The Turk: The Life and Times of the Famous Eighteenth-Century Chess-Playing Machine

Tom Standage

The period of the Turk's life lasted 85 years, and the people who somehow met and interacted with it were such luminaries Napoleon, and Charles Babbage (inventor of the first computer, sort of), and P. T. Barnum. Edgar Allan Poe started an entire genre (the short detective story) by writing "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in part inspired by the mental exercise of trying to figure out how The Turk worked. Silas Wier Mitchell, the famous American Civil War physician and neurologist, actually owned The Turk before donating it to the Chinese museum in which it finally perished. A I forget when or where but, many years ago, I first learned about a chess-playing automaton in the 19th century. In Standage's just published book, I have just learned "the rest of the story."