of chess was also understood more narrowly, namely in the sense of a school of character. Otto Emto, for example, postulated a relationship between the “German character” and the game of chess in 1934 in the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*: “The German character in its thoroughness, its contemplativeness, its serious disposition to honesty and conscientiousness, as well as to chivalry, corresponds perfectly to the nature of chess.”²⁵ The German person therefore urges intellectual activity. However, it would be wrong to engage the “average German” in the humanities, as he lacks the prerequisites for this. With chess, on the other hand, he could practise and improve according to the principle of trial and error. Chess makes “the German person capable of thinking. (...) His position in relation to the state, nationality and community is fundamentally different from that of a person who has no mental training through chess”.²⁶ Such statements were certainly not at the centre of chess journalism, but attempts to praise chess on the basis of its nature, which corresponded to typical German virtues, as it were, can be found there again and again in prominent places. The virtues cited are evidence of a self-aggrandisement typical of the time and were repeatedly varied. In 1940, for example, Josef Weinberger, also in the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, expanded the above, including ethnic anti-Semitic sprinklings, to the effect that chess “demands thoroughness, perseverance, patience, contemplation, ingenuity, flexibility of imagination, daring and a certain ideal outlook on life” and thus fulfils the “peculiarities of the German character”.²⁷

In view of this, the attempts to utilise the educational value attributed to chess in schools and thus put it at the service of the Nazi regime are not surprising. High-ranking officials, who were also enthusiastic supporters of chess, attempted to establish chess in schools in several states of the German Reich; outside of the actual curriculum, of course, for example in study groups. Hans Schemm, Gauleiter of the

23 Cf. Ehn/Strouhal (1996), pp. 203–208; Strouhal (1996), pp. 128–134.

24 Cf. Bruns (2003), p. 165.

25 Emto (1934), p. 65. Original quotation: “Das deutsche Wesen in seiner Gründlichkeit, in seiner Besinnlichkeit, seiner ernsten Anlage zur Ehrlichkeit und Gewissenhaftigkeit, ebenso wie zur Ritterlichkeit, entspricht durchaus dem Wesen des Schachs.” See also Bruns (2003), p. 190.

26 Emto (1934), pp. 65–66. Original quotation: “den deutschen Menschen denkfähig. (...) Seine Stellung zu Staat, Volkstum und Gemeinschaft ist eine grundlegend andere, als die eines Menschen, der kein geistiges Training durch das Schach hat.”

27 Quotes from Weinberger (1940), p. 116. Original quotations: “Anforderungen an Gründlichkeit, Ausdauer, Geduld, Besinnlichkeit, Scharfsinn, Beweglichkeit der Phantasie, Wagemut und eine gewisse ideale Lebensauffassung”; “Besonderheiten der deutschen Wesensart”. See also Pfrang (1935), pp. 185–188; Bruns (2003), pp. 161–162.

NSDAP Gau Bayerische Ostmark and Minister of Culture in Bavaria, was a keen advocate of this cause until his accidental death in 1935. In a published handout for schools and clubs, his ministry praised chess as an excellent means of education: It served to develop decisiveness, ingenuity and intellect, it promoted the will to fight and to win. In Baden, Herbert Kraft, a high-ranking head of department in the Baden Ministry of Culture from April 1933 and also president of the Baden Chess Association, made a name for himself with similar endeavours. There were also similar efforts in Saxony.²⁸

The last major area in which the chess world in the German Reich was integrated into the programmatic framework of the Nazi regime can be summarised under the heading of *Wehrhaftmachung* (fortification). This connection also had various facets. Firstly, the character of chess as a military and war game was emphasised in very general terms in chess journalism. According to Alfred Pfrang, it served to practice defence and self-criticism, and taught resilience, courage and boldness.²⁹ From September 1939 onwards, chess was advertised quite specifically as a means of achieving the Nazi regime's war aims, which were based not least on ideology. The "combat game of chess" showed "the laws of life" and was "called upon by the Wehrmacht to make the precious free time of our soldiers and pioneers meaningful". It was intended to give new strength, courage and resilience.³⁰ The parallelisation went so far as to use chess games to demonstrate real historical military events such as breakthrough battles, encirclements and advances.³¹ In comments on chess games, barely or not at all hidden parallels were drawn to the current war situation and, using examples from the small world of 64 squares, it was insinuated that the path to "final victory" could also be found on the large battlefields of the Second World War with the right strategy and tactics.³²

But linkages didn't stop at words: from 1940, the integration of chess into the *Wehrhaftmachung* programme found a very concrete, individually tangible application in the so-called "Chess Aid for soldiers" (Schachhilfe für Soldaten). With this programme, the GSB and the KdF chess department contributed to the general support of soldiers by the Wehrmacht, the Reich Ministry of Propaganda and the KdF. The aim was to offer the soldiers relaxation and entertainment. This support was also linked to the ideology of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, as all soldiers were addressed, whether officer or private, whether at the front or on the "home front", whether deployed or wounded in hospital. In practice, "Chess Aid for soldiers" consisted of competitions, tournaments and simultaneous events, as well as courses and lectures.³³

The central programmatic and ideological connections between the chess world and the Nazi regime were established in the areas of *Volksgemeinschaft*, anti-Semitism,

28 Cf. Maier (1935), dedication; on the whole Bruns (2003), pp. 167–169. Cf. also Kühnel (1985); Mohr (1997), pp. 311–332.

29 Cf. Pfrang (1939), pp. 55–61; Bruns (2003), pp. 164–165.

30 Cf. Majer (1943), pp. 25–26, all citations p. 26. Original quotations: "Kampfspiel Schach"; "die Gesetzmäßigkeit des Lebens"; "durch den Auftrag der Wehrmacht berufen, die kostbare Freizeit unserer Soldaten und Pioniere sinnvoll zu gestalten." Already cited in Bruns (2003), p.

197. Cf. also Majer (1942b), pp. 49–50.

31 Cf. also Majer (1942a), pp. 17–18.

32 See Meissenburg (1993) for numerous examples.

33 Cf. Rohrer (2021), pp. 54–55; N.N. (1942a), p. 66.

education and military mobilisation. However, it would be quite wrong to assume that the chess world in the German Reich was charged with National Socialist programmes without any contradictions or problems. Such an attempt at ideologisation inevitably reaches its limits where it encounters a specific world of its own. This was also evident in the world of chess in the German Reich.

3. The limits of ideologisation: the game's own world

As early as the end of 1941, Jacques Mieses pointed out that there was at least one area in which chess and the Nazi regime simply did not go hand in hand. Mieses was a former world-class chess player from Leipzig who was also active in chess as an organiser, author and journalist. As a Jew who emigrated to Great Britain in 1938, he mockingly picked up on the language of the National Socialists and stated that chess had not been able to escape the National Socialists' grasp either. It had been elevated to "the national game of the Germans – the Nazi Germans, of course". But "even the Nazis could not ignore the fatal realisation that a strikingly large percentage of these best players were of non-Aryan descent". He pointed out that two of the four world chess champions at the time, Steinitz and Lasker, were "non-Aryan" and that many world championship candidates were also of "Jewish race". An anti-Semitic newspaper once wrote that the "game of kings" had become the "game of rabbis".³⁴

Like Alekhine's series of articles on "Aryan and Jewish chess", this bold turn of phrase was nothing new in those days. Rather, it must be understood as part of a discourse in which the position of Jews or even "Jewry" in chess was interpreted and explained in terms of the history, culture or "ethnic character" of the Jews.³⁵ Fritz Scherbel, for example, declared chess to be a "Jewish game" in the *Jüdisch-liberale Zeitung* in 1926. He referred to the successes of Jewish players and assigned chess an important role in Jewish history and literature. Of course, the attribution of characteristics was now different: It was not cowardice that characterised the Jewish chess player, but – as attributed to the "Aryan" by Gutmayer and later Alekhine – the attack in which, with a deep knowledge of the theory and practice of the game, the weaknesses of the opponent are quietly but relentlessly spied and the opponent is defeated in a powerful attack. Scherbel had thus directed his argumentation to the desired point, in order to abstract it beyond chess with a view to the discrimination against Jews, which was mounting again at the time but had been going on for centuries. In exactly the same way, as Scherbel puts it, "the Jew out there in the battle of life, if he wants to stand with honour, must know the history of his people, their literature and the teachings of their religion, so that he can immediately refute all the spiteful slander, reject all hostility and attacks, indeed go on the attack himself".³⁶

34 Cf. Mieses (1941), p. 3, all quotes *ibid.* Original quotations: "Nationalspiel der Deutschen – natürlich der Nazideutschen"; "dass ein auffallend grosser Prozentsatz dieser besten Spieler nichtarischer Abkunft ist, dieser fatalen Erkenntnis konnten sich sogar die Nazis nicht verschliessen"; "nichtarisch"; "jüdischer Rasse"; "Spiel der Könige"; "Spiel der Rabbiner". This article is already mentioned in: Ehn/Kastner (2014), p. 162.

35 Cf. contemporary Junk (1918), pp. 71–73; Strouhal (1996), pp. 128–129.

36 Cf. Scherbel (1926), *unpag.*, quote *ibid.* Original quotation: "auch der Jude draussen im Lebenskampfe, will er mit Ehren bestehen, die Geschichte seines Volkes kennen, seine Literatur und

Jacques Mieses, on the other hand, very specifically marked the boundaries that the National Socialists had to overcome if they wanted to instrumentalise chess politically. The GSB “saw itself faced with the task of remodelling the ‘game of the rabbis’ into the ‘national game of Nazi Germany’”. To this end, the GSB organised tournaments and competitions with financial support from the NSDAP and excluded Jews. Mieses cited the “Jewish chess literature” as a further point. The National Socialist propaganda could only counter the success of Jewish players by concealing it. He cited the example of “Dufresne”, a chess textbook based on Jean Dufresne, which was continued by Mieses from 1907 onwards and was widely circulated.³⁷ Max Blümich, originally a postal clerk from Leipzig but also a master player, chess functionary and co-editor of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, had reworked it in such a way that not only Mieses’ author’s name but also Jewish chess players and their successes and contributions to chess in general had been erased; only some of their losing games remained.³⁸

However, these aspects do not yet shed light on the full significance of Jews in chess in Germany. It becomes clear when we realise that the bourgeois pastime of chess became a sport in the course of the 19th century, which developed a veritable cosmos of its own. This manifested itself organisationally in the formation of clubs and associations in which chess officials were active. Chess journalism also developed, supported by publishers and journalists who reported on major and minor tournaments and competitions, on famous and less famous players. And finally, apart from the pure amateurs, more and more semi-professional and fully professional chess players took the art of the game to hitherto unknown heights.³⁹ Against this backdrop, the importance of Jews in chess becomes clear, as a strikingly large number of Jews shaped this cosmos as players, theorists and composers of chess problems, as publicists, journalists and publishers, as organisers, functionaries and patrons. This development can be traced back to the first half of the 19th century, and it contributed significantly to the absolute world renown that chess in the German Reich enjoyed between around 1890 and 1920.⁴⁰

There was no doubt about the significance of the loss for chess in the German Reich that the exclusion of Jews entailed – not even on the “Aryan” side. Heinrich Ranneforth, also co-editor of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, expressed this in an insightful article a few months after the takeover. He pointed out that politics had not yet played an important role in chess. And “Jewish members have always been strongly represented in the clubs, and great international champions have also emerged from them, who have carried the fame of German chess into the world. That will probably stop now”.⁴¹ Jewish members had now “voluntarily resigned from all

die Lehren seiner Religion, damit er all die gehässigen Verleumdungen sofort widerlegen, alle Anfeindungen und Angriffe zurückweisen, ja selber zum Angriff übergehen kann.”

37 See Mieses (1941), p. 3. Original quotation: “habe sich also vor die Aufgabe gestellt gesehen, das ‘Spiel der Rabbiner’ zum ‘Nationalspiel Nazi-Deutschlands’ umzumodeln.”

38 See Laux (2016), pp. 177–178.

39 See Rohrer (2021), pp. 23–24.

40 Cf. Meissenburg (1996), pp. 167–193; Negele (2005), pp. 22–27; Ehn (2009), pp. 34–38.

41 Cf. Ranneforth (1933), p. 134, quote *ibid.* Original quotation: “jüdische Mitglieder in den Vereinen immer stark vertreten gewesen, und auch große internationale Meister sind aus ihnen hervorgegangen, die den Ruhm deutscher Schachkunst in die Welt hinausgetragen haben. Das wird jetzt wohl aufhören.”

leading positions, even if they could be certain that there was no objection to their person, their way of thinking and their management”. In his remarks, Ranneforth praised Hitler and fully recognised the new Führer state and the goal of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. At the same time, however, he tried to give the exclusion of the Jews a twist that raised the issue to an abstract level, as it were. For the “preservation of German cultural assets”, it was first and foremost a matter of “combating what is called the Jewish spirit, which is fundamentally alien to the German essence”. And other parts of society had also lost their “attachment to a good German spirit”. “Anyone who feels and acts German and thus feels inwardly connected to the German people, why shouldn’t they be recognised as fellow Germans?” Jews who had proven themselves for the Reich had also been left in civil servant positions. In a similar way, Ranneforth tried to build a bridge into the “Third Reich” for members of the workers’ chess clubs.⁴²

As mentioned, Ranneforth said this shortly after the takeover, perhaps in the hope that in practice the exclusion of Jews would not be carried out in the way that the radical measures at the beginning implied. Later, in the same chess magazine, he gave space to anti-Semitic remarks like those of Alekhine. Nevertheless, a limit to ideologisation can be seen here. Abstracting from the specific case of the exclusion of Jews, this limit consists of values that have become an integral part of chess culture over time. These values include equality and respect: just as chess offers players exactly the same starting chances, can be played around the world and is therefore a virtually global means of communication, everyone in the cosmos of chess deserves the same respectful treatment if he or she abides by the rules of the game. Regardless of religion, nationality or the like, the culture of chess has a strong transnational element. Similarly, the value of objectivity is fundamental in the chess cosmos: just as the board position contains complete information for the players – regardless of how it came about – and enables a clear, objective positional judgement, it is not well regarded in the chess cosmos to lack objectivity.⁴³ Unmistakably for everyone in the world of chess, all these values were trampled underfoot with the exclusion of Jews from chess in the German Reich, thus crossing this line of ideologisation.

Jacques Mieses was absolutely right in his assessment that chess, which was so strongly influenced by Jewish people, could not be transformed into the “national game of the Germans” in a single stroke. In the following, we will see how – beyond the connections described in terms of ideology and programme – this is precisely what was attempted.

42 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 134–135, all quotations on p. 135. Original quotations: “jüdische Mitglieder aus allen leitenden Stellungen freiwillig ausgeschieden, auch wenn sie gewiß sein konnten, daß gegen ihre Person, ihre Denkungsart und Geschäftsführung nichts einzuwenden war”; “Wahrung der deutschen Kulturgüter”; “das zu bekämpfen, was man den dem deutschen Wesen grundsätzlich fremden jüdischen Geist nennt”; “Bindung an guten deutschen Geist”; “Wer deutsch fühlt und handelt und sich dadurch dem deutschen Volke innerlich verbunden fühlt, warum soll man den nicht als Volksgenossen gelten lassen?”

43 Cf. Kauke/Bönsch (1994), pp. 202–203, pp. 211–213 and p. 216.

4. Organised chess in clubs and associations and the Nazi state

The above-mentioned guidelines of GSB President Zander quickly had consequences. His call for chess to be subordinated to political goals is to be understood as part of the *Gleichschaltung* (enforced conformity) of organised chess in the German Reich. In Weimar times, chess, like many other areas of life, was organised in various associations that were rooted in different social milieus. The large, nationally active association was the DSB, which was founded in 1877. It had a bourgeois-national character and also organised national championships. Equally important and active throughout the Reich was workers' chess. It was organised on the one hand in a larger association affiliated to the Social Democratic Party within the German Workers' Gymnastics and Sports Federation (Arbeiter-Turn- und Sportbund) which was committed to the class struggle, and on the other hand in a smaller association affiliated to the Communist Party. The DSB and workers' chess probably each had low five-digit membership figures. There was also denominational chess, above all the chess association in the Catholic Young Men's Association (Katholischer Jungmännerverband), which was strong in Westphalia and the Rhineland. And finally, the political right also had its chess organisations: For example, there were chess groups within the German National Association of Commercial Assistants (Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfen-Verband) and in 1931 the aforementioned national socialist GSB was founded.⁴⁴

It was this initially insignificant association that rose to become the leading chess organisation in the German Reich in April 1933. Although denominationally organised chess continued to exist until the end of 1937, workers' chess was quickly broken up organisationally, while the chess organisation of the Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen-Verband and in particular the DSB – officially dissolved on 9 July 1933 – were absorbed into the GSB. The regional associations remained important in the vertical organisation, but a level of six inspectorates was introduced above them, to each of which several regional associations were assigned. With the territorial expansion of the German Reich, further regional associations were also added in areas annexed to the Reich.⁴⁵

The GSB also reversed the process of organisational differentiation at club level. As a rule, there was to be only one chess club in each town, smaller ones were to merge with larger ones; large cities were exempt from this. The entire organisational train functioned according to the leader principle. This was expressed, among other things, in the fact that the higher organisational level appointed or at least confirmed the leadership of the level below; club chairmen were confirmed by the head of the association. In order to standardise and streamline the administration, the heads of the clubs and associations, who had to be "Aryans" with a national mindset, were only to be supported by the treasurer and a head of propaganda.⁴⁶

With the "Aryan paragraph", Jews – according to the GSB's definition, that were people with two, three or four Jewish grandparents – were forced out of clubs and

44 Cf. Woelk (1996), pp. 19–30.

45 Cf. Dreyer (2002), p. 23; Bruns (2003), p. 172; Woelk (1996), pp. 31–45; Post (1933a), pp. 210–211.

46 Cf. Ranneforth (1934a), pp. 14–15; Woelk (1996), pp. 56–58.

associations everywhere. As early as mid-April 1933, the federal board of the DSB asked “our members of non-Aryan descent, if they were still in leading positions, to resign voluntarily”.⁴⁷ DSB President Walter Robinow, who had rendered outstanding services to chess in Germany for decades in all areas, including financial support, was formally replaced by Otto Zander. He was a teacher by profession, a member of the NSDAP and had also been a chess functionary for many years. Operationally, however, Robinow was replaced, as were the later GSB presidents Franz Moraller (1938–1942) and Paul Wolfrum (1942–1945) by the public prosecutor Ehrhardt Post, as he steered the association’s fortunes as managing director until 1945. This was also a programmatic change of course, as the strong chess player Post had already been a chess functionary in *völkisch*-nationalist waters in Berlin for many years. Although not a member of the NSDAP, Post brought the GSB fully into line with the Nazi regime.⁴⁸

However, the exclusion of Jewish members should not only be thought of in terms of top positions. It is not known how high the numerical loss was, but it is undisputed that Jewish players, officials, sponsors and patrons were driven out of chess in Germany at all levels.⁴⁹ Just one example from the club level: Alexander Wolff, a Jewish landowner, joined the Flensburg Chess Club of 1876 in 1921. He was obviously not religious, but rather nationalistic, having fought for the German Reich in the First World War in 1914. In the 1920s, Wolff, a strong chess player, quickly established himself among the club’s best. He played in a team with the anti-Semitic club chairman Martin Link, a dyed-in-the-wool National Socialist. Wolff was expelled from the club in 1933, arrested in 1938 during the pogroms of the so-called “Reichskristallnacht” and severely maltreated. He escaped to the USA via Denmark, his mother and wife were murdered in the extermination camps in Treblinka and Auschwitz respectively and one of his sisters in Riga.⁵⁰ There was no separate association of Jewish chess players in National Socialist Germany. However, they were organised in clubs, apparently as sections of umbrella organisations such as Bar Kochba; three “Jewish championships” were held on this basis between 1935 and 1938.⁵¹

It was not only Jews who were forced out of organised chess in Germany. Many reasons – such as suspicion of communist activity – could be cited for being disliked in the GSB, which had been brought into line with the Nazis. Michael Dreyer estimated that, based on the directly comparable organisational parts of the DSB from 1932 to the GSB in 1933, almost sixty percent of the leadership personnel below the Reich level were replaced.⁵² There is much to suggest that organised chess “fell into line” comparatively quickly; there is no trace of any substantial resistance. It was quite different in other sports organisations and clubs. The communist and social

47 N.N. (1933), p. 113. Original quotation: “unsere Mitglieder nicht-arischer Abstammung, sofern sie sich noch an leitenden Stellen befinden sollten, freiwillig zurückzutreten.”

48 Cf. Dreyer (2002), p. 24; Ballo (2002), pp. 48–52. On Zander see Ranneforth (1938), p. 193–194. Wolfrum was only recently discovered as GSB president through the author’s work, see Rohrer (2021), p. 75.

49 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26.

50 See Nickel (2010), pp. 59–64, p. 109, pp. 130–132, pp. 312–313 and p. 553.

51 Cf. Anderberg (2008/2009), pp. 58–67.

52 Cf. Dreyer (2002), p. 24.

democratic organisations were generally broken up very quickly and the denominational organisations were dissolved by around 1935. Civil associations and clubs, however, lasted longer and the *Gleichschaltung* often only affected the heads of the organisations, if at all. For this reason, a “second *Gleichschaltung*” began around 1935/1936, which took place along the party structures of the NSDAP.⁵³

Without question, the expulsion of members who were declared unwanted, and Jews in particular, meant an enormous loss for the GSB. The activism that the GSB now developed can certainly be interpreted as an attempt to compensate for this loss elsewhere, insofar as this was possible. However, the GSB was able to play strong trump cards in co-operation with the Nazi regime. This does not mean measures of repression, coercion and violence. Rather, we already saw one of these trump cards in the organisational *Gleichschaltung*, which brought many new members to the GSB. In 1934, it probably had between 30,000 and 50,000 members. This also meant additional financial strength, for example through contributions from members and clubs as well as subscriptions to the GSB’s association publication *Deutsche Schachblätter*.⁵⁴ Chess-affine leaders of the Nazi regime such as Joseph Goebbels, honorary president of the GSB, Reich Minister Hans Frank and the Bavarian Minister President Ludwig Siebert became part of a network of politically influential people, which also provided access to financial resources. The major event “Schach-Olympia 1936”, which was organised following the Olympic Games in Berlin, is an example of the massive use of financial resources by the Nazi regime. During the war years, the world’s best-ranked tournaments and also top players such as Alexander Alekhine and Efim Bogoljubov were financed directly or indirectly.⁵⁵ Such funds, which were channelled to the chess world in the German Reich by agencies of the Nazi state, were a functional equivalent to financial contributions that had been excluded along with Jewish members. In this way, the GSB bridged a problem that had arisen as a result of the self-inflicted conflict with chess’s own world.

Another trump card of the GSB was its sheer organisational power. It is very likely – as Zander’s above-mentioned dictum about the “indifferent” chess player indicates – that for many of the chess players and those interested in chess who were organised in clubs and associations, the actual game of chess and not any political charges came first. In this respect, these chess players and aficionados could certainly be satisfied with the GSB. This is because it ensured, in this respect not fundamentally different from its predecessor DSB, a regulated game operation. The GSB was the umbrella under which chess congresses, individual championships and team championships were organised and held throughout the Reich and also regionally and locally via the state associations and clubs during the Nazi era and well into the Second World War. At international level, the GSB not only returned to the World Chess Federation in 1938 after leaving in 1933. It organised world-renowned top events and elite tournaments. Top players, first and foremost world chess champion Alekhine and Bogoljubov, as mentioned above, put themselves at the service of the GSB. They played numerous chess events in the Reich, during the Second World War

53 See Herzog (2016), pp. 16–18.

54 Cf. Woelk (1996), pp. 63–64; Bruns (2003), p. 177, there fn. 507, p. 179 and p. 189.

55 See Tal (2008), p. 91; Richter (1997), Part II, pp. 182–183; see also Dreyer (2002), p. 25; Rohrer (2021), *passim*.

also in the occupied territories. The founding of the European Chess Federation in 1942 was politically motivated and was aimed at first European and then global leadership of the GSB in world chess. In terms of chess, however, it ensured international play and top-level chess. In short, as far as the game itself was concerned, the GSB provided attractive conditions for “Aryan” chess players and those interested in chess in the German Reich.⁵⁶

It undoubtedly weakened the organisational unity of the chess world in the German Reich that, from the end of 1935, a chess department in the Feierabend office of the KdF entered into competition with the GSB. In 1937–1938, entire clubs and regional associations of the GSB switched to the Deutsche Schachgemeinschaft (DSG), which established a vertical organisational hierarchy along the structure of the NSDAP districts. The relationship between the GSB and KdF chess oscillated between rapprochement and rejection over the years. A plan from October 1937 envisaged that the DSG would be responsible for recreational and popular chess, including “corporate chess” (Betriebsschach), while the GSB would be the national chess association and responsible for club chess and all chess competitions. This division of responsibilities between the GSB and KdF chess was essentially adhered to. Although from 1939 the term “former German chess community” was used instead of “KdF chess community”, these tensions and parallel structures were not resolved until the end of the war. These tensions were an expression of the Nazi polycracy; they were systemic and typical due to the inconsistent allocation of competences in the Nazi state. However, the advantages of KdF chess for the chess world in the German Reich should not be overlooked: With it came enormous financial power to the chess world, as KdF was subordinate to the German Labour Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront, DAF). The DAF in turn declared itself responsible for the *Betriebsgemeinschaft* (company community) and, with its many millions of members from the former employers’ associations and trade unions, had enormous financial resources at its disposal, also to the benefit of the KdF. In terms of players and organisation, KdF chess united under its roof especially that part of the chess world in the German Reich that was less interested in competitive chess than in a leisure activity at a qualitatively acceptable level. And so KdF chess could undoubtedly be seen at the time as proof that chess under the Nazi regime was indeed also committed to creating a *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁵⁷

With the use of propaganda – i.e. the attempt to systematically influence public communication in favour of its own goals – the GSB quickly adopted one of the most important instruments of the National Socialists. They owed the success of their movement in no small part to their propaganda activities prior to 1933. Consequently, one of the main organisational changes during the transition from the DSB to the GSB was the appointment of a Federal Press and Propaganda Officer (Bundeswart für Presse und Propaganda) and a Propaganda Officer (Propagandawart) for each of the regional associations.⁵⁸ The chess propagandists aimed at the channels of direct and mediated, i.e. media communication, which were common at the time and which

56 See Woelk (1996), pp. 65–83; Bruns (2003), pp. 171–182; Rohrer (2021), pp. 66–71.

57 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 51–54; the quotation from the “former German chess community” in Massow (1939), p. 192, “KdF-Schachgemeinschaft” in Majer (1939), p. 164.

58 Cf. Post (1933c), pp. 7–8; Ranneforth (1932), p. 48.

could be used to reach publics of different ranges: The cheapest and most important form of advertising was personal, and in addition, “propaganda through the press, radio and leaflets (...) had to be carried out purposefully and according to standardised guidelines”.⁵⁹ In the first period after the takeover, the federal leadership called on the entire chess community to launch an all-out communicative attack to promote the game of chess: In advertising weeks, members were to be recruited via the press or direct contact. Establishing chess columns was to be suggested to the daily newspapers of the Nazi press. Chess events and other tangible activities were intended to introduce interested parties to chess and at the same time create content for communication. Even an iconographic federal badge symbolising the connection between chess and National Socialism, which chess fans were to wear on their lapels, was to serve to mobilise the GSB.⁶⁰

All of these communication channels were important because direct communication mediated by the media in public spheres was not a simple top-down process, but highly complex, dialectical and dynamic.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the four organs of the chess media that created a nationwide chess public from 1933 onwards must be regarded as particularly important in terms of conveying standardised information to as many people as possible. None of them were a National Socialist invention: In the case of the chess composition magazine *Die Schwalbe* (1924) and the *Schach-Echo* (1932), their first volumes dated back to the Weimar period, while the *Deutsche Schachblätter* (1909) and the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* (1872) dated back to the German Empire.⁶² The *Deutsche Schachblätter* was the organ of the DSB from the beginning and retained this function under the GSB.⁶³ The federal organ was made particularly favourable for club members: they did not pay the usual 50 pfennigs per single issue, but 10 pfennigs, with 24 issues per year. The circulation is said to have been more than 10,000 copies in 1934.⁶⁴ In comparison, the circulation in 1932 was probably closer to 1,500 copies, at a price of 2.40 Reichsmark per quarter and six issues.⁶⁵

As the Nazi-infused texts from German chess journals mentioned above have already shown, certainly none of the major chess journals in the German Reich was being able to “largely preserve their independence” from 1933 onwards.⁶⁶ However, this requires an understanding of how Nazi propaganda was put into practice. It did not rely on constant total bombardment with the Nazi world view and the Führer cult, because it was clear that such propaganda would soon cease to attract attention. From the mid-1930s onwards, the responsible authorities in the press, radio and film

59 Post (1933c), p. 9.

60 Cf. Woelk (1996), pp. 60–62; Bruns (2003), pp. 175–178.

61 Cf. Requate (1999), pp. 5–32.

62 See Zeitschriftendatenbank (2023e); Zeitschriftendatenbank (2023c); Zeitschriftendatenbank (2023a); Zeitschriftendatenbank (2023b). The predecessor of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, the “*Schachzeitung*”, even dates back to 1846, cf. Zeitschriftendatenbank (2023d).

63 Cf. *Deutsche Schachblätter* (1909/1910), title page; Post (1933a), p. 211; *Deutsche Schachblätter* (1933), title page.

64 Cf. Woelk (1996), pp. 63–64; Post (1934a), pp. 1–2.

65 Cf. Kiok (1932), p. 198; Ranneforth (1932), p. 48.

66 But this is the assertion for the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* in Negele (2006), p. 42. Original quotation: “weitgehend ihre Unabhängigkeit bewahren”.

carefully dosed ideological National Socialist propaganda. They mixed it with other reporting, for example on sport and culture, with puzzles and serialised novels and the like. Depending on demand, certain topics, such as foreign policy, were ramped up or toned down. In this way, National Socialist propaganda could be sustained without wearing off in the meantime.⁶⁷ This pattern can also be found in the German chess magazines. Largely focussed on chess, political messages were incorporated from time to time and the magazines were staunchly loyal to the regime, especially when it came to foreign policy events.⁶⁸

The use of radio for chess, which only emerged in the Weimar period, was also not a National Socialist invention. “Chess radio” (Schachfunk) was already being broadcast by stations in Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Munich and Breslau in 1925.⁶⁹ As the range of the stations and the number of receivers increased, radio gradually developed into a nationwide medium. However, during the Weimar period, radio was much more prevalent in cities than in the countryside, and even in 1943, only 16.2 million radio subscribers were counted in the entire “Greater German Reich” (Großdeutsches Reich).⁷⁰ The lectures that were sent through the airwaves in these early chess programmes occasionally also appeared in printed form; the aforementioned Edmund Nebermann, for example, was a very early protagonist of chess radio and had his radio lectures printed as early as 1926.⁷¹ From the very beginning, the National Socialists saw radio as an important means of spreading propaganda. From 1933, this medium was therefore strongly promoted and its reach massively expanded. The GSB followed this development. Chess was already part of the radio programme throughout 1933, but from 1934 the GSB made systematic use of the still young medium. In January 1934, for example, a series of such programmes, scheduled for the entire year and broadcast every Sunday, began with a lecture by GSB President Zander on “Chess in the new Germany”. However, the list of these lectures alone shows that chess radio was by no means always permeated with Nazi propaganda. Rather, the titles of the lectures indicate that the content here also moved along a continuum between strongly ideological-political content and non-ideological content focussing on the game of chess itself and the sport of chess; the “non-political” lecture titles clearly predominated.⁷²

In addition to the press and radio as high-reach means of propaganda, the GSB also relied on flyers and direct communication, in which members of the clubs and officials of the associations were to conduct grassroots propaganda in their personal environment, so to speak. In addition, chess events themselves were recognised and used as propaganda platforms. As mentioned, this applied to local events, but also to attention-generating competitions such as German championships or even major international events. “Schach-Olympia 1936” was recognised far beyond the borders

67 Cf. Reichel (1991), pp. 157–207.

68 This is shown, for example, by a review of the 1937 issue of the *Deutsche Schachblätter*, the 1940 issue of *Schach-Echo* and the 1941 issue of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*.

69 See Schweiger (2014), pp. 11–15.

70 Cf. Dussel (2022), pp. 35–149, in particular pp. 86–88 and p. 120.

71 Nebermann (1926).

72 Cf. N.N. (1934b), p. 375–376, quote p. 375. Original quotation: “Das Schach im neuen Deutschland”. Cf. also Bruns (2003), p. 191, fn. 550; Woelk (1996), p. 63, there also fn. 198; Schweiger (2014), pp. 16–17.

of the German Reich, even though it was not an official Chess Olympiad organised by the World Chess Federation. This event also provides an insightful look at important connections in the chess cosmos under National Socialist auspices: High-ranking representatives from the state and the party were able to make a highly visible public commitment to their intellectual passion by providing material and immaterial assistance. Strong players were able to compete in a high-class competition to the delight of the less gifted “woodpushers” and chess enthusiasts who shared the excitement. All together, they created content for propaganda to the benefit of the regime and the GSB.⁷³

Such events also provided an ideal opportunity to spread the above-mentioned derivations of National Socialist ideology. Ludwig Siebert was not only Bavarian Minister President, but also Honorary President of the GSB. He also took on the role of Honorary President when the European Chess Federation was founded in 1942. In a speech at the opening of the Munich European Chess Tournament in September 1942, he placed the game of chess in a cultural framework spanning thousands of years, before linking it to the present day. He claimed that the game had “much in common with the thought processes of our new National Socialist era”. By this he meant “above all the community, the community-building and community-promoting power”, in order to then state the practice of chess in the Nazi state as an expression of applied *Volksgemeinschaft*. Siebert emphasised that the game “has strong driving forces. From those who practise it, it demands superior decisiveness, the use of mental gifts, quick action, full use of mental powers. Whoever plays chess wants to conquer, wants to win. It is therefore ideas of high spiritual value that allow chess to develop again and again”. He furthermore asserted that because young people transfer the virtues required to play chess to their other lives, it also has an educational effect.⁷⁴

What characterises the connections between organised chess in clubs and associations and the Nazi regime that have been outlined so far? A systemic interpretation is particularly well suited to making the essentials clear: chess as a subsystem of the sport system was essentially supported by the GSB and KdF chess, from amateur sport to elite sport.⁷⁵ With the GSB, the previously fragmented chess organisations were de-differentiated through dissolutions and mergers, and organised chess in the German Reich was standardised. From the mid-1930s, KdF chess brought a new differentiation that ran counter to this, but also extended the outreach of organised chess to the leisure sector. Both organisations played out their original competences: They decided on membership conditions, staff positions and

73 On the whole, see Bruns (2003), pp. 171–172 and pp. 175–182; on “Schach-Olympia 1936”, see Tal (2018), pp. 91–117.

74 Cf. BayHStA, StK 5538, unpag., quote *ibid.*: Manuscript of Ludwig Siebert’s speech at the welcoming ceremony for the opening of the 1942 European Chess Tournament on 14 September 1942 in the Festsaal des Künstlerhaus in Munich. Original quotations: “mit den Gedankengängen unserer neuen nationalsozialistischen Zeit viel gemein”; “vor allen Dingen die Gemeinschaft, die gemeinschaftsbildende und -fördernde Kraft”; “starke Triebkräfte innewohnen. Es fordert von denen, die es üben, überlegende Entschlußkraft, Einsatz der Geistesgaben, rasches Handeln, vollen Einsatz der geistigen Kräfte. Wer Schach spielt, will siegen, will gewinnen. Es sind also geistig hoch zu wertende Ideen, die das Schachspiel immer wieder und mehr sich entwickeln lassen.” The word “siegen” is underlined in the original. On Siebert, see Rittenauer (2018), pp. 93–303.

75 The following system-theoretical interpretation is based on: Schulze (2005); Nolzen (2018), pp. 97–114; Nolzen (2020), pp. 174–175.

programmes, i.e. purposes and means. The GSB rebuilt previous organisational structures, statutes were changed in line with the Führer principle, new club and association management and propaganda officials were installed and members defined as Jewish were excluded. New semantics were introduced, from the *Volksgemeinschaft* to *Kampfschach* (combat chess). The GSB and KdF chess were thus able to establish specific National Socialist norms, they mobilised their members or provided them with a framework for self-mobilisation. Among the motivations that led to the integration of members, identification with the organisational goal of organising chess was certainly the strongest. Money could at most be a factor for top players. Motivations such as career opportunities, camaraderie and the chance to gain a reputation may have played a role, but coercion did not.

The strength of organisations is that they can make decisions for all members, which are almost always physically absent. However, in terms of game operations, also interaction, i.e. communication requiring physical presence, took place within the framework of GSB and KdF chess. Typical interactions took place at weekly club evenings, club celebrations and joint training sessions. There were also team matches at club level, which were organised locally, regionally or nationally. At these levels, there were also simultaneous events, individual championships and occasional tournaments and competitions at the international level. Players and organisers were involved in the interactions, as well as reporters and spectators where appropriate.⁷⁶

The decisive difference to the Weimar period was that under democratic conditions, the political system and the sports system were independent of each other, but structurally linked, utilising each other's services. In this interpretation, the term "chess world" can be broken down in a revealing way into a chess system that can be understood as structurally linked in a variety of ways: for example, with the economic system (patrons), the legal system, the sports system (association law) and the media. "Chess journalists" were therefore part of the media system, they did not operate with the central question of chess (performance/non-performance), but with the central question of the media, what is relevant information and what is not. But this is precisely where undemocratic political systems de-differentiate. The Nazi regime restricted the autonomy of other systems and interfered with them directly. Now decisions were made according to the guiding criterion of the political system, namely what served the power of politics and what did not. The most profound intervention that was certainly alien to the system can be recognised in the fact that the GSB, under pressure from the political system but also compliantly, adopted the membership rule of no longer tolerating Jewish members in 1933, thus severely damaging itself.

Overall, it can therefore be provisionally concluded that the connections shown between the organised chess world and the Nazi regime followed the logic of formal organisation under the conditions of a dictatorship: ministries and administration as well as the NSDAP and its sub-organisation KdF as organisations within the political system on the one hand, GSB and KdF chess as organisations of the chess system on the other. The structural coupling of the overarching political system and the subordinate chess system actually led to the political instrumentalisation of the chess system at various points, albeit with its compliant assistance. However, with system-

⁷⁶ For an example of gaming operations, see Efinger (2009), pp. 53–122.

theoretical orthodoxy we do not understand the entire range of connections between the chess world in the German Reich and the Nazi regime. This is due to the fact that this orthodoxy – which is, so to speak, *ex negativo* heuristically helpful – disparages everything that does not coagulate into communication, i.e. into communicated and understood information, as a pre-communicative black box and refuses to take this into account. Moreover, it does not ascribe practices the value they deserve. The following shift to a cultural-historical perspective, which overcomes these limits of system-theoretical orthodoxy, allows a deeper look into the mechanics of the chess world and its connections with the Nazi regime.⁷⁷

5. Individual appropriations by chess enthusiasts and intellectual tinkerers

Connections were also established between the chess world of the German Reich and the Nazi regime through what could be called the individual enrichment of chess culture with National Socialist or related content. This enabled the mechanics by which the chess world functioned in everyday practice and was operated by a small but influential sub-group of its inhabitants.

Firstly, a specific feature of the chess world in the German Reich should be noted. In what form did it actually exist? It was only partly based on organisation and personal interaction. It should also be understood as the totality of locally separated individuals who – each for themselves – processed chess-related information from daily newspapers and weekly magazines, chess journals and chess books, conveyed through written and visual representations. This part of the chess world can be assumed to be far more significant than it is in other sports. This is because the mere text allows a very far-reaching immersion into the world of chess; unlike football or tennis, for example, chess does not require playing partners for training or moving images of the playing venue for leisure. The notation of a game provides complete information about the course of the game, apart from any incidents on site beyond the actual game. The study of chess could therefore also take place in a form that can be described as a “solitary practice” in reference to Michel Foucault’s cultural studies reflections on “technologies of the self”: The chess enthusiast, isolated from the rest of the world, immerses himself in the sequence of moves in a master’s game, in the mating problem of a chess composer, in the course of a tournament or the latest chess association developments – to improve his understanding of the game, to keep abreast of knowledge or simply for leisure. Without such solitary practice, entry into the world of chess is inconceivable, and those interested in chess could mutually presuppose this practice. It can lead to renewed communication, but it does not have to.⁷⁸ It is in the nature of things that we can only learn about this solitary practice indirectly, for example when chess newspapers emphasise that their “readers are critical of things and want to convince themselves by checking things out for themselves”.⁷⁹ In any

⁷⁷ Cf. Levold (2013), pp. 6–21, in particular pp. 13–16.

⁷⁸ On the theoretical foundation, see Foucault (1993), pp. 24–62; Reckwitz (2020), pp. 48–51 and pp. 68–72. On chess practice, see Vidmar (1961), pp. 37–45; Pachman (1973), pp. 22–23; Nickel (2010), p. 43.

⁷⁹ Cf. N.N. (1936), pp. 388–389. Original quotation: “Leser den Dingen kritisch gegenüberstehen und

case, this emphasis on text favoured the intellectual tinkerer and gave published written media content special opportunities for influence.

In addition, the type of the highly committed enthusiast who, beyond his bourgeois profession, was completely absorbed in chess stood out from the everyday chess world. These enthusiasts found many starting points for their passionate commitment in chess because chess can be practised as a game and a sport, but also as an art, a science and much more – the multitude of different approaches shows that this is more than just a vain self-description of the chess world. Around the globe, chess has been deeply inscribed in people’s culture for centuries, for example as a literary motif, as a philosophical metaphor, as an unmistakable motif in the visual arts.⁸⁰ Some chess enthusiasts played in championships for years and decades; some ran a chess club for a long time; some followed the chess press incessantly and intervened with letters to the editors; some solved mating problems or composed complicated chess problems themselves; some organised tournaments and competitions; some published on various aspects of chess; some acted as financiers of a club, an association or an organisation. Some collected chess sets of different materials, shapes and origins. And some of these enthusiasts combined several of these roles.⁸¹ Such chess enthusiasts existed at all levels, locally, regionally and also nationwide. However, only a few people in the chess world were able to establish visible and potentially influential connections between chess and the Nazi regime. It was not enough to be one of the enthusiasts described. As will be shown below by way of example, these connections were made by chess enthusiasts who at the same time developed their own ideas on specific aspects of the game through intellectual fiddling, were inspired by a considerable sense of mission with regard to these ideas and ultimately also found ways to get their message across to the general public in the form of texts and thus through the media.

Heinrich Ranneforth, as mentioned above one of the editors of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, was a particularly influential figure in the chess world of the German Reich.⁸² He used the language of chess to establish links between chess and the Nazi regime. In his popular chess calendar of 1934, which was already in its 24th year, the then 70-year-old referred precisely to this point of contact: “At a time when the German people have begun to reflect on themselves and, if possible, to repel anything foreign, we may well remember that it is time to cleanse the language of chess of everything foreign”.⁸³ He hoped that “progress would now be faster if the Greater German Chess Federation took up the cause”.⁸⁴ This hope was well-founded, as language as an essential expression of national identity was targeted by high-ranking National Socialists and their authorities in those years. Certain stylistic devices can be described as typical Nazi language, such as hyperbolisation (e.g. *Größter Feldherr aller*

sich durch eigene Nachprüfung überzeugen wollen”.

80 Cf. Vollert (1921), pp. 194–195; Strouhal (2007), pp. 65–71.

81 See, for example, Lossa/Schmid (2018), p. 28–32; Efinger (2009), p. 80–81.

82 See Büsing (2014), p. 416.

83 Ranneforth (1934b), p. 18. Original quotation: “In einer Zeit, wo das deutsche Volk begonnen hat, sich auf sich selbst zu besinnen und das Fremdartige nach Möglichkeit von sich abzustoßen, darf man auch wohl daran erinnern, daß es Zeit ist, die Schachsprache von allem Fremden zu reinigen.”

84 Ibid, p. 19. Original quotation: “jetzt doch schneller vorwärts, wenn sich der Großdeutsche Schachbund der Sache annimmt.”

Zeiten, “greatest commander of all time”), mechanisation (e.g. *Gleichschaltung*, “enforced conformity”) and euphemisms (*Endlösung*, “final solution”). In this respect, it made sense to transfer the interpretation of purity that was important for the Nazi world view to language – expressed, for example, in the biologicistic image of the *Volkskörper* (people’s body), in which everything harmful was to be eradicated. Foreign words were to be replaced by “purely German” words.⁸⁵

The system of special terms commonly used in chess would therefore have been a suitable area for a National Socialist-influenced “language cleansing”. In some respects, the language of chess simply adopted words from the historical chess strongholds; “Remis” from French, “Giuoco piano” from Italian. Other foreign words reduced a complex issue and therefore had a useful function, for example when players were analysing their game. The *Qualität* (exchange), for example, refers to the difference in value between the rook and the bishop or knight. It normally means an advantage worth around two pawns for the side with the rook, but also a disadvantage in certain positions – advanced players immediately realise this ambivalence when the term *Qualität* is mentioned.⁸⁶

Ranneforth, however, tended to use the Nazi regime as a suitable vehicle for a “language purification” for which he had been campaigning for decades. Ranneforth, who had studied languages and German philology, was not a strong chess player. Deputy chairman of the DSB for two years from 1904, he was above all an important chess publicist, in addition to co-editing the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* and his chess calendar published from 1907 to 1938.⁸⁷ As early as 1889, at the age of 25, he promoted himself as the mouthpiece of the “German feeling Germans” and pleaded in skilfully turned sentences to “cleanse our language of the luxuriantly growing weeds of foreign words”. The German language is “so rich in its own possessions that it can easily dispense with the borrowed tinsel”.⁸⁸ Ranneforth was thus swimming in the wake of the (General) German Language Association ((Allgemeiner) Deutscher Sprachverein), which had been fighting against foreign words since 1885. With the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, the association hoped for state support in the “language cleansing” and accommodated the regime by now also spelling out racist and anti-Semitic words.⁸⁹ However, the proposals with which Ranneforth wanted to replace foreign terms with German ones lacked any nationalistic, ethnic or racist content. As Ranneforth himself stated as early as 1934, some of the proposed terms had already become naturalised after a short time. Instead of “piece touchée piece jouée”, people now said “berührt – geführt” (touched – led)⁹⁰, a phrase that is still used today. However, the old-fashioned term “Zabel” had no chance against the “Diagramm” (diagramme).⁹¹

85 Cf. Doval (2007), pp. 39–56, especially pp. 42–46; Braun (2007), pp. 201–219, pp. 246–253 and pp. 265–273; Burschel/Marx (2011), pp. 7–14; Münch (2011), pp. 421–461, especially pp. 443–452.

86 Cf. Lindörfer (1991), p. 108, p. 203 and p. 206–207; Kasparov (2016), passim.

87 See Büsing (2014), p. 416; Haas (2013), p. 289.

88 Quotations in: Ranneforth (1889), p. 126. Original quotations: “deutsch fühlenden Deutschen”; “unsere Sprache von dem üppig wuchernden Unkraut der Fremdwörter zu säubern”; “an eigenem Besitz so reich, dass sie des geborgten Flitters füglich entraten”.

89 See Doval (2007), pp. 41–44.

90 Cf. Ranneforth (1934b), p. 19.

91 Ibid.

In practice, however, the “purification” of chess language was by no means pursued with religious fervour. In the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, on whose language regulations Ranneforth could certainly have had an influence as co-editor, we find the term “remisieren” (to draw) and Ranneforth’s suggestion “schlichten” in parallel throughout the Nazi era.⁹² This is in line with the failure of the *Deutscher Sprachverein*’s ambitions. After the first few years, the Nazi regime, not least the Reich Ministry of Propaganda under Goebbels, turned against the language association. Finally, in 1940, Hitler personally issued an order forbidding the Germanisation of common foreign words; the new terms were rejected as unattractive, cumbersome, incomprehensible and inadequate.⁹³ Nevertheless, some commentators used the suggested Germanisations, which can be interpreted in part as an expression of their closeness to National Socialism. One particularly piquant example is a book about David Bronstein, a Jewish world-class player and runner-up in the 1951 world chess championship. It was translated by the Austrian Erich Eliskases, of all people, who played for the GSB during the Second World War and was close to National Socialism. Utilising the arsenal of Germanised chess terms, he explicitly referred to the German Language Association for his “language cleansing” – and he was still doing so in 1959.⁹⁴ Eliskases’ linguistic furore had the absurd consequence that he himself felt compelled in several places to cite the common original terms of his translations in footnotes.⁹⁵

Ranneforth’s endeavour to adapt his “language purification” to the new conditions in National Socialist Germany was a process of appropriation. In a historiographical context, the associated concept describes a specific way in which individuals deal with their environment and its conditions: “The individual modifies the existing conditions where this seems possible and carefully adapts them to his own ideas, but in return aligns them with the existing conditions”.⁹⁶ Understood in this way, appropriation is a cultural practice with which people explore their scope for action and meaning-making, while fundamentally accepting the political and social conditions. This concept has often been applied with regard to various degrees of resistance, but it is also suitable for fundamentally observing how people appropriate the unfamiliar and from which new connections emerge accordingly.⁹⁷

Ranneforth’s appropriation of the language of chess only connected the chess world and the Nazi regime in terms of the Germanisation itself, but not through Nazi-charged terminology. More substantial, on the other hand, were the connections in formative contemporary discourses. Certainly, under the Nazi regime there were no discourses in the sense that topics could be discussed publicly across the full breadth of the opinion corridor. However, when the National Socialists took power in 1933, there were discourses that had been developed in decades and centuries before that.

92 This is the result of a computerised review of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* for the years 1933–1944.

93 See Doval (2007), pp. 46–51.

94 Cf. Toran (1962), pp. 9–10; on Eliskases Ehn (1997), p. 68.

95 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 53, p. 71, p. 74, p. 101, p. 108, p. 109, p. 111 and p. 188.

96 Eichhorn (2006), p. 236. Original quotation: “Das Individuum modifiziert die vorgefundenen Verhältnisse, wo dies möglich erscheint, und paßt sie vorsichtig seinen Vorstellungen an, richtet diese jedoch im Gegenzug an den existierenden Bedingungen aus”.

97 Cf. Füssel (2006), pp. 7–28.

Topics, ideas and figures of thought did not simply disappear from people's minds and were used in communication even under dictatorial conditions.⁹⁸ This also applied to the world of chess. Essentially, it was chess journalists who repeatedly took up these discourses in their texts and applied them to the field of chess. This can be seen in almost crystalline form in a passage in which the chess journalist and functionary Alfred Brinckmann describes the world chess champion Alekhine:

There is no doubt that Alekhine has left his mark on our time, he is its true representative. Only pathetic diminishers and sober-minded people, who have existed and still exist everywhere and at all times, cannot want this sentence to be true. For them, boldness is "pacting with chance" and passionate zest for action is "elementary unrestraint". They would like to persuade us that the correct chess, which satisfies every demand for proof, is the true chess, in which one moves forward step by step on the basis of certain knowledge, without any ambiguity and therefore without danger. [...]

Alekhine wants to fight, not be bound by supposedly unchangeable rules and be able to use his toughness, his restlessly active imagination, his stormy endeavours to give the course of the battle his own flavour. His goal is not "ordinary victories". He is inspired by the pathos of distance, i.e. the passionate endeavour to overtake other people and leave them far behind. Only a demonic man of will, such as he is, could achieve the great and unique feat of winning a lost world championship for a second time. Anyone who sets such wide limits to his ambition, who sees the meaning of existence in his tireless willingness to act and never stops searching and wanting, who is always on the move, is certainly not a comfortable person and even less a comfortable opponent. But he is a great master and the world belongs to him. For the fighter, setbacks are not a reason to give up, but a pledge of the victory to come. Alekhine wanted great things and achieved great things.⁹⁹

The vanishing point of the aspects and associations that Brinckmann invoked in this passage was the specific genius discourse of those days. Unlike in earlier times, the categories of action and will were now added to the concept of genius: The genius understood in this way does not simply advance silently into unexplored territories and accomplish the unheard-of, but through the sensational act. At the same time, the concept of genius was given a dark, demonic side: the genius not only overcomes the

98 Cf. Schneider (2010), pp. 38–51; Schneider (2006), pp. 123–144.

99 Brinckmann (1940), p. 15. Original quotation: "Kein Zweifel, Aljechin hat unserer Zeit den Stempel aufgedrückt, er ist ihr wahrer Repräsentant. Nur armselige Verkleinerer und Nüchterlinge, die es ja überall und zu allen Zeiten gegeben hat und noch gibt, können diesen Satz nicht wahr haben wollen. Für sie ist Kühnheit 'Paktieren mit dem Zufall' und leidenschaftlicher Tatendrang 'elementare Hemmungslosigkeit'. Sie möchten uns einreden, daß das korrekte, jeder Beweisforderung genügende Schach das wahre sei, bei dem man sich auf dem Grunde sicherer Erkenntnisse schrittweise, jeder Zweischneidigkeit bar, mithin ungefährdet vorwärts bewegt. [...]"

Aljechin will kämpfen, sich nicht an vermeintlich unabänderliche Regeln binden und seine Härte, seine rastlos tätige Phantasie, sein stürmisches Bestreben, dem Kampfverlauf eine eigene Note zu geben, einsetzen können. Nicht 'ordinäre Siege' sind sein Ziel. Ihn beseelt das Pathos der Distanz, d. h. das leidenschaftliche Bemühen, andere Menschen zu überholen und weit hinter sich zu lassen. So konnte auch nur einem dämonischen Willensmenschen, wie er einer ist, der große und einmalige Wurf gelingen, eine verlorene Weltmeisterschaft zum zweiten Male an sich zu bringen. Wer seinem Ehrgeiz so weite Grenzen zieht, wer in nimmermüder Tatbereitschaft den Sinn des Daseins erblickt und nicht aufhört, zu suchen und zu wollen, wer ewig im Aufbruch begriffen ist, der ist gewiß kein bequemer Mensch und noch weniger ein bequemer Gegner. Aber er ist ein großer Meister und ihm gehört die Welt. Rückschläge sind für den Kämpfer nicht Grund zum Verzicht, sondern Unterpfand des kommenden Sieges. Aljechin hat Großes gewollt, Großes vollbracht."

traditional by creatively breaking the rules, but also shows no consideration for moral conventions if necessary. Such a genius was almost expected in political journalism in the German Reich after 1918 and was discursively conjured up. And it was this mixture of characteristics – dialectically constructed through external and self-description – that ensured that the military layman Adolf Hitler was able to wrest sovereignty over strategy and tactics in the Second World War from the highly decorated generals of the Wehrmacht.¹⁰⁰ Brinckmann took up this discourse and appropriated it with a chess-related twist. At the same time, it can be seen that embedding Alekhine in the genius discourse was able to outdo an ideological pillar of National Socialism. After all, world chess champion Alekhine and his long-time opponent Efim Bogoljubov, as “non-Aryans”, were still labelled “alien critics” by GSB managing director Post in 1934.¹⁰¹ However, after Alekhine had probably moved closer to the Nazi regime from the end of 1940, he embodied “German qualities” in line with the genius discourse – this was in keeping with the zeitgeist in the German Reich at the time and by no means implausible.¹⁰²

Brinckmann’s remarks are representative of many other discursive connections between the chess world and the Nazi regime. In part, these are congruent with the derivations of the National Socialist world view mentioned at the beginning. While the “Chess Aid for Soldiers”, for example, was based on the organisational power of GSB and KdF chess, chess enthusiasts applied general National Socialist ideologems to chess on their own initiative by means of individual appropriation and spelled them out. This applied, for example, to Theodor Gerbec, who contributed to the anti-Semitic discourse between Gutmayer and Alekhine;¹⁰³ the Viennese Gerbec was also a good player, inventor of chess compositions and editor of the *Deutsche Schachzeitung*, and in 1942–1943 also its co-editor.¹⁰⁴ Otto Emtö, who postulated the relationship between “German character” and chess, was a chess enthusiast who lived in the countryside and was a successful founder of a local chess club.¹⁰⁵ Hitting the same notch, Josef Weinberger, a teacher with a doctorate in education, was a director of the former Federal Teachers’ Training College (*Bundeslehrerbildungsanstalt*) in Oberhollabrunn, Austria.¹⁰⁶ Alfred Pfrang, who combined questions of education with nationalist thinking and chess, was also a teacher and writer; in Munich, he also led chess courses at the Nazi national education centre (*NS-Volksbildungsstätte*) and headed the Upper Bavarian Chess Association (*Schachverband Oberbayern*) in 1937–1938.¹⁰⁷ Even the SS leader Friedrich Bethge, who headed the KdF chess department

100 See Pyta (2015), pp. 249–259.

101 Post (1934b), p. 183. Original quotation: “artfremde Kritiker”.

102 See Rohrer (2022), p. 31.

103 Cf. Gerbec (1937), 129–131; Gerbec (1940), pp. 33–34.

104 Cf. Moran (1989), pp. 291–292; Ehn/Strouhal (1996), p. 214.

105 Cf. Emtö (1933), pp. 289–291.

106 Cf. *Wiener Zeitung* (1926), No. 102, 04 May 1926, official section, front page; K.k. Kaiser-Franz-Josef-Jubiläums-Lehrerbildungsanstalt Oberhollabrunn (1910), p. 1* and p. 8, with thanks to Gottfried Böck (Hollabrunn Municipal Archives).

107 Cf. BArch, NSDAP-Mitgliederkartei, Zentralkartei: index card Alfred Pfrang (30.12.

1893); Pfrang had been a member of the NSDAP since 01.05.1933. Cf. also Bruns (2003), p. 164;

Schach-Kalender des Landesverbandes Bayern e.V. im Großdeutschen Schachbund (1937), p. 62;

Schach-Kalender des Landesverbandes Bayern e.V. im Großdeutschen Schachbund (1938), p. 77.

until 1941,¹⁰⁸ has to be included here. He was also a chess player and inventor of chess compositions on the one hand and a writer and dramaturge on the other. In his above-mentioned game annotations in the style of war reporting, he appeared in public between 1940 and 1945 personally and with his very own connection between chess and the belligerent Nazi regime.¹⁰⁹

One of the central concepts in the world of chess in National Socialist Germany was *Kampfschach*. Chess publicists used it to seamlessly connect with the struggle as an important interpretation of the National Socialist world view and a common topic of discourse in those days. Based on Alekhine's style of play, which was a "single justification of Kampfschach", Alfred Brinckmann in turn described it as an "oath formula" "to counteract the rational-mechanistic chess conception of the Tarrasch era and its epigones, which can certainly be seen as a sign of decay";¹¹⁰ what was meant here was the "Jewish-decadent" Tarrasch era, as Brinckmann later wrote bluntly elsewhere.¹¹¹ Admittedly, Brinckmann also conceded that *Kampfschach* was not merely a forward rush, but could also express itself in defensive victories. *Kampfschach* is

not a specific method of playing chess and cannot be summarised in a well-formulated set of instructions, but Kampfschach is an attitude which dictates that one should strive at every moment and with all one's strength to solve the problems posed in the game and to find the appropriate form of solution. That one prefers sweat to comfort and loves danger, that one values the creative idea more highly than the brilliant but empty technique.¹¹²

As such a vague and undifferentiated concept, this *Kampfschach* had little more substance than a general concept of sporting combat. It was therefore more of a variant that was added to the National Socialist "combat" discourse with great endeavour, which sought to contrast the older discourse on the "draw death" mentioned at the beginning and was simultaneously charged with anti-Semitism. Nonetheless, *Kampfschach* was a repeatedly invoked centrepiece of chess discourse under National Socialism. Emil Joseph Diemer, for example, mused in an article on the "essence of the chess player", which, like Brinckmann's, ultimately led to Alekhine as the "ideal of the real chess fighter".¹¹³ Diemer, who was well known in the chess scene and was a close friend of the aforementioned Alfred Pfrang,¹¹⁴ was another enthusiast with a sense of mission. A fanatical National Socialist and anti-Semite, the trained bookseller with a high school diploma was also a strong chess player. After becoming unemployed in 1931, he made a name for himself nationally and internationally from 1932 to 1939 by publishing on chess in magazines, newspapers

108 Cf. Massow (1941), pp. 33–35.

109 Cf. Meissenburg (1993), pp. 2–3.

110 Brinckmann (1943b), p. 17. Original quotations: "einzige Rechtfertigung des Kampfschachs"; "Schwurformel"; "um der rational-mechanistischen und durchaus als Verfallserscheinung zu wertenden Schachauffassung der Tarrasch-Ära und deren Epigonen entgegenzuwirken".

111 Brinckmann (1943a), unpag. Original quotation: "jüdisch-dekadente".

112 Brinckmann (1943b), p. 17. Original quotation: "keine bestimmte Methode Schach zu spielen und läßt sich nicht in eine wohlformulierte Dienstanweisung fassen, sondern 'Kampfschach' ist eine Haltung, die gebietet, daß man sich in jedem Augenblick und unter vollem Kräfteinsatz um die in der Partie gestellten Probleme bemüht und um die angemessene Form der Lösung. Daß man den Schweiß der Bequemlichkeit vorzieht und die Gefahr liebt, daß man den schöpferischen Einfall höher wertet als die brillante, aber inhaltsleere Technik."

113 Diemer (1943), p. 3. Original quotation: "Ideal des echten Schachkämpfers".

114 See Negele (2009), pp. 501–502.

and his own books – though under bad economic conditions that earned him no more than 200 Reichsmark a month. Even after he took up a position in the Baden-Baden tax office in 1940, which he held until April 1945, he continued to appear in chess publications; in 1943, for example, he provoked angry reactions when he accused the barely adult world-class player Klaus Junge of a lack of *Kampfschach*, thereby placing him close to the above-mentioned stereotypes that were attributed to Jewish players in the German Reich at the time.¹¹⁵

Chess not only had its own language and discourse, but also its own visual language, which centred around the visual impression of the chessboard with its 64 black and white squares. This offered many opportunities to visually establish connections between the world of chess and the Nazi regime. In terms of content, this connection could be superficial, for example when Nazi emblems such as those of the KdF or DAF complemented the visual impression of chess boards, players and spectators at simultaneous events and were presented accordingly in publicity.¹¹⁶ The iconographic image of Klaus Junge with a swastika armband also belongs in this category, although this could of course be interpreted as a connection between the young, tall, white, “Aryan” top player and the Nazi regime. The use of the chessboard motif for a Nazi propaganda poster for the referendum of 29 March 1936 on the authorisation to occupy the Rhineland had similar associative potential. The black and white of the chessboard and its figures fitted perfectly into the typical black, white and red colour scheme that gave National Socialist visual propaganda with the swastika its peculiar aesthetic. The motif was obviously intended to suggest an association with Hitler’s strategic foresight and genius.¹¹⁷ The specific visual core element of the GSB, which was used in various places such as on the cover of the *Deutsche Schachblätter*¹¹⁸ or on signs for club premises,¹¹⁹ consisted of a chessboard with the eagle placed above it. The eagle’s head was turned to the right and, based on a decree from 1936, it was not the imperial eagle but the party eagle.¹²⁰ This core visual element also corresponded to the federal badge authorised by the Reich Ministry of the Interior in 1934, which was a pin. However, at that time the eagle was still interpreted as the imperial eagle, which replaced the royal crown previously placed there (see Figures 1 to 4).¹²¹

115 Cf. LABW, Sigmaringen State Archives, Wü 13 T2 No. 2491/009, unpag.: Emil Joseph Diemer’s letter to Chief Tax Inspector Steiner, Baden-Baden, undated (received 8 October 1940), Diemer’s questionnaire from the *Gouvernement Militaire En Allemagne* dated 2 August 1948, and the judgement of Spruchkammer VI, Staatskommissariat für politische Säuberung, Land Württemberg-Hohenzollern, session of 17 March 1949. See also Negele (2009), pp. 493–531, especially pp. 500–511; however, here Diemer’s career path during the Nazi era is in part inaccurately portrayed and his anti-Semitism played down.

116 Cf. Pfau (1942), p. 4.

117 See also Witamwas (2016), in particular pp. 41–45; Roller (2002), p. 45.

118 Cf. *Deutsche Schachblätter* (1938), No. 15, 01.08.1938, title (cover).

119 Cf. Post (1933b), p. 340.

120 See Paul (2020), p. 413.

121 Cf. N.N. (1934a), p. 149.



Figure 1: The 18-year-old world-class player Klaus Junge. Source: N.N. (1942c), p. 34. Author of the picture: unknown.

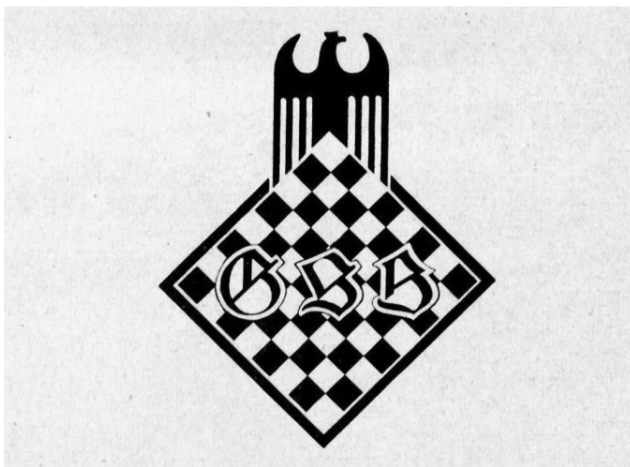


Figure 2: The emblem of the GSB. Source: Deutsche Schachblätter (1937), No. 1, title page.



Figure 3: Nazi propaganda poster on the occasion of the referendum of 29 March 1936. Source: BArch, Plak 003-002-048. Author of the image: unknown.



Figure 4: Chess compositions by Sebastian Mühlhaller. Source: Grützner (1938), p. 14.

However, the world of chess and the Nazi regime were also visually linked through more subtle practices. This was evident, for example, in the field of chess composition, also known as *Kunstschach* (artistic chess) or *Problemschach* (chess composition). In this part of the chess cosmos, intellectual tinkerers devise positional pictures that conform to the rules. The task is often for one side to achieve a win or draw, often directly by mate or stalemate in a precisely defined number of moves. Other chess compositions emphasise the geometric logic inherent in a square board with eight by eight squares, and still others strive for positional pictures whose appeal lies in their mere visual impression.¹²⁴ The three compositions by Sebastian Mühl­taller shown above represent a special variation. Born in 1895 and severely injured in the First World War, Mühl­taller developed into an intellectual tinkerer without any school-leaving qualifications or studies. He attended the Technical School for Master Craftsmen (Fachschule für Werkmeister) and passed his master craftsman’s examination in 1923. From 1931 to 1945, he worked at the Agfa camera factory in Munich as a department head and foreman below the factory manager. He also composed chess problems, which appeared regionally and nationwide in general newspapers and magazines as well as in chess magazines. They were widely distributed.¹²⁵ Mühl­taller’s triple combination was obviously published on the occasion of Hitler’s state visit to Mussolini in Rome in May 1938. Here, the initials of the two dictators and the swastika were painted on the board: not by placing the pieces, however, but by the paths that the mating pieces travelled.¹²⁶ As early as 1933, Mühl­taller had placed two compositions dedicated to the “great leader and people’s chancellor Adolf Hitler” in the extraordinarily wide-reaching magazine *Illustrierter Beobachter*, whose pieces drew an “A” and an “H” on the chessboard.¹²⁷ Apart from this, Mühl­taller did not appear in public in a way that would have made him stand up for National Socialism in any particular way. Towards the end of the Weimar Republic, he was apparently still leaning towards the Bavarian People’s Party, only joining the NSDAP in 1941 and leaving again at the end of 1944.¹²⁸ Similar to Raneforth’s “language cleansing”, the idea of focussing on the visual moment in a composition was by no means new, but the content was.¹²⁹

Perhaps the most direct attempt to link the world of chess and the Nazi regime was based on a long-established cultural practice. Attempts to develop politically and militarily charged variants of chess date back to the 17th century.¹³⁰ Even the *Webrschach Tak-Tik* (defence chess Tak-Tik) had by no means “merely adopted the fighting idea and the name from the old chess”.¹³¹ On the enlarged chessboard with

124 See Ehn/Kastner (2013), pp. 10–15.

125 Cf. Palatz (1936), pp. 77–78; Richter (1941), p. 101.

126 Cf. the three chess compositions by Sebastian Mühl­taller, illustrated in: Grützner (1938), p. 14.

127 See Benzinger (1933), p. 1378. Original quotation: “großen Führer und Volkskanzler Adolf Hitler”. Cf. also Dussel (2019), p. 49.

128 Cf. StAM, SpkA K 1201 (Sebastian Mühl­taller), unpag.: Questionnaire from the Military Government of Germany, signed. Sebastian Mühl­taller, 01.11.1945.

129 Cf. Palitzsch (1912/1913), p. 261, where the number “10” and the abbreviation “PS” are shown in two diagrams with the arrangement of the stones.

130 See Strouhal (2018), pp. 240–243; Scheffknecht/Strouhal (2016), pp. 218–219.

131 But Schmeißer (1938), p. 5. Original quotation: “vom alten Schach lediglich die Kampfidee und den Namen übernommen”. See also Bruns (2003), pp. 166–167, there also fn. 467.

eleven horizontal and eleven vertical rows, two diagonals marked a river and a main road or railway line, two horizontal lines marked deployment areas and two squares represented lake areas. One player led the red pieces, the other the blue ones. Instead of the pieces (officers) in chess, there were types of weapons used in modern warfare, such as “fighter pilot pieces” (Jagdfliegerfiguren). The “main piece” (Hauptfigur) replaced the king, which no longer had a place in the Nazi dictatorship. There were far more rules than in chess, which gave the game its order.¹³²

While *Webrschach* was more of a version of classical chess that had been enriched with complexity, its inventors distinguished it from the latter in terms of the philosophy of the game. “The chess world of recent decades has almost completely lost its original inner relationship to the essence of the royal game”, it is “completely spiritualised”, the pieces merely serve “an abstract battle of ideas”. In short: chess has “become an end in itself, so to speak”.¹³³ The purpose that the creators of *Webrschach* had in store for it corresponded in many ways to the attempts already considered to charge classical chess with National Socialist meaning: *Webrschach* was explicitly intended to familiarise players with operational warfare and to convey the warfare of modern times. The game was intended to serve military education and strengthen the bond between the “people and the Wehrmacht”.¹³⁴ And, as with chess, *Webrschach* was elevated to a school of character for the individual, a “means of cultivating and maintaining mental alertness” and an art. With a view to the people, it was valuable, instructive and contributed to education. In practice, competitions were to be played with chess clocks, the foundation of a *Webrschach* association was envisaged, as was scientific research into the new game.¹³⁵

It is unclear how widespread *Webrschach* actually was in the German Reich. The game is said to have attracted considerable interest during the war.¹³⁶ However, the news that the “bunker game of the front” had experienced a “triumphal march through Greater Germany” since its introduction and that there were 750,000 followers in the Wehrmacht and police, the SS and SA as well as the Hitler Youth and KdF and others seems more than exaggerated.¹³⁷ In any case, *Webrschach* seems to have played only a very subordinate role compared to traditional chess and other games.¹³⁸

The advocates of *Webrschach* quickly came up against systemic limitations – it was not even wanted in this form by the Nazi regime. After the introduction of the game

132 Cf. Schmeißer (1938), pp. 7–25.

133 Ibid, p. 4. Original quotations: “Die Schachwelt der letzten Jahrzehnte hat die ursprüngliche innere Beziehung zum Wesen des königlichen Spiels fast gänzlich verloren”; “vollkommen vergeistigt”; “einer abstrakten Gedankenschlacht”; “gewissermaßen zum Selbstzweck geworden.”

134 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 6–7, quote p. 7. Original quotation: “Volk und Wehrmacht”.

135 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 25–27, quote p. 25. Original quotation: “Mittel zur Pflege und Erhaltung der geistigen Regsamkeit”.

136 *Webrschach* is said to have sold particularly well among the games in 1941, see N.N. (1941b), S. 4.

137 Cf. N.N. (1941a), p. 10, quotes *ibid.* Original quotations: “Bunkerspiel der Front”; “Siegeszug durch Großdeutschland”.

138 An example: In March 1942, the 24th Panzer Division stationed in Stablack in East Prussia received 200 sets of chess, mill and many other games, but only 30 sets of defence chess games, see Barch, RH 29-1/53, unpag.: report Abt. Ic, 24. Panzer-Division, 09.-15.03.1942.

in 1938¹³⁹, a hard core of supporters of the game had developed. A Greater German Defence Chess Interest Group (Großdeutsche Wehrschach-Interessen-Gemeinschaft) had been founded, which drew on plenty of support from the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS, authorities, NSDAP offices and front-line fighters. The “Wehrschach sports news” (Wehrschach-Sportnachrichten) was first published in the spring of 1941, which was later allegedly sent to the front in four-digit numbers “to serve troop support, military education and military propaganda”. At the end of 1942, it stated that the coming year would bring “the decisive battle in the tough struggle for the further development and solid existence of the Greater German Defence Chess Interest Group, which we want to shape into a powerful organisation that is recognised and supported by the state and party for its achievements”.¹⁴⁰ The number of members, who had to be “Aryan” and pay a generous monthly subscription of one Reichsmark, was to rise to over 10,000. Always with the ideological dimension in mind, the commitment of the *Wehrschach* athletes was elevated to an important “building block in the intellectual defence front against Bolshevism and world plutocracy”.¹⁴¹

It was not only this belligerent style of language that aroused the suspicion of Walter Tießler, who served Goebbels as liaison between the Party Chancellery and the Reich Ministry of Propaganda,¹⁴² and Otto Schmidt from the Rosenberg office. Among other things, they criticised the *Wehrschach* emblem, which included a swastika without official approval, “expressions and designations that are reserved exclusively for National Socialist propaganda and training work on the one hand and for Wehrmacht and front reports on the other”, as well as the publication of the Wehrschach sports news.¹⁴³ At first it seemed that this criticism had brought order. Hugo Lamp from the interest group complied with the demand from the Reich Ministry of Propaganda and vowed to have a new emblem developed and approved.¹⁴⁴ However, the latter took place in the same month, with the blunt request for rapid fulfilment.¹⁴⁵ This annoyed the party office to no end. It not only declared its disinterest in the *Wehrschach* interest group. While the state and party were focusing all their energies on the war in accordance with Hitler’s mandate, “this Mr Lamp is bothering the offices with completely irrelevant and superfluous enquiries about the

139 See Scheffknecht/Strouhal (2016), pp. 220–221.

140 Cf. BArch, NS 18/947, p. 2 (title page), citations *ibid.*: Wehrschach-Nachrichten, “Großdeutsche Wehrschach-Interessen-Gemeinschaft e.V.”, undated [end of 1942]. Original quotations: “um der Truppenbetreuung, der Wehrerziehung und der Wehrpropaganda zu dienen”; “die Entscheidungsschlacht im harten Ringen um den weiteren Aufbau und den festen Bestand der Großdeutschen Wehrschach-Interessengemeinschaft, die wir zu einer machtvollen, von Staat und Partei wegen ihrer Leistungen anerkannten und unterstützten Organisation gestalten wollen.”

141 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 2 (reverse), quote *ibid.* Original quotation: “Baustein in der geistigen Abwehrfront gegen Bolschewismus und Weltplutokratie”.

142 Cf. Longerich (2010), pp. 590–591.

143 Cf. BArch, NS 18/947, p. 10, quotations *ibid.*: Walter Tießler’s letter of 28 January 1943 to Hugo Lamp. Original quotation: “Ausdrücke und Bezeichnungen, die einerseits ausschließlich der nationalsozialistischen Propaganda und Schulungsarbeit und andererseits den Wehrmachts- und Frontberichten vorbehalten sind”.

144 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 17: Hugo Lamp’s letter of 13 February 1943 to the Reich Propaganda Directorate.

145 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 23, quote *ibid.*: Hugo Lamp’s letter of 17 February 1943 to the Reich Propaganda Directorate, Reichsring Main Office.

organisational intentions of his association, whose necessity for the war is more than doubtful”.¹⁴⁶ In a more conciliatory tone, Tießler informed Lamp accordingly and recommended that he cultivate *Wehrschach* with his like-minded friends without any further activities.¹⁴⁷ But that didn’t stop Lamp. Just over three months later he sent Tießler a new emblem design. Now Tießler wanted to approve the emblem – “so that he wouldn’t bother us any more” – if the Party Chancellery had no objections to the new symbol.¹⁴⁸ At the end of that month, Lamp received approval for the new symbol of the *Wehrschach* interest group.¹⁴⁹ Similar to the “German Chess” by Edmund Nebermann mentioned at the beginning, the zeal of individual chess enthusiasts, who sought to link the chess world with the Nazi regime through individual appropriation, no longer recognised the limits of their enthusiasm. These limits lay in the interests of the Nazi regime.

One event format can be seen as the essence of the connections between the Nazi regime and chess: the simultaneous exhibition.¹⁵⁰ It combined the sources of these connections, namely organisation, interaction and individual appropriation. These events served the players, both exhibitor and his opponents, the GSB, the organising associations and clubs and, last but not least, the Nazi regime itself. This was particularly true during the war, whereby a distinction must be made between two forms of simultaneous exhibitions: On the one hand, those held as part of the above-mentioned “Chess Aid for Soldiers”, in which the GSB and KdF acted as organisers and members of the Wehrmacht were the opponents in the simultaneous exhibitions; on the other hand, the usual simultaneous events, which were open to all simultaneous players and were organised by clubs and associations.¹⁵¹ Players of the regional, national and international elite, including world chess champion Alekhine and Bogoljubov, served as exhibitors. The chess journals of the time are full of reports of such events, which were organised throughout the Reich and in the occupied territories.¹⁵² Even though simultaneous exhibitions did little to advance top players in terms of play, they did offer them an opportunity to earn money.¹⁵³

146 Ibid., p. 21: Note from Bühler, Party Chancellery, dated 3 March 1943 for Walter Tießler. Original quotation: “belästigt dieser Herr Lamp die Dienststellen mit vollkommen unwesentlichen und überflüssigen Anfragen über organisatorische Absichten seines Vereins, dessen Kriegsnotwendigkeit mehr als zweifelhaft ist.” The name “Lamp” is blocked out in the original.

147 Ibid., p. 25: Walter Tießler’s letter of 5 March 1943 to Hugo Lamp.

148 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 29, quotation *ibid.*: Walter Tießler’s note dated 18 June 1943 for Bühler, Party Chancellery. Original quote: “damit er uns nicht weiter behelligt”.

149 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 31: Letter from Friedrich Hudolin, Reich Propaganda Directorate, dated 26 June 1943 to Hugo Lamp.

150 Remarkably, there is still no in-depth study of the history of the simultaneous event.

151 See Rohrer (2021), pp. 54–55.

152 Cf. Rogmann (1942), pp. 12–14; N.N. (1943a), pp. 53–54; N.N. (1943b), pp. 55–57; McGowan (2018), pp. 231–232; Magacs/Negele (2017), p. 201.

153 Rohrer (2021), p. 55. The top players certainly encountered strong opponents time and again, cf. Rogmann (1940), pp. 47–48. After a simultaneous event, Alekhine praised the fact that it “stood out from similar events in military hospitals due to the considerable skill of his opponents. He had already lost one game, but not two as in Gießen.” N.N. (1942b), unpag. Original quotation: “sich durch beachtliches Können seiner Gegner von ähnlichen Veranstaltungen in Lazaretten abhob. Eine Partie habe er dabei schon verloren, nicht aber zwei wie in Gießen.” Alekhine assigned a special value to simultaneous games, namely to sharpen one’s own game in terms of openings and playing technique against the usually much weaker opponents, cf. Alekhine (1963), p. 1. Bogoljubov, on

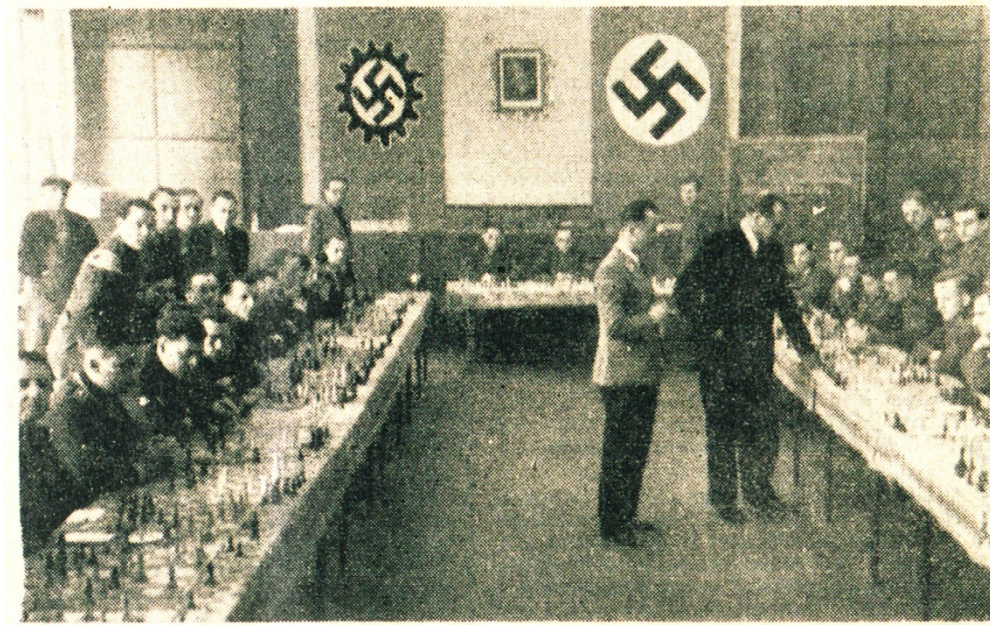


Figure 5: In the *Mühlbauer Tagblatt*, world chess champion Alexander Alekhine (standing, right) was shown playing a simultaneous game with soldiers, with prominent swastikas. Source: Pfau (1942), p. 4. Author of the picture: "Boetsch".

Staged as a performative social practice, simultaneous exhibitions were very well suited as an expression of the *Volksgemeinschaft* that could be experienced in reality: the unknown amateur, who otherwise only knew the brilliant moves of the top player from the newspapers, could compete against the famous master at eye level, surrounded by numerous spectators interested in chess. As these events were particularly aimed at Wehrmacht soldiers, the connection between front-line soldier and home front could be epitomised for the usually numerous spectators. In addition, these events were a stage on which the Nazi regime could be presented in a visually powerful way. The emblems of the DAF and KdF, the swastika set in a cogwheel (and in the case of the KdF also in a ship's propeller), stood visually and symbolically for the *Volksgemeinschaft*. It seemed to be realised in the present through visibility practices such as fundraising, travel or simultaneous exhibitions, and at the same time was a goal to be achieved fully in the future. By participating in such events, society met the *Volksgemeinschaft* offer from above through self-mobilisation from below. And finally, all these aspects were a raw material that could be utilised by reporters in the media propaganda; whether by the regular author of a chess newspaper with an enormous reach or by the local journalist, who presented his very own view of the event and often told the simultaneous exhibition as a heroic story and related it to the Nazi regime.¹⁵⁴

the other hand, is reported to have said in 1944 that he was fed up with the many undemanding simultaneous performances held in military hospitals, cf. Anderberg (2010), p. 48.

¹⁵⁴ For an example, see Pfau (1942), p. 4; for the context, see Paul (2020), pp. 413–422.

6. Concluding remarks

If one imagined the chess world and the Nazi regime abstractly as two elements within National Socialist Germany, strong threads would connect the two organisations, the Nazi state and the NSDAP – directly and mediated via social function systems, above all that of the media – with their subordinate organisations, the GSB and the KdF chess department. The Nazi regime turned chess from an end in itself into a means to an end and demanded that it make itself useful for the new political and ideological order. The GSB – and later also the KdF chess department – complied willingly: Through chess-related derivations of National Socialist ideology, it served as an organisation for the claimed development of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, excluded Jews from the association, introduced chess into schools as a means of education and contributed to *Wehrhaftmachung* by supporting soldiers. In return, the GSB and KdF chess enjoyed a wide range of personnel, organisational and financial support from the Nazi regime. The GSB was thus able to ensure the actual game operations throughout the Reich, organise international elite tournaments and assume the leading role in the Nazi-dominated European chess region. The KdF chess department joined the GSB under considerable tension and expanded its organisational coverage to include companies and the leisure sector. It can be assumed that the GSB and KdF chess thus fulfilled their organisational purpose for most of their members.

The GSB and KdF also created functional equivalents for not being able to overcome a limit set by the specific nature of the game, namely to turn chess into a National Socialist game, as it were: The importance and success of Jewish people in chess simply could not be erased, no matter how hard it was tried. Ultimately, the means of choice was to deny, overplay and drown out this influence. There is no doubt that organised chess was politically instrumentalised in National Socialist Germany. At the same time, however, GSB and KdF chess also utilised the Nazi regime for their own purposes; many of their members would probably have regarded the years from 1933 to 1945 as a heyday of chess in Germany.

However, the chess world in the German Reich was not only connected to the Nazi regime by strong threads, but also by more subtle ones. Enthusiasts spun such threads locally, regionally and throughout the Reich, using the cultural practice of individual appropriation to charge chess with content that was also very popular with the Nazi regime. This could lead to the reporter of the local newspaper writing his report on a simultaneous exhibition in the style of a heroic story, emphasising the proximity of chess, the Wehrmacht and the Nazi regime. However, only intellectual inventors who independently developed aspects of chess, were passionate about spreading their ideas and also found ways to disseminate these ideas, achieved nationwide significance. Such individual appropriations can be found, for example, in the language of chess, in the typical discourses cultivated in chess journalism, in the visual language and in chess variants such as *Webrschach*. These enthusiasts and intellectual tinkerers brought chess back to where it had always been – into the breadth of human culture, albeit now enriched with National Socialist or related content. They were able to build on the fact that for decades and centuries, chess had links in many directions beyond the actual game itself – such as science, art and language – and was also publicly present beyond the actual game through these

aspects; especially as this publicity could be created practically without loss of information and comparatively effortlessly through text and visual representations.

This also indicates that the multifaceted nature of chess is Janus-faced: It was and is a neutral platform, which makes it susceptible to being enriched with non-chess, particularistic content. For this reason, chess could be used for political purposes in a comparable way in communist regimes, and to this day, people and organisations in the chess world have repeatedly come into ominous proximity with dictators and dictatorships.¹⁵⁵ This is only possible because the values embedded in chess culture – such as equality, fairness, sportsmanship, objectivity and the idea of “gens una sumus” – are hollow. They exist, but they are not always practised by everyone or simply pushed aside when it seems useful. There are many reasons for this, certainly not least the inability of chess to finance itself due to its lack of performative appeal.

Undoubtedly, the connections between the chess world and the Nazi regime were strengthened by such finer threads, by cross-bracing as it were. Though the connection seems unlikely at first glance, the time-honoured royal game and the brutal regime were intertwined in many ways. For the time being, however, only one hypothesis can be put forward to answer the question of what effects these links had: The strong and finer threads, because they had the thrust of both organisation and individual initiative that encompassed all ranges, contributed in their own way to the normalisation and stabilisation of the Nazi regime. A small role, certainly, but together with many other small parts an important one nonetheless.

155 See Bastian (2019), pp. 12–19.

List of Abbreviations

BArch	Bundesarchiv
BayHStA	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront
DSB	Deutscher Schachbund
DSG	Deutsche Schachgemeinschaft
GSB	Großdeutscher Schachbund
KdF	Kraft durch Freude
LABW	Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg
N.N.	Nomen nescio (unknown author)
NS	Nationalsozialismus
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
SA	Sturmabteilung
SS	Schutzstaffel
StAM	Staatsarchiv München
unpag.	unpaginated
USA	United States of America

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