

A Fake Chess Photograph

Edward Winter

(2004)



It has frequently been stated that this photograph of Alekhine and Capablanca was taken in 1927, but it is a demonstrable fake. The matter has been discussed in a series of C.N. items, and a digest of them (slightly edited) is presented below.

Luca D'Ambrosio (Bolzano, Italy) asks for information about the well-known photograph of Alekhine and Capablanca, which is generally said to have been taken during their 1927 world championship match. Mr D'Ambrosio considers that there are sufficient unnatural points (lighting, background, etc.) to suggest that it is a montage. We offer a number of observations:

1) The photograph is to be found on, for example, page 165 of *Aleksandr Alekhin - nepobezhdennyi chempion*

Schachgenie Aljechin

1992) and in editions of volume one in Kasparov's *Predecessors*

by Y.N. Shaburov (Moscow, 1992), page 164 of *Das*

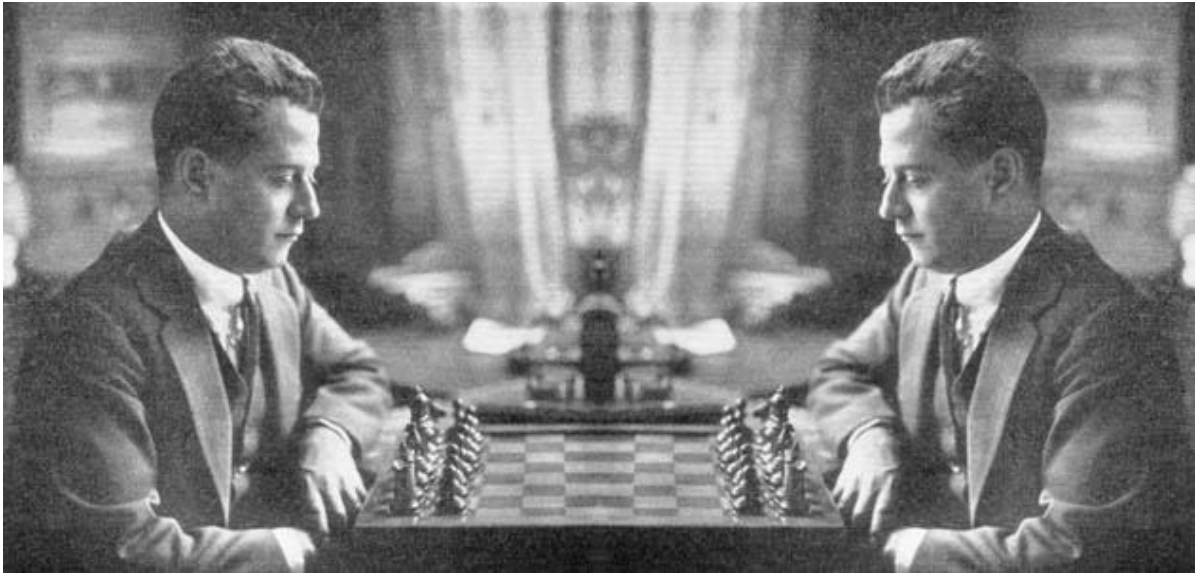
by I. and W. Linder (Berlin,

series

which have illustrations (e.g. the Russian and Italian versions).

2) Capablanca appears in a reverse shot of the portrait given on page 14 of the '1. Extra-Ausgabe' of *Kagans Neueste Schachnachrichten*, published in late 1925 or early 1926.

This picture was also the illustration in the Wildhagen volume on Capablanca (Hamburg, 1963). [Later, C.N. 3519 reproduced the same photograph from opposite page 244 of the December 1925 issue of *L'Échiquier*.] For purposes of comparison with the above photograph, we give Capablanca facing in both directions:



3) The board position in the Alekhine-Capablanca photograph is identifiable as from Nimzowitsch v Alekhine, Semmering, 7 March 1926. Although we have not found such an Alekhine picture from that event, the tournament book by Robert Laseker (published in Mährisch-Ostrau in 1934) contains the following photograph of Gilg and Spielmann:



[C.N. 4532 remarked that when this picture was published on page 143 of the November 1926 *American Chess Bulletin* the third person was identified as 'Washburn Jr., son of the American Ambassador in Vienna'.]

It will be noted that the board, pieces, clock and background correspond to those in the Alekhine-Capablanca photograph.

4) Capablanca was not in Europe in 1926. Following the Moscow, 1925 tournament he reached Havana on 24 December 1925, and after his stay in Cuba he went to the United States in May 1926. (Sources: *American Chess Bulletin*, January 1926, page 3 and May-June 1926, page 70.)

5) In view of the foregoing we believe that the Alekhine-Capablanca photograph must indeed be regarded as a montage.

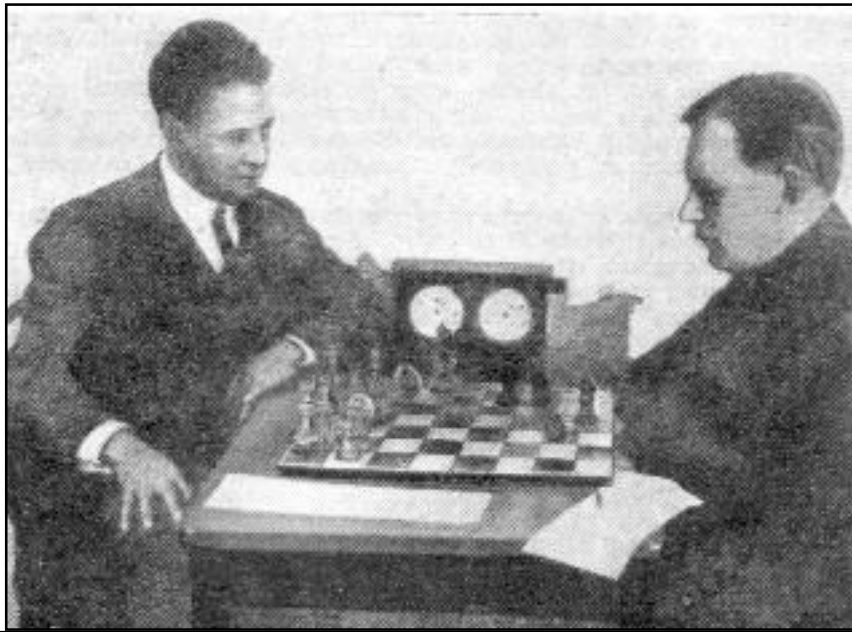
(3405)

We have now found that the Alekhine-Capablanca picture appeared in the book on the 1927 world title match edited by Alekhine's brother, Alexei, i.e. *Match na pervenstvo mira Alekhin-Capablanca* (Kharkov, 1927):



The caption asserts that the photograph was taken on the first day of the match.

We have also come across another Capablanca-Alekhine photograph which is a more obvious forgery:



It was given on page 267 of the December 1927 issue of the Swedish magazine *Schackvärlden*. The Capablanca part of the photograph is recognizable as coming from a shot of him with Emanuel Lasker (in Moscow in 1925). See, for instance, the picture section of the Dover reprint of the New York, 1924 tournament book. For some reason the manipulator altered the position and depicted the board the wrong way round.

(3513)

Birger Flindtholt (Randers, Denmark) writes:

I found an interesting drawing in a recently

acquired book,
 by Emanuel Lasker (4.
 Auflage, 1927). Bound
 together with the book
 was a German-language
 newspaper cutting
 reporting on the third
 round of the Moscow,
 1925 tournament and
 dated 13 November.
 The report included a
 sketch of Capablanca
 and Lasker seated at
 a chess board. The
 position on the board
 makes no sense.

Lehrbuch des Schachspiels

**Das Moskauer internationale
Schachturnier.**

Die dritte Runde: Capablanca remisiert.

Moskau, 13. November. Die dritte Runde des Moskauer Schachturniers begann bei ebenso riesigem Besuch wie die beiden vorhergehenden Runden.

Capablanca (weiß) remisierte wieder, und zwar mit Grünfeld in einer Damenbauerneröffnung in 22 Zügen und gab damit so zujagen die Parole für den Tag.

Die interessante italienische Partie Bogoljubow — Rubinstein wurde nach 47 Zügen gleichfalls remis.

Ebenso blieben unentschieden die Partien Spielmann — Bogatirschuk (abgelehntes Königsgambit), Sämisch — Rabinowitsch und Gotthilf — Pates (zwei Damenbauernspiele).

Auch die Partie Löwenfisch — Reti mit Wechselläuferabwehrung wurde remis.

Dagegen gewann Tartakower (weiß) in einem Damengambit gegen Werlinski und Genewski (schwarz) gegen Subarew in einer Zuckertorferöffnung.

Das spanische Spiel Lasker — Romanowitsch wurde in besserer Position für Lasker abgebrochen.

Die größte Aufmerksamkeit erweckte die Damengambitpartie Marshall — Torre die in besserer Position für den jungen Mexikaner abgebrochen wurde.

Dus-Chofimirski war spielfrei.

Strand nach der 3. Runde: Bogoljubow 2½, Rubinstein 2½, Marshall 2 (1), Dr. Tartakow 2, Romanowitsch, Rabinowitsch, Ilijn-Genewski 1½ (1), Capablanca, Bogatirschuk, Pates 1½, Torre 1 (1), Löwenfisch, Werlinski, Reti, Spielmann ½ (2), Dr. Lasker, Grünfeld ½ (1), Dus-Chofimirski, Sämisch ¼, Gotthilf ¼ (1), Subarew (0).

In der morgigen vierten Runde spielen folgende Paare: Grünfeld — Dr. Lasker, Pates — Capablanca, Rubinstein — Gotthilf, Rabinowitsch — Bogoljubow, Ilijn-Genewski — Sämisch, Bogatirschuk — Subarew, Werlinski — Spielmann, Reti — Dr. Tartakower, Torre — Löwenfisch, Dus-Chofimirski — Marshall, Romanowitsch ist spielfrei.



Capablanca. Dr. Lasker.



Capablanca and Lasker met in the first round of the Moscow tournament, on 10 November 1925, the opening being a Queen's Gambit Declined. The Capablanca sketch is evidently based on the photograph of him given in our earlier items and published on, for instance, page 14 of the '1. Extra-Ausgabe' of *Kagans Neueste Schachnachrichten* in late 1925 or early 1926, whereas the drawing of Lasker corresponds to a photograph given two pages earlier in the same issue:





(3610)

A postage stamp:



(3681)

The fake Alekhine v Capablanca photograph continues to crop up in various guises, and we recently even acquired a mousepad depicting it. As regards the Alekhine part of the picture, the German tobacco card below (which features A. Alekhine, V. Tietz and A. Nimzowitsch) may be noted, not least because C.N. 3513 reported that the board position in the Alekhine v Capablanca photograph was from Nimzowitsch v Alekhine, Semmering, 1926.



For another copy of the tobacco card, together with a discussion of the complete set, see pages 42-43 of the May 2005 *CHESS* (an article by Gareth Williams).

(3730)

Afterword : C.N. 4694 mentioned that the Alekhine part of the above tobacco card is a familiar photograph of Alekhine to be found on, for instance, page 72 of *Schach – ernst und heiter* by Rolf Voland (Berlin, 1981), but we have yet to find the full Alekhine-Nimzowitsch photograph. The main unresolved point in this affair is how the fake Alekhine-Capablanca photograph originated.

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