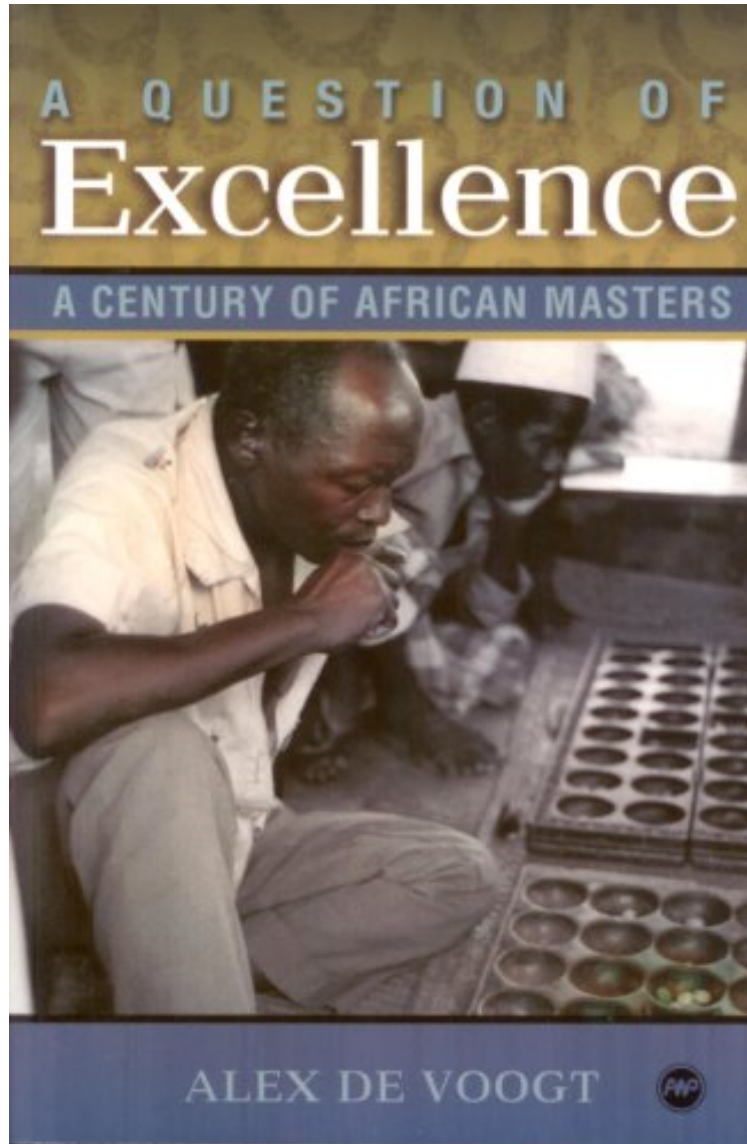


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A Question of Excellence: A Century of African Masters

Alexander J. de Voogt

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Alexander J. de Voogt : A Question of Excellence: A Century of African Masters before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Question of Excellence: A Century of African Masters:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. disappointing as scholarly referenceBy A. Lucia Braz DiasThe most surprising characteristics of this book was for me the total absence of citations in the body of the text. The author, a researcher based on a university, makes innumerable claims that beg for the sources of evidence, but they are not there.

It reads as if the author had taken all he wrote from the top of his head, but of course he didn't. This was very frustrating for me and pretty much made the book useless as a scholarly reference. Before finishing this review I went back and read the preface to see if the author even considers this book to be scholarly work. To my surprise, he writes: "The authors and researchers to whom I owe the contents of this book are not acknowledged in the body of the text. They are noted in the references and their names are occasionally referenced to quote, but as a general rule their names have been omitted." Simple as that, as if this were an accepted practice in academia. Notice that it is not a matter of having a list of references at the end of the book with notes or numbers linking particular ideas to the corresponding authors. There is simply a list of bibliography with no links at all to the text. We cannot know who said what, or who is the author of any specific claim made in the book. Very debatable choice of presentation coming from a university researcher. I guess that if I want to cite any "facts" presented in the book we will have to credit de Voogt, since he is now the only source I have for those facts. But knowing that he deliberately chose to not credit his sources, I will probably just not use any of that information.

Many books are filled with thoughts on mastership, genius and excellence in games. Those players who excel in tournaments are featured in psychological studies or tested with computer opponents. The featured games claim a history longer than any treatise on strategy and a geographical distribution reaching to all the corners of the world. Africans have shown excellence in board games. Players of African descent make up a history of intellectual accomplishments that has been thus far unnoticed in literature on African history as well as in works on cross-cultural and cognitive psychology. These African players include world champions, prize-winning grand masters, blindfold players as well as experts in simultaneous and computer matches. This study suggests three criteria of excellence that allow for a better appreciation of the past and present players. It speaks of victories against strong competition, of brilliant moves and unique accomplishments. Following the history of games in Africa and the success of players of African descent, this book illustrates and explores these criteria. The author also argues that Africans showing excellence is not a new phenomenon but part of the history of competition and of a growing understanding of what defines excellence in play.

About the Author Alex de Voogt is a researcher at the School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies at Leiden University. His education includes African Linguistics (MA) and Cognitive Psychology (Ph.D.) at Leiden University. He has set up and co-edited the international Journal of Board Game Studies and has been initiator of the International Colloquia on Board Game Studies which have been held since 1995 at various universities. He has published his articles on African board games and their masters widely.