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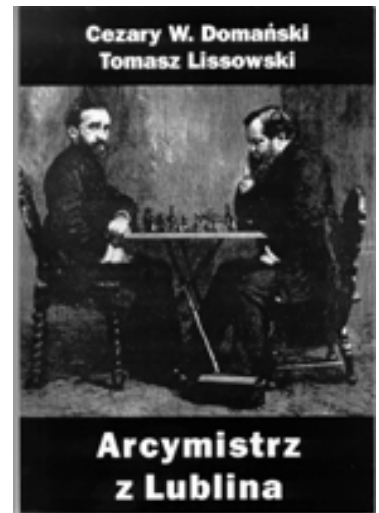
## The Definitive Portion of Sugar Tart

Marek Soszynski

*Arcymistrz z Lublina*, by Cezary W. Domański and Tomasz Lissowski, 2002, Wydawnictwo Szachowe "Penelopa" (Warsaw), Softcover, Polish Algebraic Notation, 279 pp.

The full title of this Polish book is, in translation, *Grandmaster from Lublin: Truth and legend about Johannes Hermann Zukertort, leading 19<sup>th</sup> century chessplayer, world championship match participant.*

The writers are the Polish historians Cezary Domański, and the better-known Tomasz Lissowski. The latter has co-authored other chess biographies, including one of Lionel Kieseritzky – see my book review entitled “Immortal Loser” in the [ChessCafe Archives](#). What I said of that book applies as much to this Zukertort one; it is “obviously the result of painstaking research not just reaching for well-known sources, but actively pursuing rare archival material, in several countries and in several languages. The result is a packed, authoritative work that tries to unravel some questions about his life...”



This deep study is very necessary in Zukertort’s case because his life has attracted probably more exaggerations and fictions – carelessly repeated even to this day – than any other chessplayer’s. It is entertaining to read in detail about the many false claims made about him: that he was born in Dublin... had English roots... studied at Cambridge University... was a decorated war hero... edited a political journal... was one of the strongest whist players in the world... spent time among the



Zulus... became a British citizen... was a leading spokesperson for prison reform... etc. Yet how on earth did such untruths originate? Doma•ski and Lissowski trace the sources and admit:

*Our hero was not blameless here; despite being aware of falsifications about himself, he did nothing to rectify them. It seems that sometimes he even threw in something new, and no doubt was amused over how a casually made remark started to develop into the next biographical myth. (p. 267.)*

So what was the real truth that the careful authors uncovered? Remember that their conclusions were, wherever possible, based on original documentation. The book reproduces some of the relevant passports, marriage certificates, school reports, and so on. And besides that, there are lots of images, a few maps, and several full articles or lengthy extracts (translated into Polish) from journals such as the *Neue Berliner Schachzeitung* and the *British Chess Magazine*.

The book is arranged as follows:

- In Place of an Introduction
  - I Youth
  - II Tough start
  - III Road to the top
  - IV Rise and fall
  - V Decline
  - VI Myths, legends and causes
  - VII Family tree and biographies
  - VIII Psychological portrait of the chessplayer
  - IX Index of names

Here is a biographical summary of what Doma•ski and Lissowski discovered:

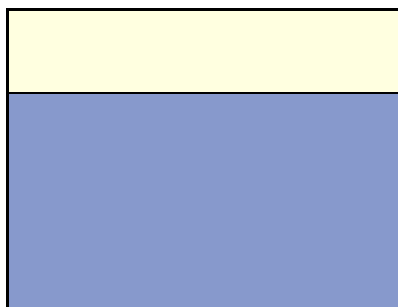
Jan Herman Cukiertort was born 7<sup>th</sup> September 1842 in Lublin, in the Russian-ruled Kingdom of Poland, into an affluent family of Polish-Jewish origins. (His father had converted to Christianity several years previously.) In 1855 his family moved to Breslau (Wroc•aw) in Prussia, and from that time his surname is written Germanically as “Zukertort.” (A literal translation would be “Sugarcake” or “Sugar Tart,” hence the titles of this review and the article on Zukertort by Tim Harding in the **ChessCafe**

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Archives.)

Zukertort was a bright boy (though no genius), with a good memory, an aptitude for languages, and an early interest in mathematics. He learnt chess in his teens, and did not acquire his own set until he was 16.

He enrolled as a student in the Department of Medicine at Breslau university in 1861, and also joined a chess club where he met and befriended the great Adolf Anderssen, winner of the London tournament in 1851. They were to play innumerable casual games against each other, and later compete in serious events, though it was some years before Zukertort became the stronger of the two.

Zukertort never completed his medical studies. One of the surprise discoveries by Domanski and Lissowski was that Zukertort was suspected by the university authorities of participating in the January Insurrection of 1863 when there was a rebellion by Poles in the neighboring Kingdom – but it seems that was not a major factor in his failure. His fiancée died unexpectedly, and concurrently his motivation for achieving the stable profession of a doctor. Not then, nor later, did he become a doctor of anything; instead he was devoting more and more time to chess.

In 1867 he headed for Berlin where he co-edited the *Neue Berliner Schachzeitung* with Anderssen, though it was Zukertort who did the majority of the work. He started to gain an excellent reputation for himself with his blindfold simultaneous displays, chess books, and increasingly good performances against the best players around.

In 1872 he moved to London, then the base of the world's leading player, William Steinitz. Whereas Steinitz was a Jekyll and Hyde character, at his worst rude, demanding and argumentative (to say the least), Zukertort was a cosmopolitan figure, talkative, witty and affable. Many in England were pleased that at last here was a “decent” rival for the disliked Steinitz.

During his time in England Zukertort achieved his peak performances. He easily won matches against the Reverend John Owen (1878), Joseph Blackburne (1881), and others. Then in 1883 came the marathon London tournament. Zukertort played marvelously, and had already achieved a victorious margin with three rounds to go, but lost all those three as a result of some sort

of breakdown. He still won the tournament (ahead of Steinitz, Blackburne, and Chigorin), but what actually happened to him towards the end? Doma•ski and Lissowski point to his general and increasingly poor health:

*He was troubled by such afflictions as a cardiac defect, rheumatism, and coronary heart disease, and suffered from insomnia. [...] Besides that he suffered from hypertension, kidney problems, and progressive arteriosclerosis. Some of these illnesses may have had their origins in his lifestyle and diet, others accompanied him since childhood. (p. 269.)*

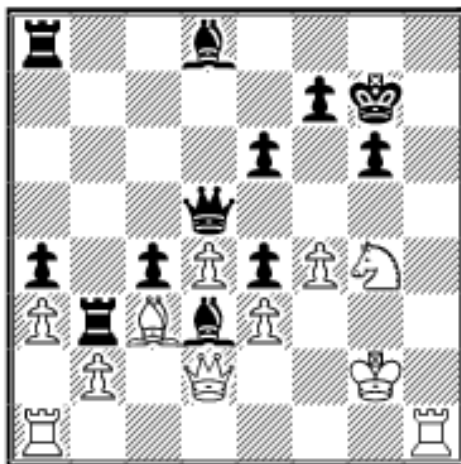
No wonder then, if he was taking digitalis (which strengthens the action of the heart) and other strong medication. But what about the allegation that he was using narcotics? The authors dismiss this in a single sentence:

*It seems that the reporting of his digitalis treatment underwent distortion and exaggeration over time. (p. 208, n. 12.)*

After the London tournament Steinitz left for the USA. For a world championship match to take place between the obvious candidates, Zukertort had to follow him in pursuit and play him there. After protracted negotiations the 20•game match finally started on January 11, 1886.

Zukertort began very well, led 4-1, but then won only one game from the remaining fifteen. In the end he lost 7½-12½. Zukertort's health had been worsening, meanwhile Steinitz was outthinking him positionally. There are not that many games in the book, and just 34 diagrams, but some crucial moments from this match (and the London tournament) are discussed and lightly analyzed with the help of Polish GM Bart•omiej Macieja. A separate book/CD of all of Zukertort's games is planned.

*In the third game Zukertort repeated, with a small modification, the variation of the first game, and soon fell into great difficulties. To avoid the worst, he gave up a pawn, and his defeat seemed just a question of time. Meanwhile in the second session Steinitz realized his strategic plan a bit too simple-mindedly, and overlooked a smart blow that altered the fate of the game. (p. 165.)*



Zukertort–Steinitz, World  
Championship, 1886

39...Ba5? 40.Rh7+! Kf8  
41.Rh8+ Kg7 42.Rh7+ Kf8  
43.Qf2! Bd8 44.Ne5 Kg8  
45.Rah1 Bf6 46.Rxf7 Rf8  
47.Rxf6! 1-0.

Zukertort returned to England  
“a broken man.” Whether or  
not Tarrasch was right that

“the match with Steinitz killed him,” Zukertort’s health and his chess were now in clear decline. In his last tournaments he achieved only mediocre results. In the end he suffered a brain hemorrhage during a casual game in Simpson’s Divan in London. It appears that instead of immediately being rushed to hospital, he was first taken unconscious to another chess club! Anyway, his life ended the next day 20<sup>th</sup> June 1888; he was 46. He died neither of hunger nor in poverty, as some writers have since claimed. His (now unmarked) burial plot in Brompton Cemetery in London has been tracked down. The book has a map of the site, and a color photograph of the precise location.

I like this book a lot. There is the worthy historical research interspersed by contemporary accounts; while for light relief there are the half-truths and legends (some quite ridiculous) – Doma•ski and Lissowski are happy to quote, analyze, and refute these at length, which adds considerably to the entertainment value of the book. I know that many chessplayers are normally put off by the thought of reading a text•heavy chess book, but in this case there are just enough games to satisfy them, some tall tales to entertain them, and plenty of pictures to break up the flow.

The only thing holding this book back is the fact that it is in Polish, and available only in small quantities (which is why the **ChessCafe** cannot normally supply it). It certainly deserves to be translated.

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*Yes, it does. We are pleased to inform our readers  
that an agreement has been reached with the*

*authors to publish an English edition, to be translated by none other than Marek Soszynski. Work has already begun and we hope to release the English version in mid-2003.*

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