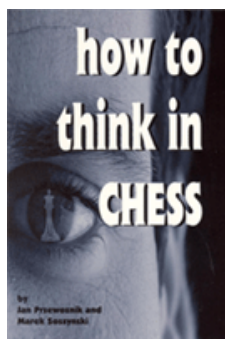




## COLUMNISTS

### *Dutch Treat*

Hans Ree



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## Two Historians

About a month ago *Time* magazine had an [article](#) by Anand about the origin of chess. This is a subject about which much has been written, but as far as I know a general consensus has not been reached.

Most chess historians consider India to be the cradle of chess, because the first references to a precursor of our game occur in Indian literature from the 6th century A.D. However, claims for China have also been made.

Anand wrote in *Time* that over the years he had had many conversations about the origin of chess, not only with chessplayers, but also with cab drivers and hairdressers. Russians, Chinese, Arabs, Ukrainians, Iranians, Turks, Spaniards and Greeks had all told him that the origin of chess was to be found in their country.



Viswanathan Anand

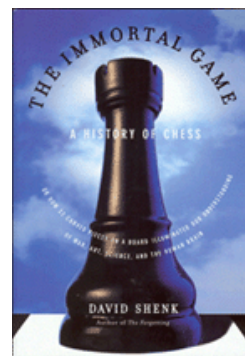
I can believe that they told him so, as a lot of talk is going on in cabs and hairdresser's saloons and what's more, you can't think of a staggering claim or there will be someone who is seriously propagating it.

To mention an example from my own country, Iman Wilkens, an economist born in the Dutch province Zeeland, published a book in 1990 in which he expounded his theory that Homer came from Zeeland and that the *Odyssey* describes Odysseus' travels, not as we think on the Mediterranean between Asia Minor and Greece, but on the North Sea between England and Zeeland.

As usual with such theories, everything fits: the goddess Circe – in her name we still recognise the present Zeeland town Zierikzee – conjured Odysseus' companions into pigs at the Zeeland sandbank Berendam, a name that would be Pigsdam (male pigs, that is) in English.

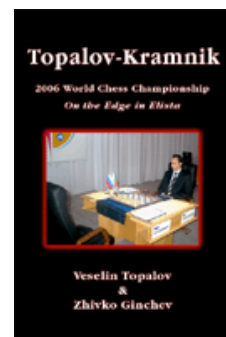
And in the chess world we know that Garry Kasparov is an adherent of the Russian historical school that expounds the 'New Chronology,' which claims that Greek and Roman antiquity never existed and that the events described by the so-called 'old Greeks and Romans' actually took place in Western Europe during the Middle Ages.

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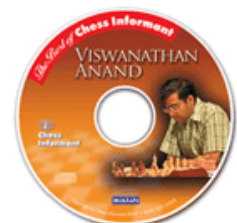
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[Viswanathan Anand](#)

Fine for Anand that he didn't allow himself to be confused by the talk of Ukrainian and Spanish cab drivers, but nevertheless, what he wrote about the Indian origin of chess was decidedly unusual, though not on the same level of weirdness as Wilkens' or Kasparov's theories.

Mainline chess historians have found the first references to a precursor of chess around 600 A.D., but Anand claimed to have seen much earlier references, and not in obscure or recently discovered sources, but in classical works of Indian literature which have been studied meticulously for centuries, without historians finding chess there: the Ramayana, an epic that dates from many centuries B.C., and the Arthashastra, a political manual from about the third century B.C.

Contrary to Kasparov's New Chronology, that pushes 'classical antiquity' more than a thousand years forward into history, Anand's New Chess Chronology seems to push the origin of chess at least a thousand years backward. I was surprised when I read his article, for I think of him as a man of a scientific bent, not at all prone to fantasy.

The gist of that article was published on the Chessbase site. Frederic Friedel, Chessbase's boss, seemed to be surprised as well, for he commented that he expected chess historians to react to Anand's claims. But apparently no such reactions were received, as Chessbase didn't publish a follow-up.

Regrettably we are unlikely to see a serious chess battle between Kasparov and Anand in the future, but we may imagine a battle between them at a conference of historians.

Anand would explain that according to Indian literature chess is at least a thousand years older than generally thought. Garry would protest: "Oh, no, Vishy, that can't be true, for the first written documents of human civilisation date only from about 1100 A.D."

Mainstream historians would fear to tread into this argument and keep silent.

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