

Comments on the Early History of Draughts

FRANCO PRATESI

Two main difficulties are encountered in any research on the origin and early history of the game of draughts: the fact that the game could be played by moving on chessboards the same pieces that were traditionally used for games of the backgammon family (and particular game sets existed in which both items were present); the necessity to distinguish the “new” game from other board games, with a great uncertainty existing about corresponding rules and names. As a result, the first spread of the game has not yet been reconstructed with enough precision and several different opinions still coexist.

National variants of draughts and their evolution

At first we learn one game of draughts and one game of chess; then we discover that in other countries different variants are played (even though, for chess, one has now to consider far countries, such as China or Japan). Thus, a historical study of the chess-draughts interactions cannot be limited to two individual games but must consider a number of variants.

In the case of draughts, several kinds of games still exist, often played at a national level. Except for a few variants, the usual way of playing is to move diagonally and to use only thirty-two squares of the 8x8 chequered chessboard, all those of either the white or the black colour. A variant played in the Philippines uses a different board with only these thirty-two points, but evidently is just the same game. Whether other variants played on all the sixty-four squares really can be considered as belonging to the same family of draughts is instead not so evident. Traditionally, they are so considered, but this happens by a conventional agreement, not as the result of any “scientific” analysis of their characteristics.

In order to follow a logical path, going more or less directly backwards in time, we can start with Canadian 12x12 draughts, a development of French 10x10 one.

The origin of this relatively recent game is not clear, even if supposedly related to the stay in Montreal of the regiments of Meuron and Watteville in the 1810s;¹ no surprise that older variants will be of uncertain origin too.

If Canadian 12x12 draughts can be considered a strange and isolated variation, the 10x10 Dutch-French variant (traditionally known as Polish) has instead gained the greatest international success in the course of time; only on its basis a world championship can now be played. Again, its origin has been the focal point of strong debates, particularly since the reports of an origin in Paris in about 1727² seem to be later than actual boards discovered in the Netherlands.³ In any case, even the 10x10 Dutch-French variant cannot be the original one: the role of initial draughts has to be restricted to games played on the 8x8 chessboard.

The introduction for chess of a chequered 8x8 chessboard occurred in about the 11th century. Even restricting the field to draughts variants played on this chessboard, it is not easy to distinguish their historical development and the chronological priority among them. A reasonable approach is to divide them into two groups according to the long or the short move of the king. The assumption that variants with the short move are the earlier is plausible: among people accustomed to the long leap of the king any “new” variant based on the short leap can hardly look enjoyable.

In our backward path we thus encounter both the largely played Russian variant and the Spanish one, with its wonderful early literature; the main difference between them is that draughtsmen can also take backwards in the Russian variant. Then, as the final stage, we find both the Italian and the Anglo-French variants. The ancient Anglo-French variant still corresponds to British and American games of nowadays: only details in capturing rules have changed in the course of time.

Italian draughts is often mentioned for its strict taking rule, “*il più col più*”, the most of pieces by the most powerful ones. It is a consolidated theory that initially there was a full freedom for captures; then huffing was introduced, then taking became compulsory in more and more strict ways. From this viewpoint, Italian draughts seems to be one of the latest versions. However, there are hints for its being

¹ MASSICOTTE 1922.

² KRUIJSWIJK 1980.

³ VAN DER STOEP 1984.

older. In Italian draughts we find kings that cannot be taken by men; to be such a solitary example seems rather to represent a residual case of an older habit than a new rule introduced when the game had already spread. Other ancient table games exist of the fox and geese kind: here too the more powerful foxes cannot be taken by men, or geese.

All the variants of draughts considered till now are of the diagonal kind and take an evident profit from the presence of two-coloured squares on the board. It is possible to stop here the description of draughts variants,⁴ but it is more usual to additionally take Eastern variants into account,⁵ with orthogonal moves into three adjacent squares (right, ahead, left), instead of the two squares available when advancing along the diagonals.

The information preserved on the rules of the most ancient games is very scarce; in particular, typical captures by leaping used in draughts are not known from the ancient world, even if the broad diffusion both in Europe and in Asia of games of the fox and geese type is hard to explain without assuming an ancient origin. *Alquerque* seems to be the oldest game recorded in Europe with leap captures.

Chess and draughts

Chess and draughts are often quoted together as suitable pastimes for gentlemen. Two of the earliest such references are from a Welsh manuscript of 1336, if they were not mistakenly translated – as it looks plausible. Let me insert here the quotations, in case somebody can translate them better: 1) «Rei onadunt yn gware seccyr, eraill yn gware gwydbwyll» – some of them were playing chequers, others chess. 2) «Ac yna y disgynasant yr neuad vrenhinawl yn yr honn yd oed aneiryf lluosogrwid o wyrdda yn gware seccyr a gwydbwyll» – and then they descended to the royal hall in which was a countless multitude of good men playing chequers and chess.⁶

Coming to a more familiar language (for me at least), Avigliano begins his book

⁴ PRATESI, CASTELLI 2003.

⁵ ALEMANNI 2005.

⁶ MURRAY 1913, p. 420.

on Italian draughts⁷ with the statement that draughts is certainly a simplified form of chess, the only problem being which originated which. Similar ideas can be found earlier and later: for instance, two interesting old works⁸ have been brought to my attention when my line of thinking was already formed.

In a very thorough text on board games,⁹ Murray concludes that both chess and *alquerque* were the parents of draughts. In his detailed history of draughts,¹⁰ van der Stoep has instead stressed the *alquerque*-draughts relationship, indicating that any proposal of chess taking part in draughts evolution is unnecessary; if interactions existed, it was draughts that influenced chess.

In any case, there are more analogies between chess and draughts than usually acknowledged, in addition to the obvious common feature of the chequered 8x8 chessboard (even though a 10x10 one is now preferred for international draughts). In particular, there are common lines in game strategies: as it occurs in draughts, two armies of pawns are present in chess that move forwards aiming at reaching the edge opposite to their initial placement and there obtaining promotion, an important step toward winning the game. This is not a common racing game, because the two armies have to cross each other and in the process the collision aspect prevails over that of the race.

In chess there are additionally major pieces that do not move ahead for promotion and the goal itself of the game becomes different, mating the king, even though eliminating as many as possible of the enemy pieces remains an important part of the strategy. However, half of the chess pieces in the initial position are pawns and – apart from differences in advancing and capturing rules – behave similarly to draughtsmen.

Possible links between the historical developments of chess and draughts have challenged historians for many years and are not yet clarified. An agreement on the origin of draughts does not exist and the relation between the introduction of long

⁷ AVIGLIANO 1918.

⁸ JOHNSTON 1908, LIMBREY 1913.

⁹ MURRAY 1952, p. 75.

¹⁰ VAN DER STOEP 1984.

moves in both games is still debated. Several doubts remain on the detail, also because the use of long moves in draughts is only found in some national variants.

The historical questions are not limited to the introduction of long moves on the chequered board. There is another extended stage to cover, still with the possibility of keeping chess and draughts linked together: in both cases an earlier phase may have existed, in which the board was still unchequered, with just an array of straight lines, crossing and separating uniform squares. In the case of chess, there is no uncertainty: for centuries it was played in this way! For draughts, it may be a question of definition: whether different games played on the same board between two armies of one kind of pieces can be accepted – up to including different rules for moving and capturing.

Passing back through several variants from Turkish and Armenian draughts we may reach some board games of the ancient civilisations, played centuries earlier than the introduction of chess. In this sense, draughts can be considered older than chess. In principle, a sort of chess could be obtained from some ancient “draughts” variants simply by adding a few pieces for better simulating a real battle. The chess-draughts relationship is interesting since the beginning – the discussion is open among experts, either specialists in the history of chess, or of draughts, or in games of pawns in general. The greatest and deepest part of the debates has occurred among historians of draughts.

Historians of draughts

In Europe, the Netherlands is the country where draughts is cultivated the most. Its 10x10 variant has become the internationally acknowledged game, in which regular world championships take place. In most countries this game acquired a considerable diffusion only recently, being accepted together with the local variant. It is thus not surprising that draughts history is also a subject in which Dutchmen are at the forefront.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the renowned Dutch chess historian van der Linde already devoted to draughts a chapter of his fundamental book on the history

and bibliography of chess.¹¹ Other Dutch historians have contributed to the subject later on, up to our days. The series has been opened by Karel Kruijswijk, who published a pioneering work on the history and bibliography of draughts.¹² For its historical part, he drew largely on a typewritten work, compiled by the greatest historian of chess.¹³

A second important contribution was a book written in English by Arie van der Stoep.¹⁰ This contribution was already marked by personal features that have continued to assist him in following works: an unusual style that allows him to deal with a complex topic in a few pages, and a strongly critical approach to different views of other historians. In my opinion, our knowledge of the history of draughts is not yet as advanced as to allow anybody to write a systematic work devoid of a few arbitrary assumptions. Often facts are not known exactly, and different reconstructions and interpretations still have reason to coexist (until only one of them is proved to be right in the future).

The main contribution of van der Stoep has been in the field of linguistics, a study of the technical terms connected with the game and their variations through different countries for many centuries. Using this approach in his thesis, he graduated in 1997 at Leiden University.¹⁴ Probably, his most significant contribution has been the conclusion that for the possible etymology of Dutch *dam*, French *dames*, Italian *dama*, and so on, an original meaning related to dyke or embankment is the only one supported by the “scientific” rules of linguistics. However, other aspects do not escape his attention, from literature to paintings, and so on.

Another remarkable and independent contribution arrived later on from Spain, but also in this case its author was a Dutchman, Govert Westerveld, living in Spain. After a few original articles, he published a book, which remains the richest of the series, at least for its format, illustrations, and binding.¹⁵ Westerveld focused his attention on the Spanish environment, to begin with literary quotations of *andarraya*

¹¹ VAN DER LINDE 1874, II, pp. 392-416.

¹² KRUIJSWIJK 1966.

¹³ MURRAY 1916.

¹⁴ VAN DER STOEP 1997.

¹⁵ WESTERVELD 1997.

and other variants, and on the meaning of queen Isabel of Castille for the introduction of long moves both in chess and in draughts. The underlying idea is that this historical personage was so largely superior to other women that even the queens on chess boards acquired an increased power, with long moves.

Other Dutch experts took part in the historical discussion, even though they did not publish important books. In particular, Gerard Bakker published significant articles; Wim van Mourik, a renowned collector, added useful comments on historical game sets; Rob Janssen more than others searched and found interesting quotations of draughts in the ancient literatures and contributed to Westerveld's book. However, the most detailed work now is also the most recent one, and is again due to the long lasting activity of Arie van der Stoep.¹⁶ In this last work he extends his treatment down to the classical civilisations, as will be mentioned below.

As for historians of board games in general, the most authoritative publication among recent works is that by David Parlett.¹⁷ His short historical introduction to games of draughts mentions different opinions of the experts and advances some doubts on van der Stoep's theories.

Comments on the new historical book

The new book published by Arie van der Stoep¹⁸ is again a fruit of his writing system, with a very schematic structure in a style reminding works of natural science. Anybody with some interest in these problems should study it: thanks to the historic and linguistic knowledge of its author, and to his concise writing, it collects so many documents, reconstructions, and deductions, that would require thousands of pages to any other author. It clearly appears to be the fruit of studies continuously carried out for at least thirty years – correct answers to the several questions that it originates would require a reflection of a similar length. Only a preliminary discussion and a comment on Muslim draughts are possible here.

¹⁶ VAN DER STOEP 2005.

¹⁷ PARLETT 1999.

¹⁸ VAN DER STOEP 2005.

Van der Stoep maintains that the kind of board used in draughts games is not relevant. He thus accepts as draughts all the variants of the Turkish kind, played on all the sixty-four squares of the chessboard; in this acknowledgement, he is not alone, because this is a commonly accepted opinion, without taking their structural differences into account. However, he goes farther on, for instance acknowledging the game of *alquerque* as belonging to draughts.

It is known that the name of *alquerque* was often used for indicating games of the morris family and sometimes later on a game of the Turkish draughts kind too, but usually it was associated to a game played between two armies of twelve men on its typical board of 5x5 points – only one of them being free in the initial position. Capturing occurred by leaping, as in draughts, and therefore van der Stoep considers that this game of *alquerque* directly belongs to games of draughts. It all depends on definition, and may or may not be accepted by a conventional agreement. (For one, I do not accept that *alquerque* belongs to the family of draughts, except in cases in which a real draughts variant was intended under that name.)

Discussion can thus be focused on the possible origin and early presence of draughts in the Muslim culture, the same that introduced chess into Europe. Was draughts really played in that environment? Arie van der Stoep concludes that not only draughts was already played in the early Muslim culture, but also that draughts kings existed and already had the same long moves that we know from orthogonal variants of recent times. The Muslim variant with its long moves would have passed on to Spain and from there to other European countries up to becoming present-day international draughts.

One of the several consequences of this reasoning is an easy solution of the priority question about the earlier introduction of long moves in chess or draughts: obviously it was from draughts, and precisely its Muslim-Spanish version (in which long moves had been used for centuries) that long moves entered the chess game. This is not an absurd conclusion; it is a possible and reasonable one, but it still needs convincing evidence for confirmation. An independent source would have given birth to the other family of variants with short moves, with an early independent spread in other European countries, such as England, France, and Italy. (Actually, the latter family is considered as the original source by most historians, with a later introduction of long moves in a few countries, at about the same time in which long

moves appeared for chess queens and bishops.)

The last part of the book delves into the ancient Roman environment, where historians had seldom encountered games of the family of draughts, except some as the great Thomas Hyde who interpreted *ludus latruncularum* precisely as draughts. Of course, Arie Van der Stoep does not find chess in the Roman empire, since it only arrived in the early middle ages, but he follows there games of the morris and backgammon families, and the corresponding technical terms, with the goal of exploring the traditional ways of game transmission and changes through those of the corresponding vocabulary – as indeed he does for all games of this kind in the main European countries and languages. Arie van der Stoep then extends his history down to the earliest possible times, investigating the practice of board games and corresponding names for typical board games of the earlier Egyptian and Babylonian civilisations.

In the following sections attention will be focused on chess queens and an early quotation, apparently referring to draughts, topics that van der Stoep considers to belong exclusively to the history of chess.

Comments on feriça, the chess queen

For chess, the question of the appearance of the queens is rather complex, because it first occurred without a name change and then a distinction was often made between original queens and promoted pawns. In particular, the transformation from military to court personages occurred before the name *Regina* explicitly appeared.¹⁹

The information deriving from Arrigo da Settimello is indicative.²⁰ In his *Elegia*, probably written in 1193, we have the chessmen mentioned.

Nuper Alemannus, Siculam delatus in oram,
 ludendo feriçam perdidit ipse suam.
 Perdidit hic equites, rochos peditesque minores

¹⁹ MURRAY 1913, pp. 423-426.

²⁰ PRATESI 1992.

perdidit, et calvis vix bene tutus abit.²¹

The queen is still called *feriça* in the original text – or something alike, the actual spelling differing greatly among handwritten copies. In particular, the name can no longer be assigned to a vizier or any dignity; it is indeed explicitly associated with the Emperor's queen, Constance, who had been taken prisoner. Thus, independent of its name, here we have another proof that the chess *feriça* was then considered the wife of the king. I share Murray's opinion (something that usually does not require a great effort of willpower), «The name "Queen" is a characteristically European innovation, suggested probably by the position of the piece upon the board and by the general symmetry of the arrangement of the pieces, which pointed to the pairing of the two central pieces».²²

The appearance of the queen on the chessboard is only a part of the transformation from military to court environment, which lasted for a rather long time. Apparently, chessmen kept their names of Arab provenance for a while, but first a new meaning was associated to these obscure names (which were variously and erroneously written) and only later on new names were introduced, in a better correspondence with the new meanings. Among other things, the various names and their numberless variants associated with queen and bishop are a proof that this process could not occur in a simple and straightforward way.

On the game of farîsiâ

It is evident that discussing any early mention of draughts in the Arab literature is essential for a clear cut reconstruction of its early history. Experts of games in the Muslim culture explicitly exclude that draughts was played there.²³ It is certain that we do not find draughts mentioned, even though sometimes a game of the draughts family might have been indicated under the common name of *alquerque*. «*Qirq* made

²¹ MARIGO 1926.

²² MURRAY 1913, p. 423.

²³ SOMOGYI 1956.

the transition into Spanish in the form *alquerque*. This would seem to suggest that the game of merels in a number of variations entered the West from the Near Eastern cultural orbit. However, it may have met in the West with similar games already existing there. »²⁴

The most important reference to quote comes from van der Linde, the famous Dutch chess historian active in Germany in the last quarter of the 19th century. The source is of the beginning of the 13th century, but the work mentioned is of the middle of the 11th century, much earlier than any similar reference. This information is known to historians, to begin with Murray and Kruijswijk; in particular, it is the first and oldest among those listed by Parlett,²⁵ and was also discussed by van der Stoep within a note of his thesis (assigning to chess all references with similar names).²⁶ It has also been mentioned in a fundamental study on chess in the Muslim world; it is discussed there among chess variants, but the conclusion is that «könnte es sich möglicherweise um eine frühe Form des Damespiels handeln».²⁷

We have seen that van der Linde devoted a full chapter of his book to the history of draughts;²⁸ however, at the time, he was not yet familiar with Arab sources. Later on, he studied them in depth and as a result he published a new book,²⁹ in which he was able to amend several of his previous descriptions of chess in the Muslim world. When this work was in the press, he received outstanding information possibly referring to the game of draughts in the Spanish-Arab literature. In other words, van der Linde's most important contribution to draughts history is not present in his chapter on draughts in his *Geschichte*, it is not even present in the body of his later *Quellenstudien*, but just in a short postscript – half a page.³⁰

The essential part of this information is copied below (this author wrote in German without using capital letters for names).

²⁴ ROSENTHAL 1975, p. 172.

²⁵ PARLETT 1999, p. 255.

²⁶ VAN DER STOEP 1997, pp. 191-192.

²⁷ WIEBER 1972, p. 253.

²⁸ VAN DER LINDE 1874, II, pp. 392-416.

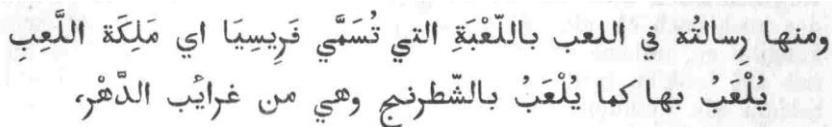
²⁹ VAN DER LINDE 1881.

³⁰ VAN DER LINDE 1881, p. 411.

Zu den “abarten” erhielt ich am 28. september dieses jares [1880] noch eine merkwürdige notiz von herrn professor R. Dozy in Leiden.

Das Britische Museum hat im april 1868 eine ausgezeichnete gute handschrift eines in Europa nicht vorhandenen buches gekauft, nämlich: Dihya’s Al-Motrib fi ash’ar ahli ‘l-Maghib (jetzt: Or. 77, beschrieben im katalog pp. 736 W.), datiert 649 H., d. h. 16 jare nach dem tode des verfassers. In diesem werke findet sich, nach einer von Wright angefangenen und Dozy verehrten abschrift, eine liste der bücher von Abu l-Fadhl Dschafar ibn-Sharaf (vgl. Dozy’s Recherches, 2. ausg. I pp. 253 W., 3. ausg. I pp. 248 W.).

Zu den schriften dieses verfassers gehört auch: «Seine abhandlung über das spielen mit dem spiele das genannt wird Farîsiâ, was die königin des spielers bedeutet, und womit man spielt wie mit dem schachspiel; welche abhandlung zu den merkwürdigsten produkten jener zeit gehört». Der text lautet:



ومنها رسالته في اللعب باللعبة التي تسمى فريسيا اي ملكة اللعب
يُلعَبُ بها كما يُلعَبُ بالشطرنج وهي من غرائب الدهر

[In Murray’s translation from van der Linde: «his work on games, with the game Farîsiâ, which means the player’s Queen, wherewith one plays as with chess, which work belongs to the most remarkable productions of that period. »]

This Arab manuscript is now kept in the British Library, but no recent studies seem to have been performed on it.³¹ The old catalogue informs us that the author had all his books robbed by pirates and wrote his compilation on authors from Spain and Northern Africa following the desire of his sponsor, al-Malik al-Kâmil Ayyubida, king from 615 to 635 H. However, even though the author did not have his sources at hand, this specific reference appears to be a very sound one, concerning both the author mentioned and his unusual book on a board game similar to chess.

A comment on the name of the game is first of all necessary. It confirms other

³¹ BAKER 2005.

ancient cases of draughts possibly indicated with the name of the chess queens: the game of *ferses* or *fierges* already had a couple of the earliest known references commonly quoted for draughts. The reference to *farîsiâ* is thus just the oldest of a group of references to a game indicated with the old name of the chess queens (before both chess queens and the game of draughts had their own names) and that was understood as draughts by several historians. If really these references indicate a draughts game, they are the oldest ones in Europe. Mainly for linguistic reasons, van der Stoep rejected their connection with draughts; Bakker reached the same conclusion after reflecting on the historical development of the game.³²

Maybe the soundest argument in support of a non-existence of a game of draughts known under the name of *farîsiâ* (or a similar name deriving from the chess piece placed near the king) is that no new such reference has been discovered in the last century. If the game was widely spread, more quotations should have been recorded and preserved. The discussion on these references is thus still open. There are essentially two different interpretations: accepting them as belonging to draughts, and thus concluding for an early origin of draughts, in the 11th century, or not accepting them, and thus concluding that draughts was only born about four centuries later, when explicit references to the game became usual. Serious research has recently been devoted to the origin of Spanish draughts near the end of the 15th century, with the conclusion that it exactly corresponds with the real origin of the game itself³³. Van der Stoep, however, puts forward a different theory: he does not accept the old references, but proposes all the same that draughts did exist then, and in even earlier times – under different names, repeatedly general names for board games.

Let us accept that a kind of draughts was intended. As noted by van der Linde himself, *farîsiâ* is not an Arab word and this fact has important consequences for the history of the game. It is necessary to assume that it comes back to the Arab language for indicating draughts, after a previous stage in which the Persian word *farzîn* through Arab *fîrzân* or *fîrz* had entered Europe indicating the chess piece that was to become the queen. At the time the chess piece located near the king represented the vizier and only moved one square diagonally, thus having only thirty-two squares of

³² BAKKER 1992.

³³ WESTERVELD 1997 e 2004.

the chessboard available, just like a draughtsman.

In Arabic, as it occurred in European languages, we have not yet found an acknowledged name for draughts at the time – if the game already existed, it might have been indicated under the general name of the various families of board games: morris, tables, and especially *alquerque*, in its main form played on a different board with similar rules for capturing. *Farîsiâ* is an Arab-through-Latin name connected with chess queens. One can thus deduce that this word, and game, was not coming to Valencia from the Muslim countries but it was instead passing through Valencia toward the Muslim countries. Indeed, the use of this word of a foreign provenance clearly indicates that a corresponding Arab name did not yet exist for this game and lets us easily suppose that the game too came to the Muslim culture from the near regions of Catalonia or maybe Southern France.

Unfortunately, this reference does not provide enough information on the game rules. However, it is essential that the game is seen, within the family of board games, as a near relative of chess. In the note it is explicitly stated that draughts “queens” move as in chess. This is an important annotation. An alternative interpretation for the *farîsiâ* game may correspond to a particular chess variant, as van der Stoep appears to suggest. This assumption, under this name, would be better supported if instead the corresponding moves were different, with respect to normal chess queens. It is not reasonable to use the name of the chess queen to indicate a chess variant, in which it is explicitly stated that one plays with queens as in chess. Some difference might be present between the two queen pieces, especially in capturing rules. It is certain however that chess queens only had short moves at the time. This description is thus clear enough to exclude any presence, at the time, of long moves for draughts “queens”: they reportedly moved in a similar way to the chess queens of the time.

Conclusions

Let us summarise, moving forward in time from the Romans. The first ancient game to serve for comparison is *latrunculi*: exactly as draughts, *latrunculi* was played without dice, by moving the same pieces on the same square-array board. However, its various reconstructions are all based on the custodian capture, which

can hardly be compared with the capture by leaping that identifies all the games of the draughts family. We can thus exclude *latrunculi* from the family of draughts, and there is no further reason to deal with ancient board games, because other games have a structure even farther away from draughts – most of them being played with dice.

The following stage was marked by the appearance of chess, played with a set of different pieces on the same unchequered board, but with a new object of the game: mating the king. If one wishes to find earlier traces of chess, research has to be done in Near East, Persia, India, Central Asia, China. It is a problem for Asian cultures to find out whether a form of chess could have existed there even before games of the *latrunculi* kind appeared in Europe. Indeed, if a board game was born as a reproduction of a real battle, the use of various pieces appears to be a more effective way to reach a suitable simulation! We have several quotations supporting a similar origin, but archaeologists did not yet discover possibly corresponding chess sets.

Alquerque, a game similar to draughts for the way of capturing but played on a different board, was already known in the Muslim countries. It is uncertain if and when it was adapted to the 8x8 chessboard and modified to give origin to variants of the Turkish draughts kind. Also very questionable is whether we can accept the recent suggestion by van der Stoep that these variants initially had the long moves as they have now; if they had not, it is uncertain when these moves became usual. The problem is important for the origin and the meaning itself of these variants. If they were played initially with long moves (as van der Stoep suggests) they may easily be considered as the origin of European draughts variants, starting from the Spanish one. In my opinion, however, they originally only had short moves.

Whereas chess arrived into Europe from the Muslim environment, the contrary direction appears to be more plausible for draughts. As suggested by Murray and other historians, the same misspelled Arab name used to indicate the chess queen was used for a while to indicate the game of draughts. Even if suitable information is missing, draughts appears to be well developed at this time: the publication of a treatise on the game is a proof. The book on draughts not only existed, but also was a work admired by readers of that period; it is a pity that no copy has been preserved.

If draughts was indicated as *farîsiâ*, we can exclude for it a genuine Muslim origin and the analogies mentioned with chess of the same time are enough to exclude the

presence of long moves. The transformation into long moves that are now typical of Turkish draughts and similar variants of the Muslim countries apparently occurred later on, as later on it occurred for chess queens and bishops. At the time, both games existed in a more primitive stage; both chess and draughts were played on the same chessboard and with short moves. In about the same time in the 15th century both draughts and chess acquired the long moves.

Lack of documents still prevents this to be considered as the true historical path; however, the same lack of documents does not allow alternative suggestions to be unconditionally preferred. It may now appear as a step backwards to come to less defined features, after a couple of authors have outlined more precise reconstructions (though they actually disagree).

The few quotations that were used by Murray to support his reconstruction are the same that we can use now. It may be disappointing that no new similar reference has been discovered in the last century. On the other hand, this may be considered as a support to Murray's theory: historians who recently disagree with his reconstruction cannot base their reasoning on better or richer evidence; they only differently interpret the same documents. Doubts on the reconstruction suggested by Murray existed at his time – they still do exist, practically unmodified. It is true that new original hypotheses have been proposed, especially by Govert Westerveld and Arie van der Stoep, but new significant discoveries are missing. Until substantial documentary evidence is found, the new suggestions mentioned cannot be considered as ascertained.

In particular, the dependence of draughts history on that of chess still appears to me greater than it would appear from the recent reconstruction by Arie van der Stoep. The evolution of draughts and chess are closely connected since the beginning of their common life, to the point that chess can be considered a parent of draughts and vice versa. Western draughts games were played on half the squares of the chequered board, born within the chess practice, and consequently should be considered as chess children or, at least – if a direct offspring is not agreed upon – as games born after the introduction of the chequered chessboard. On the other hand, we have Eastern draughts: games more or less similar to modern draughts but played on the sixty-four squares of the old unchequered boards (including Turkish and Armenian draughts). If they existed early enough, they can be considered as taking part in the

origin of chess.³⁴

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