

ORIGINS OF GO IN EUROPE

Ervin Fink

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It was written by the late Ervin Fink of Yugoslavia, and distributed at the European congress in Zagreb in 1974. It contains an interesting eye witness account of the origins of Go in Europe.

We cannot be much in error if we say that the game of Go became known in Europe at the beginning of this century. Compared with chess, which has been played in Europe for some 400 years, the relatively late appearance of Go in Europe is surprising, since its origins date back about 4,000 years. After all, both chess and Go have much in common: both are board games played with two sets of pieces, both are games of intellect, and both originated in Asia.

There are probably many reasons for the late appearance of Go in Europe. One of these reasons is, as Dr. Emmanuel Lasker, the famous Chess Champion, mentioned in his book "Brettspiele der Völker", that the mobility of chess pieces suits the European mentality better than the immobility of Go stones – although we know that the game of Go is not less (probably more) dynamic than Chess.

Anyhow, it was only toward the end of the 19th century, when Japan opened her frontiers, first to the ships of Commodore Perry and then to trade, diplomacy, science and arts of the western world, that Europe learned of arts and customs of the Far-

East, and of their game of games.

Certainly there were more attempts at introducing and spreading the game of Go in Europe, but most of them are forgotten. It would be interesting to find out those actions, those efforts, that left deeper impression in the history of Go. Due to the lack of reliable information on more important attempts, I shall recount only one of these, which happened over 50 years ago, and which I myself took part in.

In 1914, just before the beginning of World War I, I was midshipman on the fast cruiser "Admiral Spaun". My ship was at that time stationed at Pula¹ the main port of the Austro-Hungarian Navy. I used to spend my off duty evenings playing chess in the Navy club, where there were always a lot of Kibitzers, and there I met Lieutenant-Commander Artur Jonak von Freyenwald². He rather praised my game, and invited me into his ship to show me a Japanese game – Go – which he said was more interesting than chess. Of course I accepted his invitation, and after a series of lessons I daresay I improved rather quickly.

With great will and energy did Jonak strive to acquire new converts to his

¹Pula is a well known Yugoslav port in the North Adriatic.

²Lieut. Cmdr. Artur Jonak von Freyenwald was born in Salzburg (Austria) When I met him, he was first officer on the minelayer "Kameleon". In 1914 he was on the cruiser "Kaiserin Elisabeth" in Tsingtau, where he became addicted to Go. In 1918 he died in Boka Kotorska (now in Yugoslavia, South Adriatic coast) when some mines accidentally exploded during a minelaying operation.

game, mostly among younger Navy officers. In a short time he attracted a number of enthusiastic Go players. They in their turn attracted yet more players, until it became rather like an epidemic. Go was played on board ships, in coffee houses, in Navy clubs etc. Soon Go sets with glass stones and a folding board were available in a Pula bookshop. It was Jonak who did most to spread the game, and for his devotion and tireless activity he got the name "Jonak, God of Go".

After Jonak's death in the war, our Go club had no leader anymore. Flames of the "Go-fire" in Pula died out and winds scattered the sparks of the glowing fire. There had been more than 200 active Go players in our club, and I think it was the strongest, and certainly largest Go club in Europe, at least before 1918.

Although the "Go fire" in Pula went out, some sparks survived.³ One of these glowed on in its country - trying to light a new fire. Many a success of our chess players convinced me that there was the interest and necessary talent for games of intellect in Yugoslavia. This fact strengthened my conviction that in my country favourable grounds for Go exist and

that is why I decided to try to spread the game of Go in Yugoslavia.

I tried to make a breakthrough in many ways: articles in newspapers, pamphlets, lecture Radio-television, contacts with chess clubs, making improvised Go sets etc. At last I found by accident a group of students of Ljubljana University, who were playing Go. They had learned the rules and not much else from an article I had written for a weekly "Tedenska Tribuna" in December 1960. They were very enthusiastic, found many new players, mostly "converts" from chess and they eagerly studied those few books on Go that I had.

In 1961 we founded "Go-drustvo Ljubljana", the first Go club in Yugoslavia. We strived and succeeded in spreading Go, and after a while there appeared many Go clubs in all parts of Yugoslavia. At the same time, we tried to improve our skill and to come even with the best European players, and I think we did it. Of course, we hope to achieve more than that.

And that is how from the beginnings in Pula the game of Go established itself in Yugoslavia."

³One of many Go players was one Lieut. Cmdr. Froeschl, a close friend of Jonak. He was very active in Go in his native Vienna. Of the activities of other Go players from Pula I unfortunately do not know anything.