

Chapter 29

India and the rest of Asia

[This final chapter on regional and historical variants considers Asian games outside the xiangqi and shogi traditions. Be it noted that while most of these four chapters merely summarize material that is available elsewhere, with Burmese Chess and to some extent with Indian Chess David believed he was tapping sources which had not hitherto contributed to Western chess literature.]

29.1 Indian chess on the 8x8 board

Indian Chess. ‘There is no Indian game of chess. Rather there are three, and the two most played have varying rules. Some play European chess some the ancient four-handed game and a few Great Chess.’ Thus W. S. Branch (*Chess Amateur*, July 1917). Murray, too, recognizes three main games which he calls Hindustani, Parsi (S. India) and Rumi (N.W. India). Modern historians are less dogmatic. A. Goswami observes that ‘The indigenous chess is played in this country in a variety of ways and styles...’ (*Bulletin of the Correspondence Chess Association of India*, December 1988), and V. D. Pandit says ‘The rules (of the Indian game) were not uniform, but varied from place to place and time to time’ (correspondence, 1989). The weak Q and B, a hangover from the ancient game, survived in S. India into the 20th century (Rama Patler and G. H. B. Jackson, *Chess Amateur*, May 1918), although Murray stated that it had long died out. It is not surprising, in this vast sub-continent of many races and languages and lacking any central authority for indigenous games, that rules have not been codified. Whilst the influence of orthochess has long been apparent in Indian variants, there has been little outside interest in these games. An English officer observed that there were three kinds of chess in India ‘two of them more complex than the game played in Europe’, clearly a local observation embracing versions of Great Chess (*Memoirs of the War in Asia from 1780 to 1784*). That Indian chess received small notice from outsiders is evidenced by von der Lasa’s curiosity (*Chess Monthly*, March 1883, referring to an incident in Jaipur the year before): ‘I approached the

game as near as the surrounding circle of natives permitted, and I followed well the moves with the help of a small opera-glass’. Native writers have been the principal source of information. Often quoted are Lala Raja Babu and Trevangadacharya Shastree, ‘the Brahmin’, who was said never to have lost a game at chess, except one, in which he allowed himself to be beaten by a lady. (The Brahmin had not miscalculated - the lost game secured him a bullock contract.)

Summarized are the features in common of the mainstream games. Board 8x8, usually uncoloured, sometimes with crossed lines as on the ashtapada board. (According to Iyer’s *Indian Chess*, these should be on a4, a5, d4, d5, e4, e5, h4, h5, known as ‘the feet of a swan’.) Usual men (various names), referred to for convenience in orthochess terms.

(1) In the array, the king is placed on the right of the queen.

(2) The pawns move one square only, except initially the a-d-e-h pawns can make the double move but only if the respective file piece is on its original square.

(3) The king can move once as a knight, but not to capture nor if it has been checked.

(4) Promotion is to the file piece provided one has been captured. However, promotion on c- and f-files allowed only if bishop on same colour has been taken. Promotion on e1/e8 to Q. Promotion to knight allows another move immediately with the promoted piece although not if the promotion square is attacked.

(5) No castling, e.p., stalemate or perpetual check - the player must vary in the last two cases.

(6) White starts by making an agreed number of moves; Black does likewise. The number is usually 4 or 8, occasionally 3. It is not permitted to cross into the opponent's half of the board nor to move the same man twice.

(7) There are three grades of victory. In ascending order of merit: loser has bare king (boorj); loser has at least one piece; mate with a pawn.

Variations are common on almost all the above rules. Boorj is often considered a draw, when the rule is that there must be five or more men on the board at the end of the game of which at least two (king and one other) must be the loser's. The losing player will be looking for a sacrifice since if the men are reduced to four ('chamori bhaaji') the game is drawn. Because of this rule, the attacker will not take the opponent's last piece known, reasonably, as 'the immortal'. In some variants only the d-pawn or the d and e pawns have the initial two-square option, whilst Lala Singha Hunday says that in Bengal the king stands on the left of the queen (*Chess Amateur*, July 1909). And so on. To list the recorded variations on all the rules given would be both tedious and unhelpful.

OrthoChess strategy can be inappropriate in the Indian game. For example, where boorj is a draw a number of endings that are wins in orthoChess can only be drawn, for example R+B v N and R+N v B. R+R v B is only drawn when the defending king can reach corner square of the same colour as the bishop. R+B v B is drawn if bishops are on the same colour squares, won for the stronger side if they are on opposite colour squares. The early move of the g-pawn in Indian chess is primarily to make a haven for the king, not to develop the bishop. Pawn play varies from orthoChess because of the promotion rules (for example, a pawn capture fxg might be preferred to hxg so as to preserve the h-pawn's potential of promotion to R.)

The arrival of Europeans brought European chess to India, and some modern Indian variants appear to owe more to the European chess tradition than to the Indian. Two-player variants which appear to be based on the Indian tradition are listed below, those using a normal board in the present section and those using larger boards in the next. Four-player variants will be considered in a later chapter.

[Text slightly revised. In addition to some of the source material explicitly cited above, David's files contain correspondence from A. Goswami, V. D. Pandit, and R. Ravi Sekhar, and also copies of extracts from the *Chess Player's Chronicle* 1846, *Geistreiche Schachpartien alter und neuer Zeit* (Bachmann, 1894), the *Chess Amateur*, July-September 1909 and June 1917, *The Times*, 17 December 1928, *Chess*, September 1952, and *Europe Echecs*, October 1988.]

Chaturanga. India, 7th century at latest; precursor of orthoChess. Claims for the inventor are almost certainly myth. The name refers to the four arms of the Indian army, the infantry, elephants, cavalry and chariots. The name, as the board it was originally played on, pre-dates the game which it would appear was essentially the same as shatranj. The board, known as the ashtapada ('eight-square') was unchequered but with some squares regularly marked. It was believed to have been adopted from a race game related to parcheesi, the forerunner of Ludo. The markings are retained to this day on some oriental boards. Each side had a Rajah, a Counsellor, 2 x Chariot, 2 x Horse, 2 x Elephant, and 8 x P. The counsellor moved one square diagonally in any direction, the elephant two squares diagonally, leaping the intervening square. Pawns advanced one square at a time; no castling. Stalemate was a win for the player giving it.

[Murray (pages 57-60), citing Arabic sources, gives two alternative moves for the elephant in early Indian chess: a jump of two squares orthogonally rather than diagonally, and the 'trunk and four feet' move (one square straight forward or in any diagonal direction) that we shall meet in Burmese and Thai chess. The first is attributed to al-Adli, who was active in the 9th century though the earliest extant manuscript claiming to quote him dates from the 12th, the second to al-Beruni, who lived in the 11th century and travelled as far as the Punjab. Murray also says, on authority attributed to al-Adli, that stalemate was a win for the player stalemated. These pages are not in Murray's index entry for 'Chaturanga' and they are not among the sources David lists for the game, but I think I should record what they contain. I am not competent to judge what weight they should be given.]

Desi Chess. The ancient Indian game. Ks face Qs (old moves), no pawn-two or castling. King can move once as N provided it has not been checked. Promotion to file piece, but not if this exceeds the array quota (one Q, two Rs, etc); last piece apart from K cannot be captured. These rules have been known to vary over the sub-continent, and from time to time. (*Bulletin of the All-India Correspondence Chess Federation*, February 1998)

Gosai Chess. Origins unknown, Form of Indian game widely played by wanderers of the Hindu Gosavee sect in Southern India, believed now to be near extinction. During their periodical halts, they would start a game with the equipment they always carried, and continue the game blindfold when they resumed their journey using a notation peculiar to the Gosai; thus ‘I removed your horse on the 30th square with my devaratha (‘the small horse on the left hand’)’. At the end of a game the players would stop and verify the final position. (Pandit)

Parsi Chess. Term used, particularly by Murray, to describe the game played in southern India, at least until recent times, probably a direct descendant of the original Indian game. Each player has the K on the right hand. The a, d, e, h pawns can move one or two squares initially; the other pawns have no right to a two-step move. Both players make four moves each before the start of the game proper. The grades of win are as described above.

29.2 Indian games on larger boards

Atranj. Corruption of Shatranj; N.W. India, origins unknown but probably Muslim according to Goswami. Board 10x10; baseline (a1-j1/j10-a10) RNBQKPrQBNR. The Prince moves as Q+N. Second rank PPPPUUPPPP where the central pawns are Urdabegs, a corruption of udtabegums (flying queens) which move like pawns but have the extra power of moving and capturing backwards. Pawns move one square at a time and promote to file piece. (Goswami, Pandit) [The first edition mentioned a second ‘Atranj’, but it is a 22-man game with alternative name ‘Qatranj’ and I have moved it to the following entry.]

Joara-Joari (also known as **Zoraabhaji, Madadmar** and by other names). A game generously distributed (Murray gives only W. India) in which it is illegal to capture a supported piece unless in so doing one gives a discovered check. The king cannot be moved unless checked. Opinions differ as to whether the king retains its knight-move privilege; some say that it is forfeited altogether, others that it can be exercised only before the king has received a check. (Pandit, Sekhar)

The Maharajah and the Sepoys, also known as **The Mad King’s Game** (mid-19th century). One player has a single piece, the Maharajah, which is a combination of all pieces (in effect, Q+N), the other a full complement. The maharajah stands initially on any unattacked square. The object of the maharajah player is to deliver checkmate, and of the other player to capture the maharajah. Pawns don’t promote. A trivial game since the array player should always win, but in practice inexperienced players often come to grief. Falkener gives a number of game scores. William Rudge, quoted by Martin Gardner (*New Mathematical Diversions*), evolved a winning strategy irrespective of the moves of the M player: a4, a5, a6, a7, e3, Nh3, Nf4, Bd3, 0-0, Qh5, Nc3, Ncd5, Ra6, b4 (M forced to the 7th or 8th rank), h3 (only played if M on g7), Bb2, Rfa1, Re6, Rae6, Re7 (M forced to the 8th rank), Rae6 and mate next move. Rudge extends the solution unnecessarily. Some moves may be transposed, and a shorter solution probably exists. (Iyer, *Indian Chess*)

Shataranja. Origins unknown, closely related to atranj. The name appears to be a corruption of shatranj/chaturanga. As described in *Indian Chess*, the board is 10x10 and there are 22 men a side (ortho chess equivalents in parentheses): 1 x King (K), Crown Prince (Q+N), Minister (Q), Kotwala (B+N), 2 x Chariot (R), Elephant (B), Begum (moves as K but not royal), 4 x Horse (N), 8 x Pawn, array (a1-j1/j10-a10 and inwards, centred) ChHEMCpKKoEHCh, PPPPBPPPPP, HH. Murray quotes Lala Raja Babu (1901) who gives a game called Atranj or Qatranj, which appears identical except that the begums have

become 'armed female attendants' with move 'one square towards the opponent's King'. [Text revised.]

Hyder Ali's Great Chess. A game with thirty men on each side, demonstrated by Hyder Ali to his prisoner Captain Lucas in 1780. [In the first edition, David said this had been conjectured to be a piece and a pawn added to Timur's Great Chess, but this conjecture seems to have been made only by Forbes and I have to say that I find it hard to understand. The games were separated by four hundred years and a massive mountain range, and the existence of other contemporary large-board games in India removes any need to invoke foreign influence. It may even have been a version of one of the games in the next entry. I have provisionally altered the statement '60 men a side' in the first edition to conform to Forbes ('thirty on each side') and Murray ('60 men employed'), but I haven't seen *Memoirs of the War in Asia from 1780 to 1784* which was their primary source.]

Indian Great Chess (reported in 1796-8). Two composite-piece games are reported in a manuscript described by Murray. The first has board 10x10 with Giraffe (Q+N), Wazir (B+N), 2 x Dabbaba (R+N), array (a1-j1/j10-a10 and inwards, centred) RNBWGKQBNR, PPPDDPPPP, PP. P promotes to Q. Gollon describes this as the most entertaining of the Great chesses. The second has a 12x12 board with the same pieces and also two lions 'and other pieces' (32 a side).

Mysore Chess (Krishnaraja Wodiyar III, Maharajah of Mysore, 19th century). Board 12x12; extra pieces are two Chariots and two Flagcars which are in effect rooks and bishops respectively, thus each side has four rooks and four bishops, and the piece with the queen's move is called a Minister. The white baseline is (a1-a12) RNFCBMKBCFNr. The array shown for Black is quite different. In another version, the board is 14x14, with the addition of Queen (moves like K) on right of K and Prince (moves like M, orthochess Q) on left of Minister. (*Indian Chess*, also Pandit) [In respect of the 12x12 board, I suspect that only the white array is intended to show the opening position, and that the black is

intended to illustrate a possible target position after a number of moves have been played. Murray, reporting what appears to be the same game on the authority of Lala Raja Babu, gives the king positions as 'g1 (f12)', implying that Black mirrors the white array diametrically.]

Baroda Chess (Madhavrao Datey, 1890s). Developed on the order of Maharajah Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda. Board 10x10; pieces are King, Prince (Q+N), Chief Minister (Q), Chief of Army (as K or with 3-1 leap), Governor (R+N), Commander (B+N), Bandmaster (as N or can leap two squares orthogonally), Elephant (R), Camel (B), Horse (N), Police (two squares straight or diagonally forward, leaping intermediate square), Citizen (K+N) array (a1-j1/a10-j10 and inwards) BaGCoMPrKACoGBa, RNBPoCiCiPoBNR, 10xP. The king could move like a knight once in a game. Only the aefj pawns could move two squares initially. Promotion on end rank to either piece on same file provided that piece already captured. Datey wrote a book about the variant, *Yuvarajacha Budhhibalacha Khel* (Chessgame for a Prince, 1897). (Pandit)

Maharaja [12x8 board] (inventor unknown, reported c.1935). Board 12x8 (a1 black); extra pieces are Maharani (Q+N) and Elf (leaps two squares diagonally); baseline (a1-11/a12-112) RNEBQMKQBENr. Captured pieces can be claimed as deserters and are entered on an array square of player's corresponding piece. Pawns move one square at a time and may, at the option of the player, be promoted on reaching any rank from 3rd to 8th in order N-E-B-R-Q-M; thus pawn reaching 6th rank can promote to R. Players have the right, instead of moving, to remove one of their men from play, called, inappropriately one might think, a Forlorn Hope. There is also a double version played with two sets of men (distinguishable and each with a king) on a 24x8 board, a mated king being out of the game unless and until the mate is released; his turn is lost, but his men may still be captured and claimed as deserters. (Photocopy of anonymous manuscript 'Maharaja - Rules' apparently from the van der Linde - Niemeijer Collection) [The manuscript is in English in a characteristic pre-war handwriting and David

conjectured ‘probably British’, but both the terminology and the move of the elf (a corruption of ‘elephant’?) cause me to suspect an Anglo-Indian description of an Indian game.]

‘Of the making of these games there need be no end, and I have no doubt that many other varieties have been proposed and perhaps played, of which we have been spared the knowledge’ (Murray).

29.3 Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia

Burmese Chess, also known as **Sittuyin**. Origins unknown, but probably of Indian ancestry. In the opinion of Hiram Cox, Burmese chess is ‘a very advanced improvement on the Hindu game’, and the game is ‘undeniably a good one’. Falkener on the other hand describes it as ‘a heavy, wearisome, uninteresting game’.

Burmese chess is a neglected variant which has suffered through having no codified rules. Early writers - Cox, Bastian, Shway Yoe (Sir J. G. Scott), Falkener - and later the Ferrars, Murray and Branch, give contradictory accounts of how the game should be played. Modern writers have added nothing to our knowledge, for the most part faithfully echoing the pathfinders, particularly Murray. A feature article on the game (1990) even gives Bastian’s opening position ‘most favoured by Burmese players’ (in 1863!). With regard to the initial set-up, a distinctive feature of Burmese chess, Murray remarks ‘Previous observers have recorded the favourite arrangements of their native informers’. He might have added ‘and rules’ as well. The confusion has not been helped by reports of radical versions of the game. Falkener records a variant in which pawns are promoted to rooks (‘a game of his own invention’ was the unkind and probably unjust comment of Murray); a game using three dice in which the players made three moves at a time (Sunnucks, *The Encyclopedia of Chess*); and a bastard version in which the pieces are set up anywhere within the player’s half of the board, the queen and bishop (elephant) moving as in orthochess but captures by Q, R and B are on adjacent squares only, no stalemate, and pawns promote on reaching the diagonal d5-a8 or e5-h8 (*Chess Amateur*, April 1920, reprinted from *The Times*).

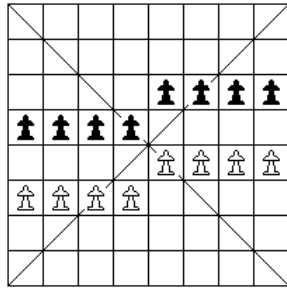
Previous accounts of the game relied on informants whose status as players has never been established. Fortunately, there exists a book on Burmese chess whose authority, if not

beyond question, certainly carries a great deal more weight than past European writings on the game: *Myan-ma sit bayin lan-nyunt sa-ok gyi* (Burmese Chess Guide) by Shwei-gyin U Bha, a retired Education officer, in consultation with chess masters Pantanaw U Maung Galei, Nyaung-don U Hamet and Bassein U Hmat (other Burmese masters are listed). Date unknown but *circa* 1924. In it, the author states significantly ‘There may still be different rules in Upper and Lower Burma, especially with regard to creating sitke (promotion)’ echoing Sir William Jones who wrote in 1883 that ‘...the Burmans admit of great variations’. The first edition reported that the game had largely died out in Lower Burma and in urban areas, having been replaced by orthochess, and that it was largely confined to tea-houses in the north-west. Old men played it with passion and arguments were commonplace. ‘It is usually played for money,’ according to one writer, ‘except at funeral gatherings, where games are played to pass the time’. Chessmen were invariably of wood, poorly carved, and stained red and ‘dark’ (black). It enjoyed a revival in the 1980s.

The rules which follow are taken from the above work.

The board is 8x8, unchequered, with the two long diagonals often marked, and sometimes the 4x4 squares in each corner (a1, b1, a2, b2 etc). Each side has 16 men: 1 x K, General, 2 x Carriage (moves as orthochess R), Elephant, Horse (moves as N), 8 x Soldier (P). The king moves as in orthochess. The general moves one square diagonally in any direction, the elephant similarly but in addition it can move one square straight forward (the resulting five moves of the piece representing the four feet and trunk of the pachyderm). Capture is as in orthochess but there is no pawn-two. A pawn promotes when standing on any square of either diagonal line in the opponent’s half of the board. A pawn can only

promote to general, and then only if the player's general has been captured. Promotion does not take place immediately but on any subsequent turn; it may be effected on the promotion square (i.e., without moving) or by moving away one square diagonally but not to capture the opponent's general nor to give check (previously published interpretations of this rule, which suggest that a pawn can promote on any adjacent square, are incorrect). A pawn that passes its promotion square cannot promote.



The pawns are placed first, Red on a3-d3/e4-h4 and Black on h6-e6/d5-a5. Red then puts his major pieces anywhere behind his pawns, after which Black does likewise. (In all previous accounts, the pieces are entered one at a time by Red and Black alternately; probably an earlier form of the game.) It is permissible to replace a pawn with a piece and to redeploy the pawn on a vacant square in one's territory. There are restrictions on Black who would otherwise be at a considerable advantage. For example, Black may not put a rook on the file on which the red king stands, nor may he enter both rooks on the same file if Red objects.

Red starts. The object of the game is to checkmate the opponent's king. Check must be announced. There is no stalemate (a player must allow his opponent a move) but perpetual check and draw by repetition of position are possible. There are involved rules for the endgame, which parallel in several respects those for Thai chess, that are designed to limit random play. These include a requirement that K and R must mate a bare king in 16 moves or the game is drawn. However, if the lone king is in any of the marked corners or on one of the central squares (d4,d5,e4,e5; known as 'the four squares of the death of the king') this is

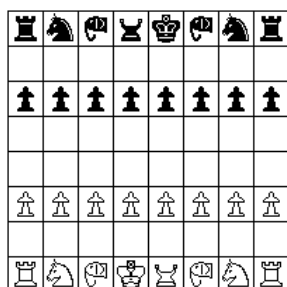
called '5 moves in 4 squares' and the counting does not start until the defender's 5th move. Murray illustrates a board in which these squares are marked, his Burmese informants suggesting the markings were 'ornaments'. There are also detailed guidelines dealing with transgressions (example: 'a player who sweeps away the pieces before a game is finished must be declared the loser').

A total of 33 starting positions is recorded of which eight are given emphasis. It is noteworthy that not one of the 'favoured positions' given by European writers is mentioned. A 1989 publication *Myanmar Traditional Chess* adds eight new positions. The king is usually placed at f2 or g2 (c7/b7) with an elephant on the square in front and a knight on an adjacent square. If the king is placed on the first rank, it is always on the c or f file. The general is almost invariably stationed at e3/d6 looking straight through the gap between the pawn lines, and is always adjacent to an elephant except when replacing a pawn. (There is a Burmese saying that elephant and general should never be separated.) Except when in the corners, the rooks tend to be close to each other.

Of all the regional variants, Burmese chess comes closest to a war game. Despite the shortage of long-range pieces, the proximity of the hostile pawn lines ensures early battle whilst the time-consuming fortress-building of shogi is here achieved at a stroke. On the minus side, Sittuyin is a game of limited strategy.

[Text slightly revised. David actually wrote 'Sittuyin enjoyed a brief revival in the 1980s' and in a letter to a correspondent he reported not having seen the game in play when he last visited the country in 1987, but it would appear that there has since been a recovery. His files contain photocopies of several pages from an unidentified book in Japanese which include two photographs of a well-attended tournament apparently held in 1998, an accompanying manuscript translation refers to an all-country tournament with 24 players of sittuyin and 40 of European chess, and most of the players in the photographs appear to be in the 18-30 age group. The book also includes a copy of the frontispiece of the book by Shwei-gyin U Bha, and the figures '1923' are distinguishable within the accompanying text.]

Makruk, also known as **Thai Chess**. Origins, including origin of name, unknown. According to Murray, pre-dates Burmese Chess with which it has clear affinities. It is estimated that two million Thais know at least the rules as against five thousand who are familiar with orthochess. Masters are known as sian (god). Living chess displays are popular: a move is executed to music in a series of dancing movements and there is traditional duelling when a capture is made.



Board 8x8 uncoloured; 16 men a side comprising 1 x Khun (lord, moves as orthochess K), Met (fruit-stone, one square diagonally); 2 x Rua (boat, as orthochess R), Thon (?nobleman, one square diagonally or straight forward, in other words as Burmese elephant), Ma (horse, as N); 8 x bia (cowrie, as orthochess P but promotes on rank 6 and only to met. Falkener allows the K on its first move the privilege leap of a N and the met a double step; Murray also gives this rule, but allows the met to move only e1-e3 (d8-d6) as in Medieval Chess. Subsequent writers like Gollon repeat these rules, but privilege moves are unknown in the modern game. Capture by displacement; no castling. Tedious endings are avoided by a rule that when a player is without major pieces (R,B,N), the other player must mate in a prescribed number of moves, according to the major pieces remaining to him, or the game is a draw: 2 x R = 8 moves; 1 x R = 16 moves; 2 x T = 22 moves; 1 x T = 44 moves; 2 x N = 33 moves; 1 x N = 66 moves. These stipulations take no account of mets. Stalemate is a draw. The pawns are sometimes cowrie shells and are commonly shown as such in indigenous diagrams; they are placed mouth-down in the array and are turned over (mouth-up) on promotion to indicate their new rank.

The opening is usually a sedate affair due to the lack of any strong diagonal-moving piece or open files on which to operate. Both sides tend to avoid contact until development is complete. The KN usually moves in front of the K whilst the other N moves alongside or at f3 (c6). The met commonly goes to e3 (d6) via f2 (c7), facing the enemy king whilst the thons move up next to the knights. Both players then advance on their right against the opposing king with the idea of forcing an open file. Books are readily available. There is no uniformity as regards notation: both the descriptive and the algebraic are in use. In the algebraic, it is usual to use arabic numerals for ranks, Thai numerals for files.

[Because the thon has the move of the Burmese elephant, I have used the elephant symbol in the diagram, although the actual meaning of the word 'thon' is apparently quite different. David's first edition included some speculations that shogi might have borrowed from makruk, specifically as regards the placing of the pawns on the third rank and the reversal of the cowrie shell to show promotion, but these are relatively superficial points and the countries in between appear to have played games of the xiangqi family. After I had started work on the present edition, I received a message from Peter Michaelsen suggesting that the rules may have been revised in recent years to reduce the number of draws in master play, but I know no details. In the absence of other pieces, three mets (not all on the same colour) are needed to mate a bare king; K+2M is only a draw, as is K+N+M; K+T is an easy win if the defending king can be kept away from the attacking side's corners, but only a draw if it can reach one of them. Against this, the nearness of the promotion rank means that a passed pawn can promote and add its weight to the attack much more quickly than in orthochess, and once a breach has been made, the defender's pawns, being already on the third rank at least, can more easily be got at from behind.]

According to information available on the web site of the Khmer Institute in 2004, **Cambodian Chess**, also known as **Ok**, is essentially makruk with two privilege moves: an unmoved K can make a sideways N leap (from d1 to b2/f2, e8 to c7/g7) though not to

get out of check, and an unmoved met can advance two spaces though not to capture. There are also differences of detail in the rules regarding the number of moves allowed to mate a bare king. In an alternative version called **Ka Ok**, ‘popular in ancient times’, the first player to give check wins.

[Text revised. The first edition contained a description, attributed to P. A. Hill, of a different game, but this has been challenged and perhaps I should quote directly from the source David used. This was a photocopy of a typed letter from John Gollon to Philip Cohen, 25 February 1975, the relevant part of which reads as follows (typography adjusted but text verbatim):

‘On the subject of Eastern chess variations, I received in 1969, from a U.S. serviceman serving as an interrogator in Saigon, a variation of chess which he obtained details about from a Cambodian born guerrilla officer he was questioning.

‘The transliteration and translation of the piece names and their positions (for “white”) are:

‘Chhwie	king	e1
‘Ta Hien	official	d1, f1
‘Tam Mai	elephant	c1, g1
‘Sheh	horse	b1, h1
‘tuk [<i>sic</i>]	boat	a1, i1
‘Trei	fish	fourth rank filled

‘The game is played on the points of a [*sic*] eight by eight, uncheckered board. The horse moves as the standard knight; the boat, as the rook; the king, as the standard king; the official, one square at a time diagonally, but captures only forward diagonally; the elephant, one square at a time in any direction (like king) but may not capture straight backward nor diagonally backward; the fish moves one square at a time forward until it crosses the center line (on its second move), at which point the piece is flipped over and can move as a king anywhere on the board.

‘The pieces, my informant noted, are little statues except for the fish, which are irregular disks marked differently on either side so that pieces which have crossed the center line and have been flipped can be distinguished. He did not know the bare king nor stalemate rules.

‘At the time, I boiled over with enthusiasm

about this awkward [*sic* - backward? awkward?] little game, viewing it either as a link between the Chaturanga and Chinese Chess forms, or as a blend resulting from the meeting of the two traditions (Thai and Burmese Chess, say, still are more closely linked to Chaturanga-like games, while Chinese Chess is the chess of Vietnam).

‘In either event, I thought the game extremely fascinating and valuable. I have not particularly changed my mind.

‘The correspondent later expressed some concern that he may have been mistaken in some details. I have never been able to check with an official Cambodian source. So there could be some errors - then again, perhaps there are none.’

The name ‘P. A. Hill’ has been added as a manuscript annotation to the words ‘U.S. serviceman’.

I do not know whether Gollon was eventually able to check with an official source, but no other confirmation seems to have come to light, and a recent paper *Kambodschach / Work in Progress zur Geschichte des Schachspiels in Kambodscha* by Bernd Ellinghoven (*Kambodschanische Kultur* 8, Berlin 2003, pages 90-122) mentions the makruk game at some length, with contemporary photographs, and the Hill game not at all. The nearest approach to the latter is a photograph captioned ‘Kampot 2003, Hotel Phnom Kamchay’ which shows some makruk men on an 8x8 board with palaces marked as for xiangqi, but this has some curious features and appears to record a display carelessly assembled for tourists rather than a position from a genuine game (there are no players within shot, and some of the men are on the intersections, some in the squares, and some in nondescript positions).

It would therefore appear that whatever else was being played on the streets of Phnom Penh in 2003, the Hill game was not, and the authority for its existence appears to reduce to a single informant whose statements are at variance with all other known testimony. I have therefore taken it on myself to remove the reference to it from the main entry, and to mention it only in the present editorial note.]

29.4 Malaysia and Indonesia

Batak Chess. The game as played by the Batak people of Sumatra. Board 8x8 unchequered; usual men with same names as in Malay Chess. Kings stand on left of queens, otherwise standard array. The KP, if it moves one square initially, retains the two-square option on its second move (e.p. possible). The K may leap two squares in any direction (including N move) but only if unmoved; thereafter normal. Castling allowed but in two moves, not one. Promotion is complicated and can differ from region to region. A pawn makes a single backward diagonal move as part of promotion, termed 'gelong'. If White has Pc7, he can play c8(Q) and then move to d7, capturing any Black man other than a K; however, if opponent's K is on d7, it is not in check (play is now c8(Q)+). A pinned piece has no powers. Discovered mate ('ares') is a draw! A handicap, known as 'tepong', requires a player to mate on one of the four central squares. There is a small problem literature, problems being composed (often in twin form) as a challenge for stakes. (Armin van Oefele, *Das Schachspiel der Bataker*, 1904, also *Jaarboek 1931 van den Nederlandschen Bond van Probleemvrienden*)

29.5 Central Asia and Tibet

Alisher Navoi's Great Chess. According to Gizycki, the 15th-century Uzbek poet Alisher Navoi described a 'Great Chess', played in Central Asia in the 13th and 14th centuries, in which each side had king, two viziers, elephant, giraffe, bear, camel, ruhbird, horses, and pawns, starting in three ranks on a 100-square board.

Timur's Great Chess. 14th century. Sometimes referred to as the 'perfect' or 'complete' chess. Said to have been the favourite game of (and even invented by) Timur the Lame (Tamerlane) who scorned the 'little chess' (shatranj). Acclaimed by Gollon as 'the most playable and most entertaining of the early forms of Great Chess'. Board 11x10 with an extruded square on the right of each player's second rank. These were citadels: if a king could attain the opponent's citadel it was immune from capture. Apart from the usual

Malay Chess, also known as **Main Chator** ('Chaturanga game'). Established in the Malay peninsula before the 15th century. Essentially the same game as Batak Chess, the Bataks being of Malay origin. Board uncoloured; long diagonals marked. Standard array except that Q stands on right of K. Rules varied from state to state but had a common feature in that a pawn promoted to Q only on the a- and h-files. On any other file it then had to make one or more moves backwards before promoting, the rules being both complex and varied. En passant, too, suffered from a diversity of rules. The king had the right to move two squares (as Q or N) initially if he had not been checked, and castling took two moves, the R being moved first, but here again rules differed throughout the peninsula. Skeat, for example, whose observations were largely in Selangor, stated in *Malay Magic* (1900) that the K could only castle if had not been checked, 'but over one square only'. According to H. O. Robinson (1904) a bare king could move as any piece. Malay Chess was a casualty of the 20th century, but may still be played in remote areas. [Robinson wrote an article *Malay Chess* in the *Cheltenham Examiner*, 27 July 1904.]

shatranj pieces, each player had a Wazir (moved one square orthogonally), 2 x Dabbaba (two squares orthogonally, leaping first square), 2 x Camel (3-1 leaper), 2 x Giraffe (one square diagonally then three or more squares orthogonally, no leaping), 2 x Talia (as B but not to first square), 11 x P (move one square only). K, once in a game, could change places with any allied piece on the board. Each pawn was related to one of the 10 pieces and could promote only to that piece. The KP promoted to Prince (K without royal powers). In addition there was an Original Pawn. The OP had a curious promotion cycle. (1) On first promotion, it remained immobile and immune from capture. Player could deploy (move) it as a pawn to any square other than one occupied by a K. Any man of either colour on the square was removed. Object was usually to achieve a fork but the removal of a strong piece seems more

pertinent. (2) If again reaching the 10th rank, it achieved a dubious promotion to king's pawn with the same powers as in (1). (3) If once more reaching the end rank, it became a Prince ('Adventitious K'). A king sheltering in a citadel could change places with a prince (either promoted KP or OP). Forbes gives the array (a1-k1/k10-a10 and inwards, empty citadel squares adjoining k2 and a9) A-C-D-D-C-A, RNTGFKWGTNR, 11xP (odcbfkwgtnr), each pawn being related to the piece with the corresponding upper-case letter ('o' being the Original Pawn). Others are recorded including 'masculine' and 'feminine' arrangements, the latter omitting the alfils and with the KP on the second rank (Bland). A feature of the array is that both a player's camels are confined to the squares of one colour, the opponent's to the other colour. Hyde (1694) gives a somewhat similar arrangement on an 11x12 board. The copyist of Timur's biographer, b. 'Arabshah, in illustrating the array (India Office MS 7322), filled the vacancies, for what reason is not known, with new pieces: lions, bulls and a sentinel with their respective pawns, and replaced the wazir with a crocodile. The moves of these additional pieces (if they had moves) are not recorded.

Mongolian Chess, also known as **Shatar**. It seems likely that the variants indigenous to Mongolia and Central Asia described by Murray and van der Linde have been replaced in many areas by orthochess as the result of Soviet cultural penetration. However, recent sources suggest that they have yet to be eradicated. Articles by S. Kondratev in *Shakmatny Listok* (1931) describe the Mongolian game as having an uncoloured board with the pieces distinguished by red and green bases. The R is represented by a chariot or wheel, the B by a camel and the P by a child. The Q moves as R+K; no castling. Positions of K and Q may be reversed in the array, but kings always on same file; in an alternative arrangement, the Ks face the Qs in the array. QP (d or e) alone can move two squares initially, and this is always the first move of both sides. (In some parts it is permitted to move the KP two squares instead.) A knight cannot mate (ignored in some parts); stranger is the fact that a

succession of B (Tuk!) and P (Tsod!) checks ending in mate is a draw, but if during the sequence another piece checks, it's a win. Bare king is a draw.

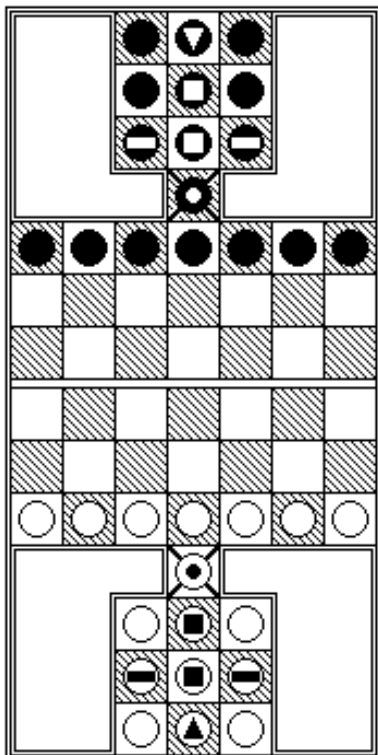
The game described by Assia Popova (*Jeux des Calculs Mongols*, 1974), whilst agreeing in the appearance of the chessmen (above), offers 'supplementary rules' in which the N is affirmed as the most powerful piece since on completion of its first move it becomes an Amazon (Q+N) whilst a R that penetrates to the 8th rank assumes the additional power of a N. According to Giadda Ricci (*Mongolie - traditions de la steppe*, Musée de l'Homme 1983) chessplayers occupy a place of honour in the community and are not obliged to rise when their betters enter the yurt.

Hiashatar, also known as **Mongolian Great Chess**, is a larger version. Board 10x10 (unchequered), 20 pieces a side. The extra pieces (+ pawns) are Bodyguards, standing on either side of the king and queen. Bodyguards move two squares in any direction but do not give check. They influence the squares adjacent to them. Any piece on a square adjacent to a bodyguard, whether hostile or friendly, may only move one square on its next turn. A hostile piece (Q, R, B) cannot capture a bodyguard directly but must first move to a square adjacent to it. It is not known if the game is still played. (Material taken from a web site maintained by Lev Kisliuk, also photocopies of pages 110-2 of an unidentified book in Japanese)

Tibetan Chess. Murray quotes a 200-year-old source which describes the game then played in Tibet. Some of its rules at least are identical with the description of the game apparently still played in Mongolia in 1931 (see above). First pawn (usually QP) alone can move two squares; castling allowed; bare king draws.

Shatra. Origins unknown. A game of the Altai region, blending chess and draughts. Velyenin Taushkanov codified the contemporary rules in 1979 and the Presidium of the Central Shatra Section published official rules in 1985. The playing area comprises 62 squares made up of the field (7x6 central area divided in two by a ditch), two fortresses (3x3 squares at either end of board), and two gates (single squares linking the two). The central file

through the fortresses and gates is known as the big road. Each side has a king (ring), a queen (triangle), 2 rooks (squares), 2 bishops (bars), and 11 shatras. Additionally, each side has a temdek (cross) which is initially placed in the gate and serves as a marker.



Shatras move as chess pawns up to the ditch, thereafter like kings, but never backwards. A shatra promotes on the back rank (3 squares) to any piece previously captured; if none, it can move horizontally until one is available. Pieces in the fortresses are reserves and are brought out one at a time during play by placing in own half of field on any vacant square except on the big road. If a reserve makes a capture within its own fortress it must move into the field on the next turn. Shatras cannot capture within their own fortresses. When the fortress is vacated, the temdek is removed, which allows captures from the field back into the fortress. The king can move independently of the temdek. Kings and shatras capture by a short leap (over an adjacent piece to an empty square immediately beyond) in any direction. The other pieces capture by a long leap (move over any number of vacant squares and leap over an opposing man to any vacant square beyond). Capturing is compulsory except for the king, but the player can choose between alternatives; he cannot elect for the king and then opt not to capture. If a second capture is available, this must be made also, and so on. The same piece cannot be jumped more than once in a multiple capture. A pawn which promotes on capturing must continue to capture as a promoted piece if a capture is available. The aim of the game is to capture or stalemate the opposing king. (Personal communication)