

EARLY TERRACOTTAS FROM KANAUIJ
CHESSMEN?

Renate Syed, *München*

An Old Indic and an Old Persian source connect the Indian city of Kanauj or Kānyakubja with the game of chess, *caturaṅga*. These sources, Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita* from the early 7th century AD and Firdawsī's *Shāhnāme* from the late 10th century, refer to Kanauj of the 6th and early 7th centuries AD. In Kanauj as well as in the surrounding cities, numerous terracotta figurines of armed warriors, horses, elephants and chariots were found, which archaeologists date to the 5th century AD onwards. In view of their representation and size, which is between five and fifteen cm, they could be chess figures.¹ In this contribution, I would like to demonstrate the connection of the city of Kanauj with the game of chess. I will present the terracottas referred to, of which the meaning and function are still unclear, and I will propose that they were possibly used as chessmen.

Kanauj and the *caturaṅga*

The city of Kanauj

The city of Kanauj or Kānyakubja² experienced its rise after the first quarter of the 6th century AD as the residential city of the Maukharis. Majumdar (1954:xvi) summarizes the events of the 6th century briefly in the following way: 'The Hūṇas [the Huns, R.S.] disappeared as they came. The Gupta Empire, grown very weak, was dissolved, the virile Maukharis emerged victorious. But with their rise began a new phase in Indian history. Kanauj emerged as the symbol of a new order.' In his work *History of Kanauj*, Tripathi writes that the city was founded long before the beginning of the Christian era, but did not reach its real zenith until the middle of the 6th century AD, when the Maukharis made it their capital (1959:preface). It was most probably the Maukhari Īśānavarman who conquered Magadha and its capital Kanauj (Chat-topadhyaya 1958:223).

During the first half of the 7th century, King Harṣavardhana of the Puṣyabhūti dynasty reigned in Kanauj. After him the city belonged to the empire of the Gurjara-Pratihāras, and in AD 1018 it was destroyed by Mahmūd of Ghazni. Situated in the northern Indian plains on the Ganges, Kanauj was an important trading centre and place for merchandizing goods from the whole of India.³ The Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang, who travelled in India in the first half of the 7th century, describes the splendour of the city and remarks: 'Valuable merchandise is collected here in great quantities' (Beal 1884,1:206). An Arabic work from the 9th century reports that precious fabrics, muslin, turbans and herbs came from Kanauj (Chandra 1977:203).

The Maukharis, Harṣa and the *caturaṅga*

The Maukharis, formerly vassals of the Guptas,⁴ became stronger at the beginning of the 6th century, when the Gupta empire disintegrated. Their rivals were initially the Late Guptas, against whom the Maukharis, however, were able to withstand.⁵ The Maukharis also played a decisive part in driving the Huns out of India.⁶

The exact dating of the Maukhari kings is uncertain, as it is based on controversial readings of the numbers on the Maukhari coins; the inscriptions merely give us the order of the rulers.⁷ According to this, the first historically identifiable ruler of Kanauj was *mahārāja* Harivarman. His rise may be assigned to the end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century AD (Devahuti 1970:15). He was followed by his son *mahārāja* Ādityavarman, who was succeeded by *mahārāja* Īśvaravarman. The latter's son Īśānavarman was the first ruler of the dynasty to bear the title of *mahārājādhirāja*.⁸ Īśānavarman's son Śarvavarman also bore that title. During his reign the empire acquired its greatest extension. Śarvavarman was followed by his son Avantivarman, who in turn was succeeded by his son Grahavarman ascending the throne of Kanauj. With his death the dynasty of the Maukharis of Kanauj came to an end (Devahuti 1970:24-32). Only those Maukhari kings who ruled in Kanauj bore the title of *mahārājādhirāja*, viz., Īśānavarman, Śarvavarman and Avantivarman, and only they issued coins.

Inscriptions, coins and deeds recording gifts prove that Śarvavarman was the most important ruler of the Maukhari dynasty. Pires writes about him: 'Śarvavarman was a paramount sovereign, to whom homage was due from all kings of Northern India. ... [His] sovereignty was acknowledged throughout practically the whole of Northern India. ... We may further assume that Śarvavarman's dominions extended westwards as far as the easternmost tributaries of the Indus, including perhaps even that country of Sthāṇviśvara (Thānesar) ...' (Pires 1934:90, 92). And Devahuti notes how 'Śarvavarman, who definitely extended the Mauk-

hari dominion, perhaps in three directions, must have enjoyed a long reign. His several coins, his Asirgarh seal, and references to him in the records of other kings all point to an eventful and long career. Twenty to twenty-five years therefore appears to be the reasonable duration of his reign' (1970:30). With this, Devahuti rejects the old datings by Burn and Majumdar, who accorded to Śarvavarman only a short rule, while assigning a longer one to Īśānavarman.⁹ The dating by Burn had already been doubted by Śāstri in his treatment of the Harāhā inscription. According to his calculation, Śarvavarman ruled from AD 560 until 580, and Avantivarman from AD 580 until 600 (1917-1918:113). According to Devahuti's dating, Īśānavarman reigned until AD 560 or 565, Śarvavarman from AD 560 or 565 until 585, Avantivarman from AD 585 until 600, and Grahavarman from AD 600 until 606 (1970:30). Anyhow, in the second half of the 6th century the Maukharis dominated large parts of northern India. They 'emerged as the paramount power on the Gangetic Plain. ...With the establishment of Maukhari hegemony Kānyakubja replaced Pāṭaliputra as the imperial capital, and the ancient Kuru-Pañcāla region again became the primary political core of Northern India' (Schwartzberg 1978:181).

The last Maukhari ruler in Kanauj was Grahavarman, Śarvavarman's grandson. In the year AD 603 or 604 he married Harṣavardhana's sister, Rājyaśrī. In his biography of King Harṣavardhana (the *Harṣacarita*, 'Life of Harṣa'), written around AD 630 to 640, the poet Bāṇa, living at the court in Kanauj, describes this event in great detail and praises the Maukhari dynasty with the following words: 'At the head of the royal families (of India) there is the family of the Maukharis, which is revered by all the world like the footprint of Maheśvara (Śiva). The firstborn son of (King) Avantivarman, the ornament of this race, named Grahavarman, who resembles the lord of the planet (the moon) descended down to earth and who is in no way inferior to his father with respect to virtues, demands her (our daughter Rājyaśrī for his wife).'¹⁰

Grahavarman was killed in AD 605 or 606 by Devagupta, the king of Mālava. Due to the short period of his reign, no inscriptions or coins of Grahavarman exist. Kanauj was in the hands of Devagupta for a short while, when Harṣa conquered Kanauj, the capital city of his slain brother-in-law. He freed his widowed sister Rājyaśrī, who at that time was only 12 or 13 years old. Grahavarman had left no heir, so in Kanauj, which Harṣa made into his new capital instead of Sthāṇvīśvara, he reigned until his death in the year 647.¹¹ There are two valuable contemporary sources on the rule of Harṣa in Kanauj: Bāṇa's biography of King Harṣa and the report by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, who travelled in India between 629 and 644 (Beal 1884). The poet Bāṇa became acquainted with King Harṣa at the beginning of Harṣa's fifth decade, viz.,

shortly after AD 630.¹² By that time, Harṣa had already waged most of his numerous wars of conquest, and his empire was experiencing a period of peace in which, as Bāṇa states, the drawing-up (*kalpanā*) of the armies (*caturaṅga*) (now only) took place on the gameboards with 64 fields (*aṣṭāpada*): *aṣṭāpadānām caturaṅgakalpanā* (*Harṣacarita* 2, ed. P.V. Kane 1918:35). This is the oldest preserved mention of the game *caturaṅga* on the *aṣṭāpada*, and it proves that around AD 630 to 640 chess was played at the court in Kanauj.

The 'Rāy of Qannūj', Khusrau Anushirvan and the *catrang*

A Middle Persian text from the early 7th century entitled *Wizārīšn ī Čatrang* ('Explanation of chess') or *Matikān-e Šatranj* ('Treatise on chess') calls the Indian king who sent the game of chess to the Sasanian Khusrau Anushirvan (r. AD 531-579) 'Devasarm', 'Devasaram' or 'Dēwišarm' (depending on the mode of transcription). However, the text does not state that this king reigned in Kanauj.¹³

According to the epic *Shāhnāme*, composed by the Persian poet Firdawsī, it was the 'Rāy of Qannūj'¹⁴ in India who sent King Khusrau Anushirvan a game of chess: 'The king of the world learned from his watchful observers that the envoy of the King of India had arrived, accompanied by elephants, shades and knights from Sindh (Indus) ...'.¹⁵ The numerous and precious gifts, including jewels, shades, gold and silver, musk, ambra and fresh incense, rubies and silk fabrics, were, according to the *Shāhnāme*, 'all products from Qonnuj and the empire of the Ray' (Abka'i-Khavari 1998:38). The Indian envoy presented the Sasanian king with the game of chess, saying: 'Give orders that those who strive hardest regarding the sciences be confronted with this chessboard, they shall confer with one another and explain the intricate game, they shall guess the name of each figure and after that its house, they shall recognize the infantry, the elephants, the army, the rok [the chariot, R.S.], the horse and the gait (mode of movement) of the Farzin [minister, R.S.] and the king' (Abka'i-Khavari 1998:38). The *caturaṅga* thus reached Persia as a game, it had a gameboard and a set number of figures, which moved and struck according to certain rules.

There can be no doubt that 'Rāy of Qannūj' means the *rāja*, king, of Kanauj.¹⁶ However, this king is not further identifiable from the *Shāhnāme*. Regardless of the identity of this king and the historicity of the statements of the *Shāhnāme*, the following points can be regarded as certain:

1. The Indian game of *caturaṅga* travelled from India to Persia, where it was called *catrang*.¹⁷ It has been linguistically proven that the Sanskrit word *caturaṅga*, 'composed of four parts', 'army', is the ba-

sis of the Middle Persian word *catrang*. ‘The name of the game of chess indicates that it came to Iran from India in pre-Islamic times. It cannot have taken the opposite way from Iran to India’ (Sundermann 1999:59).¹⁸ All Old Persian sources assume the Indian origin of the *caturaṅga*.¹⁹

2. The terminus *ante quem*: The *caturaṅga* must have reached Persia before the conquest of the Sasanian empire by the Arabs, *i.e.*, before AD 650, for the names show that the Arabs took over the game from the Persians.²⁰ The mention of *catrang* in the *Wizārišn ī Čatrang* in the early 7th century further proves the existence of chess in Persia before the advent of the Arabs. All Arabic sources assume the Indian origin of chess (Wieber 1972:92-99).²¹
3. The terminus *post quem*: The *caturaṅga* cannot have reached Persia before the early 6th century, as its invention in India can hardly be dated before 500.²² The earliest Persian references to *catrang* all date from the period after AD 600.²³

Thus, the period in which chess came to Persia probably extends from the middle of the 6th century (at the earliest) and AD 630 (at the latest). If one doubts the truthfulness of the statements made in the *Wizārišn ī Čatrang* and in the *Shāhnāme*, then the sending of the game of chess by an Indian king to a Persian ruler might also be questioned. Thus, Panaino calls the Dēwišarm mentioned in the *Wizārišn ī Čatrang* ‘fictitious’ (1999:245). Of course, the *caturaṅga* could have reached Persia with traders, soldiers or scholars. Regardless of whether the statements in the *Shāhnāme* are to be treated as historical facts or not, *caturaṅga* came to Persia during the period when Kanauj was the political and economic centre of northern India. If one believes the *Wizārišn ī Čatrang* and Firdawsī, chess came to Persia under Khusrau Anushirvan. This coincides largely, as elaborated above, with the probable period in which *caturaṅga* must have reached Persia in any case. During the politically significant period of Khusrau’s rule, the most important northern Indian kings of that century ruled from Kanauj, *viz.*, the Maukhari Kings Īśānavarman from approximately AD 554 until 560 or 565, and King Śarvavarman from AD 560 or 565 to 585. Īśānavarman’s and Khusrau’s reigns thus overlapped for six or eleven years,²⁴ Śarvavarman and Khusrau shared at least fourteen years of rule (AD 565 until 579).

In the *Wizārišn ī Čatrang* the Indian king is called ‘the great lord, king of India’ (Panaino 1999:249), in the *Shāhnāme* he is the ‘King of India’ (VIII, 2632, Abka’i-Khavari 1998:39). This would fit both the Maukhari King Īśānavarman and his successor Śarvavarman, as both used the title *mahārājādhirāja*. A further designation of the ‘Rāy of

Qannūj' in the *Shāhnāme* could also point to the Maukharis. The Indian delegate, obviously an intellectual Brahmin, is addressed with the words: 'You priest of the Rāy, whose origin is from the sun ...'.²⁵ In their inscriptions the Maukharis also trace their origin from the sun god; 'the Maukharis thus were *sūrya-vaṃśīs*'.²⁶

In the *Wizārīšn ī Čatrang* the Indian king is called 'Dēwišarm' (Panaino 1999:93, 249),²⁷ which seems to be based on Sanskrit 'Devāśarman'. But an Indian king as a member of the warrior class cannot have borne a name ending on '-śarman', as this is exclusively a designation for brahmins. The onomastic element '-varman' of the Maukhari name shows them to be members of the warrior class. On his coins and in the inscriptions Śarvavarman is called *śarvvavarmma deva* as well as *deva śarvvavarmma*,²⁸ as Indian kings frequently bore the title *deva*, 'god', 'lord'. Could 'Dēwišarm' be a modification (contraction) of the designation *deva śarvvavarmma*?

An exchange of delegations between the Maukharis and the Sasanians seems highly probable, as under Śarvavarman the dominions of Maukharis extended up to the Indus.²⁹ The *Shāhnāme* tells us that the delegation from the Rāy of Qannūj was accompanied by riders from the region of the Indus.³⁰ This indicates that the Rāy of Qannūj indeed ruled over the area mentioned. After the Huns had been driven out, the empire of the Maukharis nearly bordered on the easternmost parts of the Sasanian provinces. The expulsion of the Huns had relaxed the political situation in northern India considerably and had opened up the roads between India and Persia.³¹ Not only Firdawsī, but also the historian Ṭabarī (AD 839-923), who came from Persia and wrote in Arabic, reports that Khusrau Anushirvan and Khusrau II (AD 590-628) received Indian delegations.³²

In the *Shāhnāme* Firdawsī says that the collection of Indian folk tales 'Kalīla wa Dimna' came to Persia under Khusrau Anushirvan.³³ The Arabic historian Mas'ūdī confirms this.³⁴ The historicity of this event is not doubted by scholars. Thus the Iranist Wiesehöfer writes: 'Xusro's look to the East is indicated by the translation, authorized by him, of a version of the Indian work of fables *Pancatantra*, ... brought back from India by the doctor Burzoy' (1993:291).³⁵ According to the Indologist Winternitz, it was the Northwest Indian version of the collection of tales, together with other Indian texts, that was translated into Pahlavi by order of Khusrau (1920:299). Thus, the route along which the tale collection travelled from northern India to Persia was most probably also that of the *caturaṅga* in about the same period.

As to *caturaṅga* and its connection with Kanauj, it is noteworthy that Śarvavarman was the grandfather of Grahavarman, Harṣa's brother-in-law. At Harṣa's court in Kanauj chess was played, and Harṣa

had inherited the throne of Kanauj as the heir of the Maukharis. Had he also taken over the war game *caturaṅga* from the Maukharis? If *caturaṅga* was played around AD 630-640 in Kanauj, undoubtedly it must have been known there some decades before, when Īśānavarman and Śarvavarman ruled over Kanauj. We may assume that the game *caturaṅga* was invented around AD 500 in northern India and quickly spread, also to Kanauj, the most important city in the North around the middle of the 6th century. The invention and spread of a war game imitating battle, the progress of which does not depend on luck in throwing the dice, but purely on the achievement of the mind, on strategic and tactical considerations, are not surprising at this particular time and in this geographic area. 'The late fifth and the sixth centuries were an age of mutually repellent and warring states engaged in petty internecine jealousies, and hence statesmanship and military skill of a high order were called forth to hold the empires together' (Tripathi 1959:130).

My hypothesis is that the game *caturaṅga*, invented around the middle of the 1st millennium AD in northern India, developed from a didactic model of the same name which was a kind of sandpit game of the war theoreticians. I assume that this older *caturaṅga* was played without a gameboard and with a variable number of figures, which represented the different elements of the army, in order to imitate the setting-up of armies and the course of battle. I believe that this *caturaṅga*, not documented in any texts, was used for training purposes in strategy and tactics.³⁶

Terracottas from Kanauj and other cities of northern India

The finds

In central northern India, at Kanauj, Ahicchatra, Pāṭaliputra and numerous other cities, a great number of terracottas have been excavated. Among these are figurines of standing armed warriors as well as elephants, horses and chariots.³⁷ However, there are no figurines that, as a group, could be interpreted as forming a chess set.³⁸ Also I do not know of any specimens that could unequivocally be identified as a 'king' or a 'minister'.³⁹ I will present some of these terracottas, with illustrations and descriptions taken from the publications on these finds, in order to discuss their interpretation as figurines of warriors, elephants, horses and chariots used in the *caturaṅga*. Nigam's dating of the pieces as 'post-Gupta' points to the 6th century and thus to the epoch of the Maukharis. However, we must realize that the dating of these terracottas is extremely difficult and in no case certain.

No. 1. A warrior, from Kanauj; 'post-Gupta terracotta' (Nigam 1981:216 and pl. 6). Here, as in the other cases, the precise recovery site within the city of Kanauj is not mentioned. 'A terracotta figure in dull grey, prepared from a single shallow mould ... presents a male warrior standing. The lower portion of the plaque is broken, but the posture of the feet can be known from several similar incomplete figurines in the collection. ... He holds a sword in the right hand while the left is akimbo.' The scale provided by Nigam below the illustration shows that the figure, with legs and feet, must have been about 12 to 15 cm high (fig. 32.1).

No. 2. A warrior, from Kanauj; 'post-Gupta terracotta' (Nigam 1981:216 and pl. 7). 'A fragmentary terracotta figure, dull red, pressed against a single shallow mould. ... is the bust of a warrior. ... The masculinity of the warrior who holds a khetaka [*khetaka*, 'shield', R.S.] in his right hand has been expressed by the broad chest.' Judging from the scale the complete figure must have been between 12 and 15 cm high (fig. 32.2).

No. 3. A warrior, from Kanauj; 'post-Gupta terracotta' (Nigam 1981:216 and pl. 8). 'A dull red, fragmentary terracotta figure of warrior He holds an oval shield in the left hand which is resting on the left knee. It may conjectured that a sword or lance may have been held in the right hand in a charging posture as also suggested by the position of the thighs. The figure is in [the] round. The moulded head has been luted to the hand modelled body.' Judging from the scale, its height must have been approximately 15 cm (fig. 32.3).

No. 4. A rider on horseback, from Ahicchatra (Agrawala 1947-1948:154, fig. 213). 'Male rider on horseback, complete with the feet of the horse resting on the base-plate.' Belonging to Stratum IIIb, 'A.D. 550-660' (Agrawala p. 153). Twenty-three riders of this type have been excavated. Each figure was produced from a double mould' (p. 152). The scale shows that the figure is approximately 9.5 to 10 cm high. Interestingly, Agrawala (1947-1948:153) writes: 'This type [of horse, R.S.] may be identified with the Kāmboja horse ... referred to by Bāṇa (*Harshacarita*, p. 62)' (fig. 32.4).

No. 5. A rider on horseback, from Bhitari, near Ghazipur (Prakash 1985:10, 127, pl. 10). 'Horse rider, warrior, ... latest period [AD 300-600, R.S.]. ... It is double moulded and half seated figure fixed on a pedestal [sic, R.S.].⁴⁰ Prakash does not mention the size. He refers to ten comparable rider figures from this period found at Ahicchatra. These have not been published yet (1985:127). This type was widespread since the Gupta period (p. 126) (fig. 32.5).

No. 6. An elephant, from Kumrahar (Altekar 1959:119). 'Ninety-seven terracotta animals, entire or fragmentary, were found. ... Majority of

these animals are solid.’ According to Altekar the elephant belongs to Period IV and thus to the time between AD 300 and 450. The elephant is circa 7 cm long and nearly 6 cm high. The village of Kumrahar lies to the South of Patna / Pāṭaliputra (fig. 32.6).

No. 7. An elephant, from Pāṭaliputra (Sinha and Narain 1970:12). ‘Red terracotta, no wash or slip. ... Mould made. From period III’ [until AD 500, R.S.]. The elephant is about 4.5 cm high and 5.5 cm long (fig. 32.7).

No. 8. A chariot, Hastināpura (Lal 1954-1955:88 and pl. 48). ‘Wheeled toy-cart. ... Excavated from an early level of period IV, early second century B.C. [to] late third century A.D.’ (fig. 32.8).

Interpretations

No conclusive evidence can be given for the use of these terracottas as chessmen. However, we may consider such a use. None of the authors referred to linked the terracottas with chess. According to Prakash and Altekar the figures are toys.⁴¹ However, the assumption that these figurines were toys for children is just as speculative and without proof as the supposition that these terracottas were chessmen and thus toys for men. Terracottas in human and animal shapes, which were possibly also used in a religious context, have existed all over India from the earliest times onwards. When chess was invented, one could thus make use of already existing forms. The following factors point towards a possible use as chessmen:

- These figures were mostly produced in forms or moulds. This indicates that they were manufactured serially. Apparently their artistic design was of minor importance;
- There are several copies of the warrior figurines from Kanauj (no. 1). Nigam speaks of ‘several similar incomplete figurines’;
- Some of the terracottas are grey (no. 1), others red (nos 2 and 3). It is unclear whether they were painted;
- The horses and elephants have flat bases (nos 4, 5 and 6). Due to their fragmentary state, it is not possible to tell whether the warriors had flat bases;
- The height is between 5 and 15 cm;
- The meaning and use of these terracottas are as yet unknown;

- The figures were found in central northern India (the Gangetic plains) and thus in an area in which, in all probability, chess originated. This area was ruled by the Maukharis. The geopolitical synopsis in Schwartzberg's atlas depicts the dominion of the Maukharis as including Kānyakubja, Prayāga, Ayodhyā and Pāṭaliputra (1978:145, pl. 14.1, map 1). Most of the Maukhari coins were found in this area, *i.e.*, in Ahicchatra and Ayodhya (Tripathi 1959:298), as well as in Lucknow (Burn 1906:847);
- In Ahicchatra the number of serially manufactured elephant and horse terracottas with solid bases increased between AD 300 and 600 (Prakash 1985:122). This city is situated approximately 80 km Northwest of Kanauj and belonged to the core area of the Maukhari realm. Here seventeen elephants were found. Prakash writes: 'The elephant figures lack the sophistication of the preceding period. The figures are generally devoid of any decoration. Double moulded elephant figures are mostly found from these sites. A large majority of elephant figures showed the representation of riders. They are mostly represented on a pedestal.' The following also applies to the period mentioned: 'An interesting development was the occurrence of a large number of horse figurines with rider. In many cases the person depicted as a rider is shown as a warrior This type is very popular and almost every site of the valley has yielded this type. The figures are generally mould-made. The rider is often represented like [a] warrior' (Prakash 1985:126-127). The horses were also mould-made, or, as Prakash indicates, 'moulded horse figures are found mostly from all the sites of the valley' (p. 126) In the period between AD 300 and 600 the animal figures, so Prakash informs us, are supplied with flat bases: 'Yet another interesting development was the provision of a flat or pedestal base on which the animal figures stood. ... This was meant to facilitate the use of the figures as toys' (p. 122).

Epilogue

I can offer no conclusive evidence for the historicity of Firdawsī's statement and my corresponding thesis that a *rāja* of Kanauj sent the game of chess to Khusrau Anushirvan. But different kinds of clues do point to the Gangetic plain as the area in which chess was most probably invented and from where it made its way first to Persia, and then out into the world. The existence of *caturaṅga* played on the *aṣṭāpada* around AD 630-640 as documented in the *Harṣacarita* proves that chessmen

were used by this time. Is it possible that the terracottas presented here were such chessmen used in the 6th century?

References

Primary textual sources

Bāna. *Harṣacarita. The Harshacarita of Bānabhaṭṭa with exhaustive notes (Ucchvāsas I-VIII)*. Ed. with an introd. and notes by P.V. Kane. Delhi [etc.], 1918.

Beal, S. 1884. *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist records of the western world*. Transl. from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629). 2 vols. London [etc.]. (Trübner's Oriental Series)

Firdawsī, Abū al-Qāsim Maṣṣūr b. Ḥasan. *Shāhnāme. The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi: Matn-i intiḡadi*. 9 vols. Moscow, 1960-1971.

———. *Shāhnāme. Le livre des rois: Shahname*. Ferdowsi ; traduit du persan par Jules Mohl ; extraits choisis et revus par Gilbert Lazard. Paris, 1979. (Persian Heritage Series 37; La Bibliothèque Persane, Collection Unesco d'Œuvres Représentatives, Série Persane)

Maskūr, Muḥammad Gawād. *Kārnāmak-i Artaksīr-i Pāpakān. Karnamak-e Ardaschīr: Artachsīr i Papakan*. Aus dem Pehlewi übersetzt, mit Erläuterungen und einer Einleitung versehen von T. Nöldeke. Göttingen, 1879.

Nöldeke, T. 1879. *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden: aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari übersetzt und mit ausführlichen Erläuterungen und Ergänzungen versehen*. Leyden.

Panaino, A. 1999. *La novella degli scacchi e della tavola reale: un'antica fonte orientale sui due gochi da tavoliere più diffusi nel mondo eurasiatico tra Tardoantico e Medioevo e sulla loro simbolologia militare e astrologica*. Testo pahlavi, traduzione e commento al Wizārīšn ī Čatrang ud nihišn ī nēw-ardaxšīr, "La spiegazione degli scacchi e la disposizione della tavola reale". Milano.

Secondary sources

Abka'i-Khavari, Manijeh 1998. Schach im Iran: einige Überlegungen zu den Iranischen Schachepisoden. In: M. Eder (ed.), *Arbeitspapiere zum Privatissimum "Seidenstraße"*, Berlin 20. und 21. Februar 1998, pp. 28-41. Kelkheim/Ts.

Agrawala, V.S. 1947-1948. Terracotta figurines of Ahichchatrā, District Bareilly, U.P. *Ancient India: Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India* 4:104-179.

Altekar, A.S. 1937. Three Maukhari inscriptions on yupas: Krita year 295. *Epigraphia Indica* 23 (1935-1936):42-52.

Altekar, A.S., and V.K. Mishra 1959. *Report on Kumrahar excavations 1951-1955*. Patna.

Bartholomae, C. 1904. *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*. Strassburg.

- Burn, R. 1906. Some coins of the Maukharis, and of the Thanesar line. *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, pp. 843-850.
- Chandra, M. 1977. *Trade and trade routes in ancient India*. New Delhi.
- Chattopadhyaya, S. 1958. *Early history of North India: from the fall of the Mauryas to the death of Harṣa, c. 200 B.C. – A.D. 650*. Calcutta.
- Devahuti, D. 1970. *Harsha: a political study*. Oxford [etc.].
- Fleet, J.F. 1888. *Inscriptions of the early Gupta kings and their successors*. Calcutta. (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum 3)
- Jones, W. 1790. On the Indian game of chess. *Asiatick Researches or, Transactions of the Society, instituted in Bengal for Enquiry into the History and Antiquities, the Architecture, Sciences, and Literature of Asia* 2:159-165.
- Lal, B.B. 1954-1955. Excavation at Hastināpura and other explorations in the Upper Gangā and Sutej basins 1950-52: new light on the dark age between the end of the Harappā culture and the early Historical period. *Ancient India: Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India* 10-11:5-151.
- Law, B.C. 1954. *Historical geography of ancient India*. Paris.
- MacDonell, A.A. 1898. The origin and early history of chess. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, pp. 117-141.
- Majumdar, R.C. 1954. Northern India after the break-up of the Gupta empire (sixth century A.D.). In: R.C. Majumdar (gen. ed.), *The classical age*, pp. 60-95. Bombay. (The History and Culture of the Indian People 3)
- Murray, H.J.R. 1913. *A history of chess*. Oxford [etc.].
- Nigam, J.S. 1981. Some post-Gupta terracottas from Kanauj. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*, n.s. 52-53 (1977-1978):214-218.
- Nöldeke, T. 1892. *Persische Studien*. Vol. 2. Wien. (Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 116, 4. Sitzung 126, Abhandlung 12)
- Pires, E.A. 1934. *The Maukharis*. Madras. (Studies in Indian History of the Indian Historical Research Institute, St. Xavier's College, Bombay 10)
- Prakash, P. 1985. *Terracotta animal figurines in the Ganga-Yamuna valley (600 B.C. to 600 A.D.)*. Delhi.
- Śāstri, H. 1917-1918. Haraha inscription of the reign of Isanavarman: [Vikrama Samvat] 611. *Epigraphia Indica* 14:110-120.
- 1927-1928. Barah copper-plate of Bhojadeva: Vikrama samvat 893. *Epigraphia Indica* 19:15-19.
- Schippmann, K. 1990. *Grundzüge der Geschichte des sasanidischen Reiches*. Darmstadt.
- Schwartzberg, J.E. (ed.) 1978. *A historical atlas of South Asia*. Chicago [etc.]. (The Association for Asian Studies Reference Series 2)
- Sinha, B.P., and L.A. Narain 1970. *Pāṭaliputra excavation, 1955-56*. Patna.

- Smith, V.A. 1957. *Early history of India: from 600 B.C. to the Muhammadan conquest including the invasion of Alexander the Great*. 4th ed., rev. by S.M. Edwardes (orig. pub. 1904). Oxford.
- Sundermann, W. 1999. Eine Bemerkung zum Namen des Schachspiels, seiner Herkunft und Geschichte. In: M. Eder (ed.), *Arbeitspapiere zum Privatissimum "Indien"*, München, 13. und 14 März 1999, pp. 58-59. Kelkheim/Ts.
- Syed, R. 1993. Das caturaṅga im Mānasollāsa und einige Bemerkungen zum Schach in Indien. *Beiträge des Südasien-Instituts der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* 6:93-132.
- 1995. Caturaṅga: Anmerkungen zu Alter, Ursprung und Urform des Schachs. *Beiträge des Südasien-Instituts der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* 8:63-108.
- 1998. Der König und sein Berater im altindischen Staat und im Schach. In: M. Eder (ed.), *Arbeitspapiere zum Privatissimum "Seidenstraße"*, Berlin 20. und 21. Februar 1998, pp. 71-95. Kelkheim / Ts.
- 2001. *Kanauj, die Maukharis und das caturaṅga: der Ursprung des Schachspiels und sein Weg von Indien nach Persien*. Kelkheim/Ts.
- Tripathi, R.S. 1959. *History of Kanauj to the Muslim conquest*. Delhi [etc.].
- Wieber, R. 1972. *Das Schachspiel in der arabischen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Walldorf-Hessen. (Beiträge zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte des Orients 22)
- Wiesehöfer, J. 1993. *Das antike Persien: von 550 v. Chr. bis 650 n. Chr.* München [etc.].
- Winternitz, M. 1920. *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur*. Vol. 3, *Die Kunstdichtung – Die wissenschaftliche Litteratur - Neuindische Litteratur ; Nachträge zu allen drei Bänden*. Leipzig. (Die Litteraturen des Ostens in Einzeldarstellungen 9)
- Wolff, F. 1935. *Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname*. 2 vols. Berlin.

Illustrations

- 32.1 A warrior, from Kanauj. Terracotta, 'post-Gupta period'. Photograph after Nigam 1981:pl. 6.
- 32.2 A warrior, from Kanauj. Terracotta, 'post-Gupta period'. Photograph after Nigam 1981:pl. 7.
- 32.3 A warrior, from Kanauj. Terracotta, 'post-Gupta period'. Photograph after Nigam 1981:pl. 8.
- 32.4 A rider on horseback, from Ahicchatra. Terracotta, recovered from Stratum IIIb, ca. 'AD 550-660'. Photograph after Agrawala 1947-1948:fig. 213.

- 32.5 A rider on horseback, from Bhitari. Terracotta, ca. AD 300-600. Photograph after Prakash 1985:pl. 10.
- 32.6 An elephant, from Kumrahar. Terracotta, from Period IV, ca. AD 300-450. Photograph after Altekar 1959:119.
- 32.7 An elephant, from Patna. Terracotta, from Period III, ca. until AD 500. Photograph after Sinha and Narain 1970:12.
- 32.8 A chariot, from Hastināpura. Terracotta, from an early level of Period IV (early 2nd cent. BC to late 3rd cent. AD). Photograph after Lal 1954-1955:pl. 48.

Notes

¹Besides the king and minister (our 'queen'), ancient Indian chess consisted of two elephants, two horses and two chariots as well as eight foot soldiers for each of the two colours (Syed 1995; 2001).

²In the *Mahābhārata* the city is called Kanyakubja, Kānyakubja and Kanyākubja (*Mhbh* 3.115.9 and 17). In Buddhist literature the city appears as Kaṇṇakujja (Law 1954:93), in Prakrit its name is Kaṇṇaujja, *e.g.*, in Rājaśekhara's *Karpūramañjarī* 3.5.

³The position of the city in trade and traffic (as well as military expansion and administration) was excellent: 'The importance of Kanauj in ancient times was probably due to its strategic advantages. The city stood on a cliff on the right bank of the Ganges, which was then a highway of commerce and communication, and it must have, therefore, been a convenient centre for traffic in the upper Doab [land of two streams, the Gangā and the Yamunā, R.S.]' (Tripathi 1959:1, fn. 1).

⁴The Maukharis were a very ancient tribe whose branches were spread over different parts of the country' (Devahuti 1970:24). The dynasty can be traced back to the 3rd century AD in inscriptions. See Altekar 1937:42 and Majumdar 1954:67.

⁵From the undated Apsad inscription we learn that Ādityasena from the family of the Guptas of Magadha had waged war against the Maukhari king Īśānavarman, and that Ādityasena's son Dāmodaragupta had also fought the Maukharis (Fleet 1888:200-208, Apsad stone inscription of Ādityasena, in particular lines 5-9).

⁶Pires 1934:91 and Tripathi 1959: 46.

⁷The Harāhā inscription of King Īśānavarman, dated to the Vikrama year 611, equivalent to AD 554, is particularly important for the genealogy of the Maukharis. See Śāstri 1917-1918. The names of the Maukhari kings and their wives appear in the Asirgadh copper seal inscription of Śārvavarman (Fleet 1888:219-221). The Deo-Baraṇārka inscription demonstrates that Avantivarman was the successor of Śārvavarman (Fleet 1888:213-218).

⁸Śāstri 1917-1918:111-112; Smith 1957:155; Devahuti 1970:25. On the title ‘*mahārājādhirāja*’ Fleet writes: ‘... *lit.* “supreme king of Mahārājas” ... is one of the titles indicative of supreme paramount sovereignty, and is the only expression that properly and fully answers to our idea of a “king” (1888:10, fn. 3).

⁹According to Burn (1906:849), who founds his opinion on the reading of legends on the coins of Īśānavarman, Śārvavarman and Avantivarman, Īśānavarman reigned in the year AD 553, Śārvavarman in the years AD 553, 554 or 555 and 557, and Avantivarman in the years AD 556, 569 and 570. According to Pires’ reading, AD 579 was the last year of Śārvavarman’s reign (1934:163-164). According to Majumdar (1954:70) and Pires (1934:164) Īśānavarman reigned from AD 550 until 576, Śārvavarman only from AD 576 until 579-580. But Majumdar is unsure: ‘Unfortunately, the numerical figures are very uncertain, and widely divergent readings have been proposed by different scholars. So it is impossible to form any definite conclusion from them ...’ (1954:70). On Majumdar and criticism of his proposed dating, see Devahuti 1970:29.

¹⁰*Harṣacarita* 2, ed. P.V. Kane 1918:35.

¹¹See on this *Harsacarita* 7, ed. P.V. Kane 1918:67 as well as Pires 1934:116-125, 129-130 and Devahuti 1970:72.

¹²*Harṣacarita* 2, ed. P.V. Kane 1918:30: *pañcamīpraveśa*. Harṣa, born in AD 590, ascended the throne of Kanauj after the death of his brother Rājyavardhana and after some wars. He was not even twenty years old at the time.

¹³In his English summary Panaino translates: ‘Thus they say that, in the reign of Xusraw of the Immortal Soul, Dēwišarm, the great lord, king of India, sent one set of catrang (and) sixteen pieces made of emerald and sixteen made of red ruby, to test the intelligence and wisdom of the lords ... of Erānšahr ...’ (1999:249).

¹⁴According to Wolff, *rāy* means ‘Raja, king’ (1935:427), Qannūj is a ‘geographical name, city in India’ (1935:622). Wolff remarks that the city also appears as Qānūj in the *Shāhnāme*.

¹⁵*Shāhnāme* VIII.2628 ff., Moscow ed., 1960-1971. The German translation is by Abka’i-Khavari 1998:38, translated into English by R.S.

¹⁶In his 1898 article, MacDonell had already identified ‘Qannūj’ (transcribed by him as ‘Kanūj’) as Kanauj (p. 129). However, he did not pursue this line of thought any more than Murray did. The latter wrote: ‘Under the Persian name Kanūj, the town is associated by Firdawsī in the *Shāhnāma* with the introduction of chess into Persia under Khusraw I Nuschirvan, 531-79 A.D.’ (1913:52, fn. 3).

¹⁷The figures, their arrangement, their progress and their modes of fighting and striking were modelled on the ancient Indian army, which was also called *caturaṅga*, and on the theory of war. I have treated this matter in detail in a study of ancient Indian war-theoretical literature (Syed 1995).

¹⁸This was already seen by Sir William Jones two hundred years ago (1790:159). The Iranist Sundermann states that the Arabic word for chess, *šatranj*, which undoubtedly forms the basis for Spanish *ajedrez* and Portuguese *xadrez*, is a loanword from Persian, as it cannot be derived from three radicals (consonantal stem sounds), as would be the case with an Arabic word proper. Sundermann continues: 'But Middle Persian *catrang*, i.e. the word used in Iran until the 7th/8th centuries A.D., is a loanword in Middle Persian as well. It cannot be a native word, as Middle Persian does not have the consonant cluster *tr*... . If *catrang* is a loanword, the most obvious solution seems to be to derive it from Old Indic *caturaṅga* documented in Sanskrit The initial *aṅga*- "member" is an Indic word without any equivalent in the Iranian languages' (1999:59).

¹⁹Syed 1995:67; Abka'i-Khavari 1998:31.

²⁰MacDonell (1898:10) writes: 'Had the chess come into Persia from India after that date [652 AD, R.S.], it is likely the Arabs would have obtained a first-hand knowledge of the game.' In the battles of AD 636 and 642 the Arabs inflicted the worst defeats on the Sasanians. Around AD 651/652 the Sasanian Yazdegird was murdered (Schippmann 1990:146).

²¹According to the Arabic historian Mas'ūdī, who wrote in the first half of the 10th century, King Khusrau Anushirvan received the game of chess, the collection of fairy tales entitled 'Kalīla wa Dimna' (called '*Pañcatantra*' in India) and some black hair dye from the Indians. See on this Nöldeke 1892:22.

²²The complete silence of the voluminous Indian literature on a game named *caturaṅga* prior to Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita* suggests that such a game did not exist before the 6th century. Of course, the silence is no *proof* for the non-existence of *caturaṅga* by this time.

²³The Pahlavi work *Kārnāmak-i Arta ksīr-i Pāpakān*, according to which the Parthian King Ardaschir (AD 224-240) learned to play chess, was written around AD 600 at the earliest (ed. Nöldeke 1879:39). The *Wizārīšn ī Čatrang* is also from late Sasanian times (Abka'i-Khavari 1998:29 and Panaino 1999:245).

²⁴Khusrau came to the throne at a very young age and had to suppress rebellions and revolts for many years. It took several years for the kingdom to be at peace and Khusrau to be established. He did not gain full power until the middle of the 6th century.

²⁵*Shāhnāme* 8.2686; Abka'i-Khavari 1998:39. According to the latter, the title '*khvarshid cehr*', 'descended from the sun', is borne by the Sasanian kings in the *Shāhnāme*. According to Bartholomae, Old Iranian *cithra*, which is the basis of Modern Persian '*cahr*', means, among other things, 'face' and 'origin', 'descent' (Bartholomae 1904:586-587; Engl. transl. by R.S.).

²⁶Devahuti 1970:241. See the Harāhā inscription of Īsānavarman, where the Maukharis or Maukharas are called the descendants of the hundred sons whom Aśvapati obtained from Vaivasvata, or the seventh Manu, who is supposed to be born of the Sun (Śāstri 1917-1918:111). In the *Harṣacarita* Bāṇa also says that the Maukharis are a solar race. According to *Harṣacarita* 4, ed. P.V. Kane

1918:16, the marriage of Rājyaśrī, who was descended from the lunar race of the Puṣpabhūtiś (=Puṣyabhūtiś), with Grahavarman, a descendant of the Mukharas [sic, R.S.], constituted the union of the moon with the sun.

²⁷According to Panaino: ‘... in grafia pahlavi ... d y p š l’ (1999:93).

²⁸Barah copper plate of Bhojadeva (Śāstri 1927-1928), as on his coins (Burn 1906:844).

²⁹The inscription on the Nirmand copper plate of the *mahāsāmanta* and *mahārāja* Samudrasena mentions that a Śarvavarman made a donation of land at the river Sutlej (Fleet 1888:286-291). Devahuti writes: ‘The extension, even if briefly, of Maukhari influence in the Panjab and the identification of the Śarvavarman of the Nirmand inscription with the Maukhari king of that name appear feasible. In fact no other power but the Maukharis, and among them Śarvavarman, appears to fit in with the circumstances’ (1970:28). The opinion that the dominion of the Maukharis extended to the Indus under Śarvavarman is also shared by Pires (1934:90, 92) as well as Majumdar (1954:69-70).

³⁰Accompanied by ... riders from Sindh; *Shāhnāme* 7.2632, Abka’i-Khavari 1998:38.

³¹See Schwartzberg 1978:25, pls 3D.1a-b. According to this, around AD 500 the Sasanian territory stretched right into what is today Pakistan; the Gupta empire extended up to the Indus; and the area of northern Pakistan and northern Afghanistan was under the rule of the Huns.

³²Nöldeke 1879:371 and Devahuti 1970:146.

³³Nöldeke 1892:22 and MacDonell 1898:126, 130, *Shāhnāme*, ed. Mohl 1979, 6:356-365.

³⁴Cp. note 22.

³⁵Wiesehöfer points out Khusrau’s occupation with philosophy, theology and statesmanship as well as with foreign contributions to law and medicine. In his ‘Book of deeds’ Khusrau acknowledged his interest in Byzantine and Indian law (Wiesehöfer 1993:291).

³⁶Syed 1995; 1998; 2001:10-14.

³⁷Among the terracottas, there are many different animals: bulls, dogs, monkeys, lions, tigers and camels. See Altekar and Mishra 1959:119 and Prakash 1985:38.

³⁸As none of the excavators and art historians thought of chess figures in connection with the terracottas, it is possible that an (incomplete) set was not recognized as such.

³⁹Conclusive statements cannot be made before all terracottas in the museums of the places mentioned have been sorted. Most pieces, however, are kept in hardly accessible go-downs.

⁴⁰According to Prakash 74 terracotta human figurines and 65 animal figurines were found at this place. All are 'datable not earlier than the fourth century AD'. They were all made in a mould (1985:38).

⁴¹Prakash 1985:122; Altekar 1959:1.