

A World of Chess (Cazaux and Knowlton)

A World of Chess by Jean-Louis Cazaux and Rick Knowlton, McFarland, ISBN 978-0-7864-9427-9, viii+398 pages, over 400 diagrams and other illustrations. £54.99 from my local UK bookshop in November 2017, but one of the authors tells me that the book is available at a better price from the dedicated website AWorldofChess.com. There is also an e-book version, ISBN 978-0-4766-2901-8, which I haven't seen.

This book is a much expanded translation of Cazaux's 2010 book *L'Odysée des Jeux d'Échecs*. It is divided into seven parts, covering in turn ancient Persia and neighbouring countries, India and south-east Asia, China, Japan, Europe, modern variants, and the origins of chess. In each of the first five parts, the principal game of the region is described in full, with notes on tactics and on the game's history, and a selection of the most important variants is described more briefly. Most of the games are covered in David Pritchard's *Encyclopedia*, but some are not, and in any case the treatment here is much more extensive and leisurely. The diagrams are copious, large, and clear, and the illustrations, even when monochrome reductions of coloured originals, are relevant and attractive.

Part 6 covers developments of modern chess. Apart from Chess960 and some other games with orthodox rules of play but unorthodox starting positions, it confines itself to games featuring new pieces or new boards. It therefore has a strong tendency towards the exotic, and the more common variant games played with an ordinary board and men, such as Kriegspiel, Losing (Giveaway) Chess, Progressive Chess, and that splendid four-player game Bughouse, are not covered.

Part 7, on the origins of chess, starts from the premise that the various games described share a common origin. I no longer find it possible to agree with this (see "Thoughts on the origins of shatranj and xiangqi" on the Chess Variants page of www.jsbeasley.co.uk); nevertheless, I found this part of the book of considerable interest. It gives an account of the available early manuscripts and other artefacts, and says to what extent they can definitely, or perhaps, or surely not, be regarded as relating to chess games.

The text is supported by 25 pages of notes, and in at least one case these need to be read to give a complete picture. In the discussion of the alleged variety of Cambodian Chess reported by P. A. Hill (pages 81-83), my demonstration that the game would have been fundamentally flawed, which to my mind is the strongest reason for believing that the description given to Hill was garbled and that no such game existed, is mentioned only in note 50 and does not appear in the main text.

But on balance this is an excellent book, and one that I am glad to have, At £54.99, it is something of a luxury purchase, but it deserves to do well, and I hope its price will not kill it.

JDB, December 2017.