

= Chess in Armenia =

Chess has been played in Armenia since the early Middle Ages ; however , it was institutionalized during the early Soviet period . Highly popular in Armenia today , chess gained widespread recognition during the 1960s , when Soviet Armenian grandmaster Tigran Petrosian became the World Chess Champion . A country of about three million people , Armenia is considered one of the strongest chess nations today . Among countries , Armenia has one of the most chess grandmasters per capita .

Since the country 's independence , the Armenian men 's chess team has won the European Team Championship (1999) , the World Team Championship (2011) and the Chess Olympiad (2006 , 2008 , 2012) . The women 's team had its crowning victory at the 2003 European Championship . As of February 2016 , Armenia ranks seventh in the world by the average rating of its top players . Levon Aronian , Armenia 's best chess player , is currently world No. 4 in the FIDE rankings . Aronian was a World Champion candidate several times .

Since the 2011 - 12 school year , chess lessons have been made part of the curriculum in every public school in Armenia , making it the first country in the world to make chess mandatory in schools .

Garry Kasparov has compared the popularity of chess in Armenia with the popularity of football (soccer) in Latin America .

= = Name = =

Until the early 20th century , chess was known in Armenian as *shatrank* (*shatrank*) , from Middle Persian *Chatrang* . Today , that term is pronounced *jadrag* and is only used in Western Armenian , which is spoken in the Armenian diaspora . In modern Eastern Armenian , which is the variation of Armenian used in the Republic of Armenia , chess is known as *axmat* [*axmat*] . It is derived from Russian *axmaty* (*axmaty*) , itself a derivative from Persian *âh mât* (*âh mât*) , literally meaning " the king is at a loss . "

= = History = =

= = = Early history = = =

In *Shatrang : The Book of Chess* (1936) , orientalists Joseph Orbeli and Kamilla Trever suggest that chess was known in Armenia since at least the 9th century , when Armenia was under Arab rule . According to them , the game was brought to Armenia by the Arabs from India , where the game is believed to have been originated in the 6th century as *Chaturanga* . In 1967 , chess figures were found in the citadel of Dvin , the medieval Armenian capital . Chess is mentioned in manuscripts from the 12th century - 13th century kept in the Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan , including a 13th - 14th century manuscript by Vardan Areveltsi . Until the mid - 20th century villagers in Shenavan near Aparan were using homemade chess figures similar to medieval ones .

= = = Soviet period = = =

Chess in Armenia was institutionalized after the establishment of Soviet rule in 1920 . In 1926 - 27 , by the initiative of chemist Simon Hovyan (1869 - 1942) , sections about chess started appearing in many Armenian newspapers . Hovyan contributed to the popularization of chess in Armenia by giving lectures about it . He translated books by Emanuel Lasker , Ilya Maizelis (ru) , and Yakov Rokhlin (ru) into Armenian .

The first chess competitions were held in 1927 , when the Armenian Chess Federation was founded . Until 1934 chess players from Armenia competed in the Transcaucasian championship . In 1934

the first Armenian Chess Championship was held in Yerevan . Genrikh Kasparian became its winner . In later years Kasparian won the championship nine times and became the most titled Armenian chess player with ten national championship wins . The women 's championship was also held the same year , Sirush Makints and Margarita Mirza Avagian shared the champion title . The first Armenian chess club was founded in 1936 . Chess clubs were also founded in Leninakan (now Gyumri) and Kirovakan (now Vanadzor) in the 1950s .

Chess became particularly popular with the unprecedented success of Tigran Petrosian in the 1960s . Born in Tiflis , the current capital of Armenia 's neighbor Georgia , he started his ascent in Armenia with a 1946 victory at the national championship . He then won the Soviet champion title four times (1959 , 1961 , 1969 , 1975) . In 1963 Petrosian became the World Chess Champion , defeating Mikhail Botvinnik , another Soviet representative . Petrosian 's victory not only popularized the game of chess , but also " led to an outpouring of patriotic fervour " in the smallest Soviet republic . " From that moment on , chess became a national obsession . " Many couples named their sons Tigran , after Petrosian . Besides being World Champion for six years (1963 to 1969) , Petrosian won the Chess Olympiad nine times with the Soviet team (1958 to 1974) .

In 1962 , there were 30 @, @ 000 chess players in Soviet Armenia , as well as 3 @, @ 000 instructors and judges . By 1986 the number of chess players had increased to 50 @, @ 000 , including three grandmasters : Rafael Vaganian , Smbat Lputian , and Arshak Petrosian . In the late Soviet period , Rafael Vaganian (1989) and Artashes Minasian (1991) became Soviet Champions . Vaganian also won the Olympiad with the Soviet team twice in 1984 and 1986 .

In 1985 , Garry Kasparov , born in Baku , Soviet Azerbaijan to an Armenian mother and Russian Jewish father , became World Champion . Although he never represented Armenia and is only half @-@ Armenian , some sources preferred to call him Armenian , partly because his last name is the Russified form of his mother 's Armenian last name Kasparian .

= = = Independent Armenia = = =

Armenia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 . Since then , Armenian chess players have had the opportunity to represent the Republic of Armenia . Three major chess tournaments have taken place in independent Armenia : the 32nd Chess Olympiad was held at the Sports & Music Complex in Yerevan in 1996 ; the 2001 World Team Chess Championship and the 2014 European Individual Chess Championship were held at the Yerevan Opera Theater .

Armenia earned its first medal at the 1992 Chess Olympiad , finishing third . Armenia won bronze medals at the 2002 and 2004 Olympiads as well . The Armenian team made a breakthrough with the sensational victory at the 2006 Chess Olympiad . They also won the 2008 and 2012 Chess Olympiads . Their record at the World Team Championships has been similarly outstanding , finishing third in 1997 , 2001 , and 2005 , and winning in 2011 . At the European championships the team performed somewhat more poorly , placing third in 1997 , first in 1999 , and second in 2007 .

= = = Teaching of chess in schools = = =

In 2011 , the Ministry of Education of Armenia made chess part of the primary school curriculum along with such standards as math and history for children over the age of 6 . Chess is compulsory for second , third and fourth graders . Over \$ 1 @. @ 5 million was spent on the program . The inclusion of chess in schools was generally received positively by the public , but some parents claimed that their children 's school program was already complicated and overloaded . Grandmaster Smbat Lputian argues that " bringing chess into schools is the best way to build the future . "

The decision was widely reported in the international media . Journalists , chess experts and officials in various countries praised the program and advised its adoption in their respective countries . During his visit to Armenia in 2014 Magnus Carlsen stated : " I think Armenia 's experience of teaching chess in schools is a great example for the whole world . "

= = Institutions = =

The national governing body for chess , the Armenian Chess Federation , was founded in 1927 . President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan was elected its president in 2004 (when he was Defence Minister) and was reelected in 2011 . Sargsyan " is known for enthusiastically supporting Armenian chess players . " On one occasion , Sargsyan stated that " We don 't want people to know Armenia just for the earthquake and the genocide . We would rather it was famous for its chess . " The Armenian government provides grandmasters with salaries and perks .

The Chess Academy of Armenia (?????????? ?????????? ??????????) , " one of the leading chess @-@ teaching institutions in the country " , was " founded in 2002 in Yerevan by the initiative of grandmaster Smbat Lputian , supported by the Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan " . The academy has organized international and national chess tournaments .

= = National championship = =

The first Armenian championship occurred in 1934 when it was part of the Transcaucasian SFSR . Championships were held sporadically in the Armenian SSR until 1945 , when they became an annual event ; this practice has been continued in independent Armenia . Genrikh Kasparyan has won it the most times (10 times) , followed by Ashot Anastasian (8 times) , Levon Grigorian (6 times) and Artashes Minasian (6 times) .

The first woman 's championship also took place in 1934 , but was not held again till 1939 . Some of the most notable women champions include Elina Danielian (6 times) , Lilit Mkrtchian (4 times) and Siranush Andriasian (3 times) .

= = Media = =

In 1972 , the magazine Chess in Armenia (?????????????? ?????????? Shakhmatayin Hayastan) was founded by Gaguik Oganessian . It was published monthly until 1997 , when it became a weekly magazine . In 1972 , the TV show Chess @-@ 64 (originally named Chess School) started to be aired by the Public Television of Armenia . Hosted by Gaguik Oganessian , it is the " longest lived program series " in the channel 's history . Another more recently created show , Chess World , is aired after the First News .

= = Individual statistics = =

FIDE , the World Chess Federation , lists 24 active Armenian grandmasters , 4 woman grandmasters , 17 international masters and 4 woman international masters .

= = = Men = = =

The Top 10 Armenian grandmasters as of May 2016 are listed below .

Levon Aronian is currently No. 7 in the FIDE World Rankings . In 2005 he won the Chess World Cup .

= = = Women = = =

The Top 10 women Armenian chess players are listed below as of May 2016 .

= = Team records = =

= = = Chess Olympiads = = =

Men 's
Women 's

= = = World Team Championships = = =

Men 's
Women 's

= = = European Team Championships = = =

Men 's
Women 's

= = = Club championships = = =

In 1995 , the Yerevan city club won the European Chess Club Cup men 's tournament . In 2006 , the Yerevan MIKA club won the European Club Cup women 's tournament .