

CHESS
IN JEWISH HISTORY
AND HEBREW LITERATURE

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to deal with the origins of chess before AD 500 with attention to the record of sources and commentaries in the Babylonian Talmud. At the same time the names of other games which could be connected with chess are analysed. It is argued that Jews played a part in the spread of chess through the Jewish Khazars. Medieval Jewish writing on chess (primarily in Spain) demonstrate possible Jewish influence on the development of chess in the Middle Ages. Also allusions to chess in Hebrew Literature are recorded together with background material on the historical periods concerned.

Among the main Sources are JEHUDAH - HA- LEVI who made one of the earliest significant European references to chess in *HA -KUSARI*. *DISCIPLINA CLERICALIS* is cited as an example of the role played by Jews in the pattern of transmission of chess to Europe in the 11th and 12th Century. Jewish literary references to chess after AD 1600, and the re-discovery of the earlier texts from the *DE LUDIS ORIENTALIBUS* are cited with special reference to the volume entitled *SHAHLUDIUM TRADITUM* in *TRIBUS SCRIPTIS HEBRAIC*'s of Thomas Hyde. The most important of these three works being the 11th Century Hebrew Rhythmic verse of Abraham - Ibn - Ezra which at such a remarkably early date contains probably the earliest Rules of chess written in Europe. This is followed by an *ELEGANT ORATORIO* by *IBN - YEHA*. The third work, *MA'ADONEH MELECH* which Hyde ascribes to an anonymous author is shown to have been written by *YEHUDA DI MODENA*. Its rich Hebrew language is underscored with my Concordance Notations of Biblical Phraseology. This is extended by revivals of *DE LUDIS ORIENTALIBUS* in the (1) 18th Century German commentaries and translations by Ludimagistro and (2) in a French publication entitled *DELICE ROYALE* by Leon Hollanderski (1884). A chess manuscript is discovered to be by a Proselyte *ABU ZACHARYA*, whose writings retrieve and revive otherwise lost 9th C. Arabic chess studies and records. Chess in the *MA'ASEH* book, Moses Mendelsohn and Lessing's Nathan the Wise are also presented. This is followed by two of the most important Hebrew chess works of the first half of the 19th Century. The Hebrew chess Treatise by Zevi Uri Rubinstein, *LIMUDEI - HA - INYANAI VE - HAMASEH-BEDARCHEI HASCHOK - HANIRA - SCHACHSPIEL* is translated and explained. *JACOB EICHENBAUM*'s 1840 Poem "*HA-KRAV*" is also translated and explained as based upon a game of *STAMMA*.

Talmudic references to chess and other chess texts (one in Pahlavi) coincide as being of approximately the same period in pre-dating the assertion contained in Firdausi's mythological account of the invention of chess at the time of Chosroes I. The Talmudic word for chess suggests that the conclusion that the origin of chess is associated with the period of Alexander the Great. This argument is supported by a Vatican Library Hebrew manuscript containing an extract from *SECRETUM SECRETORUM*. The importance of Jewish influence upon the development of chess is underscored by important books, as landmarks in chess, History which are shown to have been written directly by Jews or "Conversos". Among these are "*ALPHONSO's*" *LIBRO DIVERSOS DE ACEDREX*, *DADOS-Y-TABLAS* translated by Don Zag Ibn Cid and others. However an equally important and rare volume is by *LUIS DI LUCENA*, who is presented as a *MARRANO*, the father of modern chess with a newly researched explanation of the *AMORES* part in *REPETITION DE AMORES E ARTE DE AXEDREZ*, 1497 A.D. This is provided with greater breadth by newly researched links with *CELESTINA Y CALISTO* and *MELIBOEA*.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Surveying the history of chess over the past century and a half, it is impossible to overlook either the successes of Jewish chessplayers or their contribution to the game's extensive literature. What is less well understood is the Jewish role in earlier phases of chess history. To assist in clarifying that role is the aim of the present dissertation.

Chapter 2 will take us back to the earliest documentary records of the game. It will focus on the question whether Jews were familiar with chess in the era of the Talmud. The task will be to examine a number of partly enigmatic talmudic passages referring to games, and to decide whether these games can be understood as a form of chess. I shall review the controversy surrounding the issue and draw independent conclusions from it.

These textual enigmas involve fundamental questions about when and where chess originated. A widespread view is that chess *could* not be mentioned in the Talmud, since it only arrived in the areas of Jewish settlement after the Talmud was completed. According to this view, chess was 'invented' in India and only travelled westwards to Persia in the sixth century. Recently, this hypothesis on the origin of the game has been called into question. In critically examining it, I shall weigh it against alternative hypotheses which permit and invite us to read the relevant passages in the Talmud as references to chess.

Chapter 3 deals with an epoch of notable developments in chess history -- the period when the game was introduced into Europe by the Arab conquerors of Spain. The contribution made to chess and its literature by Spanish Jews will be viewed in the light of their intellectual and cultural pre-eminence. The availability of their talents to both Mohammedan and Christian governments, and their consequent role (particularly as translators) in the transfer of knowledge between Arab and Christian worlds, will be seen as the context in which the Jews furthered the dissemination of chess. The specific texts through

which this argument is presented are in part unpublished or little known, and some are translated into English here for the first time. In some cases, the mention of chess is incidental -- the playing of chess figures as an object of moral judgement, or the game supplies an analogy illustrating a didactic point. In other cases chess itself is the central theme, a subject of analysis or celebration in poetry or prose.

Chapter 4 continues the story into the sixteenth century and beyond. The material here comes from various parts of Europe, and again is varied in character. It includes practical, technical treatises for the chessplayer; references to chess in legal and moral arguments, partly derived from unpublished manuscripts; evocations of the game in verse; and anecdotal material expressive of attitudes to chess and the status accorded to it. My survey terminates in the mid-nineteenth century, since from that period onwards, the ground has been covered at some length by previous writers.

Of the sources I have used, there is one that must be singled out for special discussion. This is the treatise *De Ludis Orientalibus*, written in Latin by Sir Thomas Hyde (1636-1702) and published in 1694. This has long been recognized as the first study of chess history to be based on authentic scholarship. All subsequent chess historians of any note are indebted to it,¹ yet I believe that the material and insights it offers have yet to be

¹ In his monumental work *A History of Chess* (Oxford, 1913), p. 841, H.J.R.Murray calls Hyde's book 'the first really scientific contribution to the history of chess'. On pp. 19-21 below, we shall see that the other 'standard' chess history -- Antonius van der Linde, *Geschichte und Litteratur des Schachspiels* (Berlin, 1874) -- also makes extensive use of Hyde's material.

Harold J.R.Murray (born 1868 in London, died 1955) was the son of Sir James A.H. Murray, the editor-in-chief of the Oxford English Dictionary. He graduated from Balliol College, Oxford, with a First in mathematics. He became headmaster of Ormskirk Grammar School, Lancashire, in 1896, and was later appointed an Inspector of Schools. Murray began his researches into chess history in 1897 with the encouragement of Baron Tassilo von der Lasa. He learned Arabic and could thus study the chess writings of the tenth-century Mohammedan chessplayer al-Lajlaj. Murray made use of the extensive collections of manuscripts and rare books belonging to J.C.White of Cleveland, Ohio, and J.W. Rimington Wilson.

In addition to *A History of Chess*, Murray published *A History of Board Games other than Chess* (Oxford, 1952) and *A Short History of Chess* (Oxford, 1963). Information on Murray is in R.C.Bell, *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, revised edition (New York, 1979), pp. 198-200. see also E Meissenburg, 'H.J.R. Murray (1868-1955); Bibliography of a Chess Historian'. *British Chess Magazine* (May 1980), pp.249-52.

utilized fully. It will therefore be fitting to devote the rest of this introduction to an account of Hyde's work as well as its later influence.

Thomas Hyde: *The Book of Oriental Games*

Thomas Hyde was the first scholar to devote detailed research to the early history of chess in the East. He was also the first to explore the theme of chess in Hebrew literature. These achievements were made possible by his outstanding academic qualifications. His contemporary Thomas Hearne refers to him as Europe's greatest master of oriental languages,² and he is indeed generally acknowledged as the foremost orientalist of his day.

Thomas Hyde was the son of a Shropshire vicar; he was born on 29 June 1636 at Billingsley, near Bridgnorth. When he was sixteen he went to King's College, Cambridge, and became a pupil of Wheelock, the Professor of Arabic. While still a student at Cambridge, Hyde assisted in the preparation of B. Walton's Polyglot Bible. Hyde edited the Latin, transcribed the Persian translation (which had been published in Hebrew characters at Constantinople) into its proper script, and corrected the Arabic, Persian and Syriac versions. Among many other accomplishments he became reader of Hebrew at Queen's College, Oxford, and in 1665 he was elected the chief librarian of the Bodleian Library. He was made Archdeacon of Gloucester in 1673 and a Doctor of Divinity in 1682. At Oxford Hyde succeeded to both the Arabic chair (from 1691) and the Hebrew (from 1697). He was, incidentally, a friend and tutor of Sir Robert Boyle, the physicist.³

As to his motive for writing the history of chess, he tells us: 'I am not an outstanding player, nor do I get much pleasure from this kind of practice; but the enjoyment which others derive from playing games I get from writing their history and from unravelling the name of the Ancients for them and from opinions of them.'⁴ It has been claimed that Hyde did not play chess at

² See *The Remains of Thomas Hearne*, revised by John Buchanan-Brown (London and Fontwell, 1966), p. 47. Hearne was assistant keeper of the Bodleian Library from 1701-12, then second keeper until 1715. Information on Hyde's career is in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol 28, edited by Sidney Lee (London, 1891), pp. 401-2. Also *The Bodleian Library & Its Treasures* by Aiden Ellis Publishing Ltd, 1991.

³ See Bell, *Board and Table Games*, p. 186.

all,⁵ but this seems unfounded; he mentions, for example, a game against an Arab from Jerusalem, in which his opponent announced checkmate with the expression *ksh mat*.⁶

Hyde was the interpreter of oriental languages at the courts of Charles II, James II and William III. By meeting envoys from eastern countries, he was able to collate information on the subject of oriental games. He placed his vast knowledge of Arabic literature in the service of his task. But a further point which requires emphasis is that at Oxford, Hyde could draw on the knowledge of the Jewish scholar Isaac Abendana (c. 1650-1710). Abendana is noted for producing the first Latin translation of the entire *Mishna*, between the years 1663 and 1675. Between 1676 and 1689 he stayed for some time in London. In 1689 he was employed in Oxford as a lecturer in Hebrew, and he continued this work until 1699. As a rabbinical authority, Abendana was welcomed by numerous distinguished Oxford scholars.⁷

Thomas Hyde died at Oxford in 1702. In 1767 a compendium of his works in two volumes was published by Dr Gregory Sharpe, under the title of *Syntagma Dissertationum*. The second volume of the collection consists mainly of a reprint of *De Ludis Orientalibus*. Interestingly, the same volume contains Hyde's translation of the introduction to the philosophical work *More Nevochim* ('The Guide to the Perplexed') by Maimonides (1131-1204). We shall later see that Maimonides himself mentioned

⁴ Quoted from the first page of the preface ('*Benevolo lectori*') to *Mandragorias, seu Historia Shahiludii*, in *Syntagma Dissertationum* (see note 5 below).

⁵ Cf. *The Remains of Thomas Hearne*, p. 211.

⁶ Thomas Hyde, *Syntagma Dissertationum* (2 vols), edited by Gregory Sharpe (Oxford, 1767), vol. 2, p. 132. From here until the end of the chapter, bracketed numbers in the text refer to pages in this volume.

⁷ Information on Abendana is in Edwyn R. Bevan and Charles Singer (eds), *The Legacy of Israel* [first ed. 1927], reprint (Oxford, 1948), pp. 361-2, which mentions as Abendana's colleagues: Anthony Wood, Dr Jonathan Edwards (1629-1712; Principal of Jesus College from 1686), and Dr Roger Mander (Master of Balliol 1687-1704). Abendana also had a patron in Dr John Hough (1651-1743), then Bishop of Oxford -- not to be confused with Thomas Barlow, former Archdeacon of Oxford (then Bishop of Lincoln) (1507-1691), to whom Hyde dedicated the Hebrew section of his book (see p. 12 below). Another generous Oxford friend of Abendana was Arthur Charlett (1655-1722), Master of University College. From the same source, we learn that 'Abendana's brother Jacob was called to England in 1680 to become the Rabbi in London of the Congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews at Bevis Marks. Interestingly, it was Jacob Abendana who translated the *Mishna* for the first time into Spanish.'

chess in his writings.⁸ Hyde's Latin translation is printed in columns opposite the source text -- which is in Arabic. This calls to our attention the fact that some literature taken to be purely Arabic is in fact Hebrew. The lesson implicit in Hyde's approach to the culture of the Middle East and Spain is to accord due attention to both the Hebrew and the Arabic.⁹

De Ludis Orientalibus combines two works of Hyde: *Mandragorias, seu Historia Shahiludii* (which had previously been published in 1689) and *Historia Nerdiludii* (unpublished before 1694).¹⁰ The latter contains the history of several games of the East other than chess, and is not relevant to our present theme. The volume *Mandragorias*¹¹ comprises a history of chess written primarily in Latin but also featuring numerous quotations in Arabic, Greek, Sanskrit and Persian -- as well as a section of over 70 pages devoted to original Hebrew texts. These texts, which are at least partly of medieval origin, constitute part two of the volume, entitled *Shahiludium Traditum in Tribus Scriptis Hebraicis*. This material is of central significance, and we shall return to it later. First, let us review the contents of part one -- the Latin part -- of the volume.

Hyde's history, in his own words, deals with chess as 'practised among Arabs, Persians, Indians and Chinese'; it

⁸ See below, p. 83.

⁹ The first volume of the *Syntagma Dissertationum* contains another notable translation: Hyde's Latin version (entitled *Itinera Mundi*, and first published in 1691 as a supplement to Abulfeda's Arabic *Geography*) of *Iggeret Orot Olam* by Abraham Farissol or Peritsol (1451 - c. 1525), son of Mordecai Peritsol. This book (Ferrara, 1524; Venice, 1586; and many subsequent printings) is the first modern Hebrew work on geography; it presents all the evidence the author could collect regarding Jewish settlements in each country, and incorporates a description of the New World. A large part of the Alphonsine Tables, which we encounter on p. 90 below, derives from Abulfeda's *Geography*.

¹⁰ 'In the Newcastle University copy the two books are bound together, and in the instructions to the binders and printers are orders to colour the fore edge of the first book and to leave the fore edge of the second book plain. This has been done.' -- Bell, *Board and Table Games*, p. 185.

In some editions (or perhaps rebindings), the sections of *De Ludis Orientalibus* appear in a different order. This is surprising, given Hyde's explicit instructions on this point.

¹¹ The title is commented on by Richard Eales, *Chess: The History of a Game* (London, 1985), p. 13: 'Ironically Hyde based his title on one of his mistakes, his belief that the Arabic word for chess *shatranj* was derived from *satrang* meaning mandrake plant. . . .'

describes the 'curious methods of play' and 'the various shapes and carvings of the chess pieces in many lands'.

A substantial part of the text is devoted to legends, theories and speculations about the origin of the game. Hyde is dismissive of the more outlandish claims such as the bizarre theory that chess was invented by the Greek commander Palamedes for the amusement of the Greek armies at the siege of Troy,¹² or the notion put forward by Hieronymus Vida (1490-1566), Bishop of Alba, who 'attributes the invention of chess to a philosopher called Xerxes' (55). Some eleven other mythological theories are in turn described and discarded. Hyde finally states his belief (which is now widely accepted, though I shall later offer some criticism of it) that chess 'progressed from India to Persia and then to Arabia' (62). By way of supporting this view, Hyde pioneers the etymological study of chess nomenclature, offering copious evidence to trace the derivation of chess names from language to language.

A section of the text is headed 'Chess Boards'. Hyde gives examples of designs ranging from the wholly primitive to the lavishly ornate. At one end of the scale:

the Turks are so obsessed by this game that they mark out chess boards on their pavements in the dust and sand and then sit down there cross-legged and play all day long. (72)

At the other end, Hyde tells us:

the most valuable and ornate and oldest boards come from India, as indeed does my own. This was given to me by a rich friend, Sir Dan Sheldon, who did some arms dealing in India. This board is one of the type used by nobles and princes of India. . . . The board is supported and raised upon four legs made from ebony. Thus, it is very similar to a rich writing table and can often be designed to fulfil both functions. Inside, there are various compartments. (73)

He goes on to explain that 'on the outside the squares of tortoiseshell are marked out with lines of ebony and are all of a single colour'; the reason is that 'a board marked out in black and white squares is used only by beginners.' The four corners of Hyde's board are decorated in gold covered in glass crystals.

¹² Hyde, ed. cit., vol. 2, p. 55. The same story is reported e.g. by the author of *The Delight of Kings* -- see p. 132 below.

We learn, further, that Louis XIII of France had an unusual board in the form of an embroidered cushion (79), for use with chess pieces which 'had pins attached to them, so that when he was playing chess in his carriage or coach, the pieces would not be disturbed by the jolts and movements of the journey.' (Hyde is of course referring to the seventeenth and eighteenth-century carved chessmen made in Dieppe, with which collectors are today familiar. They were equipped with spikes for sticking them into the cushion.)¹³

Hyde's description of the designs for chess pieces is, again, detailed and wide-ranging. Desert travellers, he remarks, have no room to carry proper boards and chessmen, they therefore use small stones or pieces of wood, such as may be readily available. On a higher level of luxury, Hyde portrays (among others) the geometrical Arab style which was distinctive and attractive:

These are simple pieces made of ivory, varnished, covered with decoration in gold. One player's pieces are bright red and the other's are bright green. (124)

He mentions a design of chessmen with a humorous element:

These are simple pieces of ivory but hollowed out, with a little bronze bell inserted into each which can be tinkled when the piece is moved or shaken. The commonest occasion of their being shaken is when a player takes a man prisoner from the other side. The outer circumference is perforated. (124)

Hyde observes that 'Muslims of the Persian sect play with ornate figures whereas Turks and Arabs used the plain ones' (122). The chess pieces which he himself acquired from Sir Dan Sheldon represent an Indian army:

The king goes into battle unarmed riding an armoured elephant, as if to command the warriors and he himself no more than a spectator. On the back of the royal elephant is a . . . gilded turret with a painted canopy supported on poles. (125)

The *fers*, or supreme general, rides on an armoured horse, wearing a *risha* or plume on his head. In his hand he carries a short sword called a *curda* or *curta* (126). His footman is a

¹³ I have treated this subject in a book; see Victor Keats, *Chessmen for Collectors* (London: Batsford, 1985), pp. 114-15.

trumpeter blowing a *buk* or trumpet.

Then there is the Rook or Dromedary, a racing camel upon each side of which is tied a *kus*, a bronze drum, which the rider beats. . . It is the custom of the East to beat such drums in battle, and indeed, in the cities at evening hour (eight o'clock) the signal to shut the gates.¹⁴

A famous set made wholly of ivory, consisting of ornately carved pieces engraved with Arabic writing had supposedly been owned by Charlemagne.¹⁵ In the records of the treasury of St Denis, where the set was preserved, it was stated that since the chess set was inscribed with Arabic writing, it must have originated in the East. Hyde comments somewhat caustically:

I think that this witness is wrong in assuming that the inscription of Arabic letters must have come from the East. In fact the figures and the work are clearly European, as is the name of their sculptor. He is unmistakably a European named Joseph Nicolaus who signed his own name in Arabic. (82)

Hyde mentions a number of special variants of chess. An old form of the game was called *Curzier-Spiel*¹⁶, and was only played in one place -- the German town of Ströbeck (78). Another ancient game called *kusht* has pieces which resemble those of chess.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ed cit., p. 127. Hyde also quotes the account from the Persian historian Majdi, and the further information from *Al-mustatraf*, an anthology of the first half of the 15th century: 'It is reported that some of the Persian kings had a game of chess of red ruby, and that the value of the smallest piece (*qit'a*) was 3,000 dinar' (p. 82). Duncan Forbes, in *A History of Chess* (London, 1860), p. 194, estimates from this that the value of the whole set was a quarter of a million sterling, and that 'At the present day they would be worth a million.'

¹⁵ Hyde, p.122. According to one account, the chess set was a gift to Charlemagne from the Caliph Harun al-Rashid at the time when the two rulers were attempting a *rapprochement* to overcome the Christian-Muslim divide. The gift (in other accounts it was ivory tusks) was delivered -- after the two chief ambassadors had died on the journey -- by Isaac, an Arab-speaking Jew attached to Charlemagne's court and holding the position of *Gragorman*. See H.Graetz, *Popular History of the Jews*, translated by A.B.Rhine, 4th edition (New York, 1930), vol. 3, p. 56.

The chess pieces are now in the Bibliothèque Nationale; see Harry Golombek, *A History of Chess* (London, 1976), p.57. Also *Pièces d'Echecs* published by Bibliothèque National Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques 1990, pp. 16-26. The chessmen are now considered to be of late provenance.

The game of 'Great Chess' was favoured by the Emperor Tamburlaine:

since he was far too grand to play little chess, he used to play Great Chess which was on a board of 10 x 11 squares. (74)

Hyde supplies a folding chart which illustrates the layout of Tamburlaine's Great Chess board.

There is a section on Chinese Chess, including a lengthy description of the rules of the game.

The part of Hyde's work which from our own point of view is the most important is the section entitled *Shahiludium Traditum in Tribus Scriptis Hebraicis*, which presents three original Hebrew texts printed parallel with Hyde's Latin translation.

This part of the book is dedicated in the most flowery language to Thomas Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln (1507-1691), Reader of Metaphysics, Chief Librarian of the Bodleian Library, Master of Queen's College and Archdeacon of Oxford. The sycophantic dedicatory epistle announces that:

[with] this child -- I mean my booklet -- which I have brought to birth, most learned Bishop, I now dare to approach you. . . . It was at your behest that these famous authors, long sunk in oblivion and covered in dust, now appear to rise like so many phoenixes from the ashes.

Hyde praises the bishop beyond all reason in his effort to gain patronage. He describes how hard it is to translate the biblical style and special biblical allusions contained in the Hebrew. He continues:

I found the Hebrew devoid of points, and for this reason not suited to students in training. Thus, the task of adding the vowels [i.e. the points], not at all an easy thing, inevitably fell on me.

The Hebrew and Latin titles of the three texts in question are as follows:

¹⁶ Hyde reminds us that both ordinary chess and the *Curzier-Spiel* are mentioned by Gustavus Selenus (pseudonym of Augustus, Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg) in *Das Schach oder König-Spiel* (Leipzig, 1616), the first work on chess history to be written in German.

¹⁷ A set of *kusht* has since been discovered and is displayed in the Museo Nazionale Antropologico ed Etimologico in Florence. It is played as the game of Shatrang with similar board and pieces but with slight variation.

1 *HARUZIM al S'hoq Shah-mat le-ha-Rav Avraham Ibn Ezra*

*Carmina-Rhythmica de Ludo Shah-mat, R.Abraham Abben-Ezrae,
beatae memoriae*

(Verses on the Game of Chess by Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra
of blessed memory)

2 *Melizat ha-Schok ha-Ishkaki*

*Oratio elegans de Ludo Scaque, quam composuit Gloria Oratorum
Bonsenior Abben-Jachia, beatae memoriae*

(Description of Chess in Elegant Rhythmic Prose, by
Bonsenior Ibn Yehia)

3 *Ma'adaneh Melech*

Deliciae Regis dicta Historia Shahiludii

('The Delight of Kings' -- an anonymous prose work)

In later chapters I shall quote these works partly or fully, and attempt to place them in their historical perspective. For the present it must be stated that the Hebrew texts have been reprinted and translated in various contexts within the time-span of my survey, sometimes being combined with extra material to form a general chess treatise. Some of these editions are based on false assumptions which need to be clarified. It will therefore be helpful at this point to locate the various editions in chronological sequence.

The Influence of Hyde

The following is a list of publications, subsequent to the first edition of *De Ludis Orientalibus*, which reproduce Hyde's Hebrew texts.¹⁸

¹⁸ Cf. Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (Berlin, 1852-60), p. 684 (Hereafter quoted as *Bodleian Catalogue*).

1 An Oxford edition of 1702, which contains only part of Hyde's Hebrew and Latin material

2 *Ma'adaneh Melech*, printed by Johannes Kölner
(Frankfurt am Main, 1726)

This is a rare Hebrew publication (8vo, 16 sheets),¹⁹ entirely in 'Rashi print'. It contains:

- (i) a 5-page preface in highly biblical phraseology, with little relation to chess²⁰
- (ii) the poem by Ibn Ezra
- (iii) the treatise *Ma'adaneh Melech*
- (iv) the work by Ibn Yehia
- (v) an anonymous song in Yiddish, describing the game of chess.

The editor or publisher describes himself as Süsskind ben Isak of Pinczow, Poland, grandson of the famous Kabbalist, Rabbi Perez.

The author of the preface is Asher Anshel ben Wolf of Worms. He is mentioned in the *Bodleian Catalogue* (col. 752, No. 4462) as Anschelius Wormasius (= 'of Worms').

The composition of the book is somewhat confused. The introduction of the anonymous prose work *Ma'adaneh Melech*, from which the volume takes its title, begins without any proper superscription,²¹ giving the impression that this work forms a sequel to the Ibn Ezra poem. In fact in the column title on sheet 9, the prose work is explicitly ascribed to Ibn Ezra, and on the title page it is claimed that Ibn Ezra composed it in his old age.

¹⁹ The publication date is the Jewish year 5486, corresponding to 1726 AD. On the reverse of the title page is an engraving of a chessboard with the Hebrew heading: 'illustration of the board which is mentioned in the 4th paragraph'.

²⁰ I quote from this preface on pp. 146-7 below.

²¹ The text of *Ma'adanneh Melech* begins on sheet 5b, but the heading follows only on sheet 6b.

3

Neu-eröffnete Kunststück des Schach-Spiels,
translated by 'Ludi Magister' (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1743)

This rare book (8vo, 104 pp.)²² is a German translation of Kölner's 1726 publication (see '2' above). It contains:

- (i) an introductory preface, translated from the title page of the 1726 edition
- (ii) a foreword by the translator (pp. 5-14)
- (iii) the preface by Asher Anshel ben Wolf (pp. 15-40)
- (iv) the poem by Ibn Ezra (pp. 40-49)
- (v) the treatise *Ma'adaneh Melech*, which is treated as the kernel of the whole book (pp. 49-91)
- (vi) the work by Ibn Yehia (pp. 91-8)
- (vii) the Yiddish poem from the 1726 publication, printed here in German characters (pp. 98-103).

The Ibn Ezra poem is placed together with the anonymous prose work and treated as a preface to it; both are attributed to the same author. This of course is because the translator uses the 1726 edition (in which the same error is present) instead of using Hyde.²³ In his foreword the translator mentions Hyde, but only by way of quoting him from Wolf's Hebrew bibliography (I, 85).

²² The full wording of the title page is: *Neu-eröffnete Kunststück des Schach-Spiels darinnen nicht allein die unterschiedliche Nahmen und Gebrauch auch Anzahl der Steine dieses Spiels bey allerhand Nationen als: denen Persern, Türcken, Mohren, Russen, Pohlen, Teutschen, Spaniern &c. und andern Völckern gezeiget wird, als vornehmlich die Kunst-Griffe dieses Spiels in anmuthigen Gleichnissen, wie solches die Jüdische Schreib-Art gemeiniglich mit sich zu bringen pfleget vorgestellet werden. Von dem berühmten Rabbi und Caballisten ABRAHAM IBN ESRA in Hebräischer Sprache geschrieben, nun aber zum Dienst und Nutzen der Herrn Liebhabere dieses Spiels ins Teutsche übersetzt von LUDI MAGISTRO. Franckfurth und Leipzig 1743.* The identity of 'Ludi Magister' is not known. His foreword is quoted on p. 147 below.

²³ In *Schachzeitung*, 15 (1860), a series of anonymous articles appeared under the titles 'Der Schach-Tractat des "Ludi Magister"' (pp. 330-9, 361-71, with additional material on pp. 344-5) and 'Das Buch: des Königs Lust' (pp. 393-405). The articles reproduce extensive extracts from 'Ludi Magister's' work and discuss it at some length. The author voices the strong suspicion that *Ma'adaneh Melech* is not by Ibn Ezra but was only written after c. 1500. He does not realize, however, that what he takes to be the concluding part of the Ibn Ezra poem is in fact the introductory section of *Ma'adaneh Melech*; see below, p. 122.

The translator's foreword gives some information on the history of chess and the chessmen.²⁴ It mentions, among other things, four-handed chess, Chinese chess and two stories from the *Ma'aseh Book*²⁵ of 1602.

- 4 Thomas Hyde, *Syntagma Dissertationum*,
edited by Dr Gregory Sharpe, 2 vols (Oxford, 1767)

Volume 2 contains a reprint of *De Ludis Orientalibus*. The book is in a larger format, with larger and clearer print, than the 1794 edition.

- 5 Don Joseph Rodriguez de Castro, *Biblioteca española*, vol. 1
(Madrid, 1781)

The volume contains 'information about the Spanish Rabbinic writers from the Golden Age of their literature up to the present'.

Pages 183-8 contain the poem by Ibn Ezra in Hebrew, with a transliteration into Latin characters in the opposite column; then a 'literal prose version' and a translation '*en metro acomodado al del original hebreo*'.

- 6 Sephat Yochar [i.e. Joseph Samuel Reggio], *Igeros Joscher*, 2 vols
(vol. 1, Vienna 1834; vol. 2, Vienna 1836)

The name 'Yochar' is derived from the Hebrew initials of Joseph Samuel Reggio. The work was printed and published by Anton Edlen von Schmid.

Vol. 2, pp. 77-80 contains the poem by Ibn Ezra with an introduction (which does not tell us on which edition this reprint is based).

²⁴ Taking Ibn Ezra to be the author of *Ma'adaneh Melech*, Ludi Magister (p. 12) reproaches him for omitting King Solomon from the list of reputed inventors of chess. (For this list, see pp. 131-4 below.) The ascription of the invention to Solomon has only ever been regarded as fanciful.

²⁵ For the *Ma'aseh Book*, see below, pp. 156-9.

Reggio (1784-1855) was an Italian Rabbi and a professor in Görz. He published an Italian translation of the Hebrew Bible with a Hebrew commentary in 1821. Reggio wrote under the influence of the Jewish philosopher Mendelssohn and attempted to show that reason and philosophy were compatible with the Torah.²⁶

Igeros Joscher is perhaps Reggio's best-known work; it consists of historical and philosophical notes in the form of letters to friends.

7 R. Abraham Aben-Esra, *Sephat Jether* (Pressburg, 1838),
introduced by M.Letteris

This volume (8vo), printed and published by Anton Edlen von Schmid, consists of 47 pages in Hebrew, with German and Hebrew title pages.²⁷ The wording of the German title page is:

Sephat Jether. Beleuchtung dunkler Bibelstellen und
R.Saadia's Erklärungen vertheidigend, gegen *R.Adonim*
Levita, von R.Abraham Aben-Esra dem Spanier. Mit einer
Einleitung von M.Letteris.

The chess poems of Ibn Ezra and Ibn Yehia are printed on pages 44-7. The Hebrew title page names the publisher as Mordechai (Marcus) Loeb ben Moses Bisliches or Bisseliches, of Brody.

Bisliches (1786-1851) was a Galician bibliophile and rabbinic scholar. He has the credit of having collected a number of valuable manuscripts in Italy. He was interested in manuscript Hebrew works and early printed editions, which he would then reprint.²⁸ Among the works he published was Samuel Ibn Tibbon's *Yikkavu ha-Mayim* (1837).

²⁶ See *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (16 vols) (Jerusalem, 1971-2), vol. 14, p. 38. Reggio also edited some of the writings of Leon di Modena (see pp. 141-3 below), and published works on the Kabbalah.

²⁷ The title *Sephat Jether* may be rendered as 'excellent speech' -- cf. Proverbs 17:7 in the Authorized Version. The text appears to have been corrected by M.Letteris, who wrote the brief introduction.

²⁸ For information on Bisliches, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 4, p. 1057, and M.Steinschneider in Van der Linde, vol. 1, p. 162.

Bisliches does not identify his source (evidently a manuscript) for *Sephat Jether*, but it was obviously written in Spanish or Italian characters, resulting in the garbled name M(a)ns(h)tur for Bonsenior.

8

Don José Amador de los Rios, *Estudios historicos, politicos y literarios sobre los Judios de España* (Madrid, 1848)

On pp. 259-61, parts of the Ibn Ezra poem are reproduced from Rodriguez de Castro, and accompanied by a Spanish translation.

Amador de los Rios was a Spanish literary critic and historian. He wrote general works on Spanish history in addition to this book about the Jews of Spain, which earned him a chair at the University of Madrid.

9

Don Victor Balaguer, 'Noticia de un poema hebreo sobre el juego de ajedrez', in *El Ajedrez*, 1862, pp. 111-13

Sixty-seven lines of the poem by Ibn Ezra are reproduced from Rodriguez de Castro.

10 *Délices royales*, translated by Léon Hollænderski (Paris, 1864)

This book (8vo, 68+36 pp.) consists of a French and a Hebrew section. The Hebrew section reads from the back, and comprises the three texts from Hyde, with a short preface added. The French section,²⁹ reading from the front, comprises translations of the three texts plus some extra material, in the following order:

- (i) a dedication to Albert Cohn
- (ii) a note to the translator from Chief Rabbi S.Uhlman, approving the work (p. 1-2)
- (iii) the translator's preface (pp. 3-8)
- (iv) a poem entitled *Le Jeu des échecs* (pp. 9-14)
- (v) Ibn Ezra's poem (in prose translation) (pp. 15-18)
- (vi) the work by Ibn Yehia (pp. 19-23)
- (vii) a 'free translation' of *Ma'adaneh Melech*, entitled *Le jeu des échecs: son origine, ses règles et sa valeur morale* (pp. 25-59)
- (viii) general advice for playing chess (pp. 61-3)
- (ix) the rules of chess (pp. 65-8)

The book is discussed in detail on pages 176-83 below.

Moritz Steinschneider: *Chess Among the Jews*

Hyde's work was utilized, and enlarged upon, in the nineteenth century by the German scholar Moritz Steinschneider.

Steinschneider was assistant librarian at the Berlin Library, and afterwards assistant curator and then curator at the Bodleian Library in Oxford; he was thus following, some two centuries later, in Thomas Hyde's footsteps. Steinschneider was nothing if not a painstaking and thorough bibliographer; his catalogue of

²⁹ The wording of the French title page is: *Délices royales ou le jeu des échecs: son histoire, ses règles et sa valeur morale. Par Aben-Ezra et Aben-Yéhia, rabbins du XIIe siècle. Traduction de l'Hébreu par Léon Hollænderski. Paris [. .] 1864.*

The book is discussed by Leopold Dukes in *Ben Chananja*, 7 (1864), pp. 601, 633, 649, 681.

Hollænderski is briefly mentioned as the author of other works, in H.Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart* (11 vols), vol. 9 (Leipzig, 1870), p. 9.

Hebrew books is still in use today.

The material which Steinschneider collected on the subject of chess and the Jews is published in *Geschichte und Litteratur des Schachspiels* by Antonius van der Linde (1874). Van der Linde³⁰ reports that the material was submitted to him in the form of notes (in a handwriting he had difficulty reading). Printed in its original note form, it constitutes a self-contained chapter of the book, under the heading *Schach bei den Juden*. The volume as a whole is an exhaustive history of chess, beginning from the first traces of the game and extending up until the time of writing.

Among various other items, Steinschneider discusses the Hebrew writings which Hyde had been the first to present to the public. He also reviews all previous editions of these works that he was able to locate, and, in particular, rigorously criticizes the German and French translations³¹ produced respectively by 'Ludi

³⁰ Van der Linde was born in the Netherlands in 1833. He studied theology, philosophy and history, gaining his doctorate in 1862. His chess articles appeared from 1865 onwards; his first chess book was *De schaakpartijen van Gioachino Greco* (Nijmegen, 1865). *Geschichte und Litteratur des Schachspiels* (Berlin, 1874) is his main work; it invites criticism only for diffuseness and an attention to details of tenuous relevance. His other writings include *Das Schachspiel des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1874); *Das erste Jahrtausend der Schachlitteratur (850-1880)* (Berlin, 1881); and *Selbstbiographie* (Leipzig, 1885).

Van der Linde collected a most valuable library of illuminated manuscripts and rare books on many subjects. His chess library was eventually sold to the Royal Library in the Hague, and formed the basis of the *Bibliotheca Van der Linde-Niemeijeriana* (established in 1948).

Through the collapse of an Amsterdam bank in 1875, Van der Linde lost his fortune. He subsequently became Bibliographer to the Royal Library in Wiesbaden. He retired in 1895 and died in Wiesbaden in 1897.

The above information is from the foreword (by Christiaan M. Bijl) to the 1981 reprint of *Geschichte und Litteratur des Schachspiels* (Edition Olms, Zürich; 2 vols in 1). From here onwards, references to Steinschneider are to this edition (vol. 1) unless otherwise specified.

³¹ Here are some examples of this criticism. We have seen that the author of the preface to Kölner's edition (1726) was Asher Anshel ben Wolf of Worms. After pointing out the misprint 'Arschel' in the translation (for 'Anshel' = Angelo, Anselm), Steinschneider comments sarcastically that 'Ludi Magister' has evidently confused the first name with the relative pronoun *asher* (which has the same consonants) and has therefore omitted it. The garbled title 'Wirmischa' (= 'Wormatia', 'Worms') is duly noted by Steinschneider. Or again: the editor of the 1726 edition is from Pinczow; 'Ludi Magister' is taken to task for

Magister' and Hollænderski. Steinschneider's approach is meticulously scholarly. Small deviations in wording and spelling, virtually inevitable when Hebrew verse is transcribed and reprinted from edition to edition over the centuries, and often making little if any difference to the sense of the text, are comprehensively reported. The objections which Steinschneider raises to the translations can in places scarcely avoid the charge of excessive pedantry, and seem to betray an academic constitutionally intolerant of the work of others. In actual fact, the German translation of Ibn Ezra's poem which Steinschneider himself offers is not strikingly dissimilar to those he criticizes.

Steinschneider reprints the Ibn Ezra poem in its original Hebrew, and adds further Hebrew writings which he has discovered and publishes for the first time.

One section of the chapter is devoted to special sources concerning the earliest Jewish records of chess. Steinschneider supplies biographical details of previous scholars whose work has touched on his subject.

In a further section entitled 'General', Steinschneider draws attention to a wealth of relevant Hebrew literature and tradition reaching down to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In these various ways, then, Steinschneider offers a valuable commentary on Hyde's work and a supplement to it. The use I have made of his material will be acknowledged in individual instances in the pages that follow.

corrupting this to 'Pinteschob' and 'Pintischoph'. In general terms, he incurs blame for ascribing *Ma'adaneh Melech* to Ibn Ezra. (See Steinschneider, p. 161.)

Hollænderski is said to be 'irresponsible' for describing both Ibn Ezra and Ibn Yehia as 'twelfth-century rabbis'. (For the dating of Ibn Yehia, see pp. 79-80 below.) Hollænderski's purportedly 'literal' rendering of Ibn Ezra is dismissed by Steinschneider as 'completely unusable' (p.163).

Chapter 2

CHESS AND OTHER GAMES IN THE TALMUD

Texts and Commentaries

It has never been seriously claimed that chess is of Jewish origin, or that a specifically Jewish version of the game has existed. It is nonetheless evident that the game has flourished in areas where there has been a significant Jewish community. The question I consider in this chapter is whether chess was already known to the communities that produced the Talmud.

This question hinges on the interpretation of certain talmudic passages which refer to the playing of games designated mainly by the Aramaic words *nardshir* and *iskundrée*.¹

In unravelling this issue, we need to take account of the partly conflicting exegesis devoted to these passages by a whole succession of commentators.

1 The game of *nardshir*

The word *nardshir* occurs in tractate *Kethuboth* (61b). The passage reports a discussion of the proposition that idleness can lead to whoredom, or to imbecility. In the opinion of 'R. Simeon b. Gamaliel', the 'practical difference' is the case of

a woman who plays with little cubs or is addicted to *nardshir*.²

The editor explains: 'A woman who spends her time in this manner may be exposed to the temptation of unchastity but is in no danger of falling into idiocy.'

The following commentaries are relevant: --

¹ The word occurs in different variants; where deviations are unimportant, I shall retain this spelling in the interests of consistency.

² I quote from *The Babylonian Talmud* (34 vols + index vol.), edited by Rabbi Dr I. Epstein (London, 1935-52), *Kethuboth* vol. 1, p. 368.

Rashi (d. 1105) renders *nardshir* by the word *escaque* (chess).³

Although Rashi (Rabbi Shelomo Yitschaki) was born in Troyes which was the capital city of the area of Champagne, he studied at the great Jewish academies of Mainz and Worms, only returning to Troyes after the age of 25.

The main distinguishing characteristic of Rashi's commentary is his balance between literal and midrashic interpretation. The majority of Rashi's comments are based on Rabbinic sources; the few that are original are mainly philological explanations. Rashi uses concise and straightforward language, and he often explains difficult problems with a word or a mere hint. He wrote Hebrew as though it were French, with wit and elegance.⁴

Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome (1103 AD), in his dictionary, gives a different explanation of *nerdshir*; he renders it by the Arabic *al-Nerd*, and as an explanation he uses the Italian *dadi*, meaning dice.⁵ The game of *nard* is equivalent to the medieval race game of tables, trictrac, or backgammon.

Ben Jehiel⁶ was an Italian lexicographer also known as the 'Ba'al he-Arukh' (The Author of the *Arukh*, after the title of his lexicon). He lived between the years 1035 and circa 1110, but little is known about his life. After his father's death, Nathan together with his two brothers succeeded him as the heads of the *Yeshivah* in Rome. Together with them he wrote *responsa* to various questions on *halakhah*⁷ addressed to them by various scholars. While serving as the head of the *Yeshiva*, Nathan wrote the *Arukh* which was a lexicon of the Talmud and *midrashim*⁸, containing all the talmudic terms in

³ See Steinschneider, p. 157; Murray, p. 446. The use of *escaque/escaques* is of independent importance in indicating that chess was known in Worms, Mainz or Troyes, to which Rashi returned in 1065; the reference to chess is a very early one in this part of Europe.

⁴ Information on Rashi is in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 13, pp. 1558-66.

⁵ Steinschneider, p. 157, referring to Landau Dictionary, IV, 185.

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Judaica* vol. 9, p. 1312.

⁷ 'Halakhah': Jewish law, also Mosaic law.

⁸ 'Midrash': Legends and tales handed down by Rabbinic authorities and used to create an allegory, or to illustrate a point.

need of explanation.. The *Arukh* received a wide circulation and was the definitive work on the subject.

Among later commentators, Franz Delitzsch (in 1840) similarly equates the talmudic *nardshir* with the game of tables (*nard*):

Neither the (talmudic) *pessos* game nor the *nerdshir* or trictrac game is identical with chess, since they represent a version or two versions of a board and dice game which, like chess, was invented in India and became known to the Jews through the mediation of the Persians.⁹

The quotation is from an article entitled 'On Chess and Related Games in the Talmud',¹⁰ in 'Literary Journal of the Orient'. The journal printed 'reports, studies and criticisms concerning Jewish history and literature'.

Delitzsch was a Protestant theologian and a biblical and Judaic scholar. He became Professor of theology at the University of Leipzig in 1844. He had great enthusiasm and affection for Judaism and he was well versed in Hebrew and Semitic languages as well as in the Talmud.

Samuel Krauss, in *Talmudische Archäologie* (1910-12), states that *nardshir* is 'a board game, which the Sassanian Ardeshir Babekan is supposed to have invented.'¹¹ This evidently refers to a story familiar in Arabic and Persian legend -- that Ardeshir, the first of the Sassanians, was the inventor of *nard*.¹²

Krauss was born in Ukk (Hungary) in 1866. He taught at the Jewish teachers' seminary in Budapest and (after 1906) at the *Israelitische Theologische Lehranstalt* in Vienna. His library and papers were destroyed in the *Kristallnacht* of November 1938, after which he fled to England and lived in Cambridge until his death in 1948.

⁹ Quoted in Steinschneider, p. 156.

¹⁰ 'Über das Schach und die damit verwandten Spiele in den Talmuden', in *Litteraturblatt des Orients*, published by C.L.Fritzsche (Leipzig), issue No. 4 (25 Jan. 1840), pp. 47-53.

¹¹ Samuel Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, 3 vols (Leipzig, 1910-12), vol. 3, p. 113.

¹² See e.g. Murray, pp. 153, 210-11; on p. 210 he quotes from Al-Mas'udi's *Muruj adh-dhahab*. See also below, p. 38, note 51.

Krauss's *Talmudische Archäologie* (3 vols, 1910-12; reprinted 1966) is regarded as a classic description of every aspect of life reflected in talmudic and midrashic literature.¹³

The prevailing opinion, then, is that *nardshir* refers to the game of tables/backgammon -- though Rashi equates it with chess.

But the passage I have quoted from *Kethuboth* contains a further phrase, 'little cubs', which denotes an object of play and calls for interpretation.

2 'Little cubs' or dogs

Nathan ben Jehiel takes the words 'little cubs' in a literal sense, to mean lapdogs.¹⁴

Rashi similarly interprets the phrase as a game with little dogs.¹⁵

Alexander Kohut (1872) argues that

since 'little dogs' is juxtaposed with *nardshir*, which is a kind of dice game, it is clear that the game with little dogs must also be a kind of board game.

He adds:

I believe (in agreement with Delitzsch) that *guryata kitanyata* 'small dogs', denotes trictrac pieces, which used to be dog-shaped, . . . ; those used by the Persians had the shape of a lion's head, hence Hyde's translation of *Nerdeshir* with *trunculus leoninus*.¹⁶

¹³ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10, pp. 1248-9.

¹⁴ Ben Jehiel reported in Alexander Kohut, 'Ist das Schachspiel im Talmud genannt und unter welchem Namen?', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 46 (1892), 130-5 (p. 131).

¹⁵ Rashi reported by Kohut, loc. cit.

¹⁶ Kohut, pp. 131, 133.

Delitzsch had written on this point:

The commentary on *Kethuboth* (61b) which ascribes the dog-shaped figures to chess was . . . mistaken, -- it confuses *nerd* [trictrac / backgammon] with chess, . . .¹⁷

Delitzsch draws attention to the fact that Arabian and Turkish commentators are prone to this same confusion.

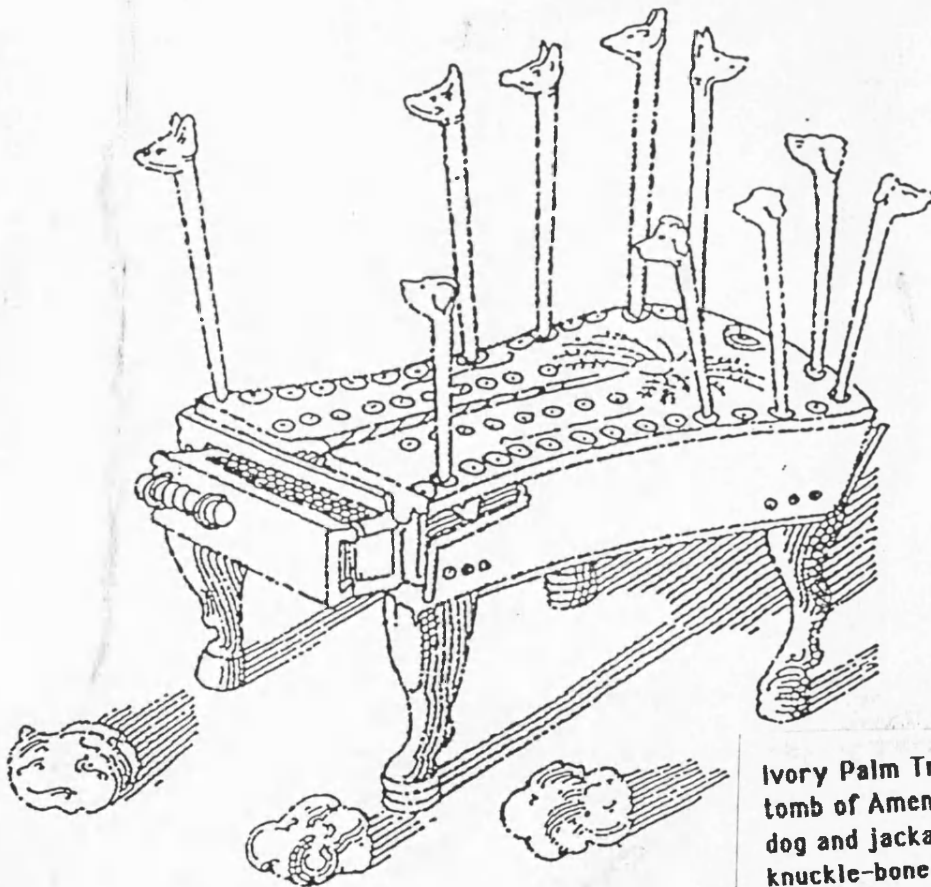
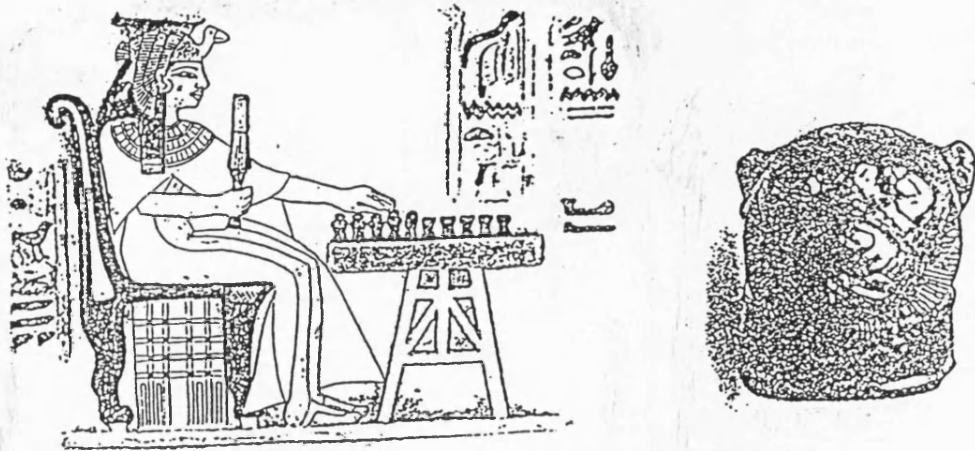
It should be noted that in various types of 'race game' throughout the Middle East, the playing figures represented the head of a dog, jackal, lion or other animal. This may have derived from the Egyptian game of *Senet*.¹⁸ The latter was illustrated on the walls of Egyptian tombs, and an extensive collection of such figures is to be seen in the Cairo Museum.

The board for such a game was found at Nippur in Mesopotamia. Five white dogs on one side raced against five black jackals on the other. See the illustration on the next page.

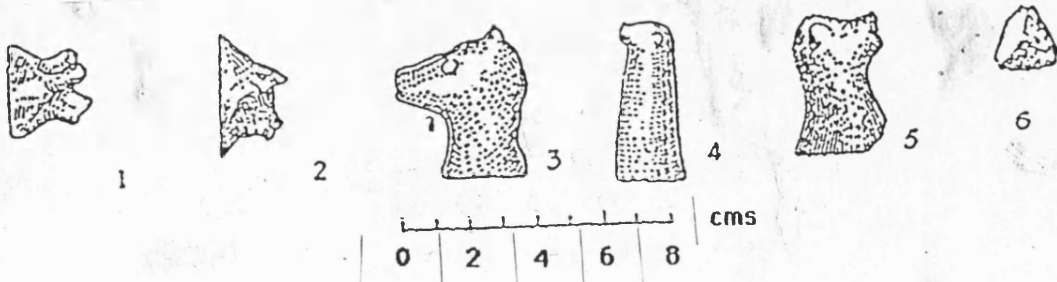
The argument of Kohut and Delitzsch, that the 'little cubs' in *Kethuboth* refer to a board game, is, then, more convincing than the opinion of the earlier commentators. The type of the game remains uncertain. Murray (pp. 209-10) quotes early Arabic manuscripts in which the pieces in the *nard* game are designated as dogs. In the same context, however (p. 209), he notes the use of the word *kalba* ('dogs') to mean chess pieces.

¹⁷ Quoted in Steinschneider, p. 156.

¹⁸ Such figures were in use since the time of Ur of the Chaldeans -- See Dr Irving Finkel (ed.), *Board Games* (British Museum Publication, forthcoming).



Ivory Palm Tree game from tomb of Amenemhet IV with dog and jackal pieces and knuckle-bone dice.



3 The game of *iskundrée*

The word *iskundrée* occurs in *Shebuoth* (29a), when the the *Beth din* impose an oath on a litigant:

When they adjure him, they say to him, 'Know that we do not adjure you according to your own mind, but according to the mind of the Omnipresent and the mind of the Beth din.' What is the reason? Is it not because we say, perhaps he gave him counters, and called them *zuzim*, in which case when he swears, he swears according to his own mind?¹⁹

The editor explains: 'Perhaps the debtor (who has to swear) had given to the creditor counters, such as are used as tokens (instead of money) in the game of *iskundre* (a kind of draughts or chess).'

In a comparable passage in *Nedarim* (25a), the word *iskundrée* is rendered as 'checkers', and is again placed in opposition to money:

When an oath is administered, he [the man swearing] is admonished: 'Know that we do not adjure you according to your own mind, but according to our mind and the mind of the Court.' Now, what does this exclude? Surely the case of one who gave [his creditor] checkers [tokens in a game] and mentally dubbed them coins;

...²⁰

The game which makes use of these 'checkers' is mentioned in a further passage, *Kiddushin* (21b), where two judges are conducting an argument about a *halacha* (point of law). R.Nahman says to R.Anan:

When you were at Mar Samuel's academy you wasted your time playing *iskundrée*.²¹

¹⁹ *Babylonian Talmud, Shebu'oth*, p. 159.

²⁰ *Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim*, p. 71. The words in square brackets are present in the edition quoted.

²¹ *Babylonian Talmud*, ed. cit., *Kiddushin*, pp. 102-3. *Kiddushin* is the seventh tractate of *Seder Nashim*. The editor relates the word *iskumdre* [sic] to the Persian *iskodar* and Greek *ασχανδης*.

The reference to Mar Samuel's academy unambiguously gives this passage a date as early as the third century AD.

It appears, then, that *iskundrée*, like *nardshir*, is a game played with pieces; but what further conclusions can be drawn about the type of the game? On this question, once again, a number of commentaries must be taken into account.

Rashi, commenting on *Kiddushin* (21b), explains *iskundrée* with the word *pispussin* -- 'a game played with pieces on a board.'

He further equates *pispussin* with the Old French *marelles*.

He gives the same explanation of *pispussin* when commenting on the following passage in *Sanhedrin* (25b):

Dice-players include the following: Those who play with checkers, and not only with checkers, but even with nut-shells and pomegranate peel. And when are they considered to have repented? When they break up their checkers and undergo a complete reformation, so much so, that they will not play even as a pastime.²²

On *Nedarim* (25a), Rashi explains *iskundrée* (again) as '*pispussin* with which people play.'

On *Shebuoth* (29a), he renders *iskundrée* as 'a game played with wooden pieces.'²³

Rabbenu Nissím (Nissím Gerondi, 14th century), commenting in the *Ran* on *Nedarim* (25a), explains *iskundrée* as 'small pieces of wood'.²⁴

²² *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* vol. 1, p. 146. For *marelles* or *merelles* see H.J.R. Murray, *A History of Board-Games Other than Chess* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 40-1.

²³ Rashi reported by Kohut, p. 130. Kohut equates *pispussin* with 'ψηφος = πεσσεια'. He notes that *iskundrée* has the variation *skundrai*.

²⁴ Kohut, p. 130; Steinschneider, p. 158.

Steinschneider compares this with a passage in *Sefer Chasidim* ('Book of the Pious'), first published in 1538 and originating from the school of Jehuda ha-Chasid, son of Samuel, in Regensburg (d. 1216). The passage (§ 400) refers to someone who lost in a game of dice and stole 'a piece of wood, used for playing' from his opponent. Leopold Zunz, in *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1845), p. 174, sees this as a chess piece.

Nathan Ben Jehiel, quoting *Kiddushin*, *Nedarim* and *Shebuoth*, explains *iskundrée* as a children's game with counters, for which he uses the Italian word *brincoli*.²⁵

Rabbi Hananel ben Hushiel (Chananel), as quoted by Nathan ben Jehiel, explains *iskundrée* as 'a game with little dogs'.²⁶

Hananel ben Hushiel of Kairuwan (c. 980-1056) 'undertook to provide the whole Babylonian Talmud with succinct and lucid comments which would guide any moderately informed student toward a better understanding of the text.'²⁷ He was 'the first to make frequent use of the Jerusalem Talmud, and he regularly compares it with discussions in the Babylonian Talmud.'²⁸ The *Arukh* of Nathan ben Jehiel contains 142 quotations from Hananel.²⁹

Alexander Kohut discusses Hananel's interpretation at some length. He does so in the context of his article which has the following question as its title:

Is chess mentioned in the Talmud, and if so, under what name?

Kohut, we recall, understood *guryata kitanyata*³⁰ (in *Kethuboth* 61b) to mean dog-shaped trictrac pieces. He argues that Hananel must be using 'little dogs' in this same sense, i.e. that Hananel either assumes *iskundrée* to mean the game of trictrac (*nard*) or else imagines that chess too is played with pieces in the shape of dogs' heads.³¹

²⁵ See Kohut, p. 130.

²⁶ See Kohut, p. 131.

²⁷ Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (8 vols + index), 2nd ed. (New York, 1952-60), vol. 6, p. 45.

²⁸ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 7, p. 1252.

²⁹ Baron, vol. 7, p. 30.

³⁰ Delitzsch's comment that this is a diminutive of *κίτες* is questioned by Steinschneider (p. 158) and disputed by Kohut (p. 133, note 2).

³¹ Kohut, pp. 133, 135.

Kohut quotes and discusses in detail many of the commentaries I have mentioned. His own conclusion is that *iskundrée* means chess:

In *Kiddushin*, only one kind of game can be referred to -- one which served as a recreation for men -- since R.Nahman blames the neglect of *halacha* studies on this game. We can scarcely assume that serious scholars at Samuel's academy would have bothered with a game with counters. . . . If *halacha* studies could have been neglected for the sake of a game, this can only mean a game which is serious even in play -- it can only be chess!³²

Kohut argues that if Hananel fails to recognize *iskundrée* as chess, his confusion of chess with trictrac is a common error, e.g. among interpreters of Sanskrit texts.

Franz Delitzsch, in connection with the word *iskundrée*, writes that 'we may presuppose chess is mentioned in the Talmud.'³³ He conjectures that *iskundrée* derives from *chaturanga*, the original Sanskrit word for chess.³⁴

On the other hand, Krauss (*Talmudische Archäologie*, vol. 3, p. 113) regards *iskundrée* as 'the *dice* in various games of chance.'

Finally, Jastrow's Talmudic Dictionary,³⁵ collates some of the references I have already mentioned and supplies further elucidation. The relevant dictionary entry reads:

³² Kohut, pp. 130, 132.

³³ Quoted from Steinschneider (p. 157), who comments: 'This can only be admitted if it can be shown (as so far it has not been) that the Persians were already familiar with chess before the end of the 5th century (when the Babylonian Talmud was completed).'

³⁴ Delitzsch reported by Kohut, p.133. However, Kohut considers this etymological conjecture far-fetched. For his own view of the derivation of *iskundrée*, see below, p. 42.

³⁵ *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature, compiled by Marcus Jastrow* [n.d.], vol. 1, p. 57.

איסקונדרי, אסק, סקונדרי m. pl. (Pers. is-kodâr, ἀσχανδης, σαγγάνδης, ἀσάδης; v. Perles Et. St. p. 113) prop. *despatch-bearers*, name of a game, a kind of chess. Kidd. 21^b באר אכללר Ar. (Var. Ar. בסק; ed. א-סקונדרי) you must have played at *iskundré* (instead of studying). Shebu. 29^a וילכא א-י רב (Ms. M. א-סקונדרי) perhaps he gave them checkers (tokens in game) and passed them for Zuzé. Ned. 25^a. Cmp. א-סקונדרי.

Joseph Perles (1835-94), the author of *Etymologische Studien zur Kunde der rabbinischen Sprache und Alterthümer* (Breslau, 1871), to which Jastrow refers, was born in Baja (Hungary) and studied in Breslau. He served as a preacher in Posen (Poznan) and then as Rabbi of the Jewish community of Munich. His main scholarly contribution was to Hebrew and Aramaic lexicography and philology, to which he devoted such studies as: *Zur rabbinischen Sprach- und Sagenkunde* (1873), . . . *Beiträge zur Geschichte der hebräischen und aramäischen Studien* (1884) and *Beiträge zur rabbinischen Sprach- und Alterthumskunde* (1893).³⁶

4 Conclusions

In the talmudic texts I have quoted, the games mentioned are paid little attention in themselves; in no case are the allusions more than incidental and casual. This very fact suggests that the games must have been familiar, without further elucidation, to the broad population which surrounded and supported the Talmudic Academies; they were firmly enough established in day-to-day usage to be included as a matter of course in legal argument and discussion.

There is evident agreement that *nardshir* and *iskundrée* both refer to games played with pieces on a board (and *pispussin* is a word for the pieces in such a game). The general view among commentators (which is not, however, supported by Rashi) is that *nardshir* is the type of game otherwise designated as *nard* -- the precursor of modern backgammon. It should not be forgotten,

³⁶ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 13, p. 294.

on the other hand, that a common error is to mistake chess for *nard*. Delitzsch (see p. 26 above) points to this confusion among Arab and Turkish writers; Kohut (pp. 30-31 above) ascribes it to Chananel, and detects it among interpreters of Sanskrit texts.

From the juxtaposition with *nardshir* and the knowledge furnished by archaeology about gaming pieces in the shape of animals' heads, we must conclude (with Kohut and Delitzsch) that the 'little cubs' mentioned in *Kethuboth* are a further reference to a board game. While such pieces were commonly used for race games, the possibility of ascribing them to chess remains open (and is consistent with the early Arabic designation of chess pieces as 'dogs' -- see page 26 above).

If the mention of *nardshir* in *Kethuboth* should turn out to be a reference to the *nard* game, it is reasonable to suppose that the contrasting word *iskundrée* denotes a game of a different type. Even if Krauss is right to associate *iskundrée* with dice, this does not preclude interpreting it as a form of chess. (Murray surmises that the earliest version of chess, while possessing the essential features of the later game -- the six types of piece forming two armies on an eight-by-eight board -- involved the use of dice to determine which type of piece was to be moved.)³⁷ Kohut emphasizes that *iskundrée* must have been 'serious' enough to be a time-absorbing occupation for scholars, and his conclusion (consistent with Delitzsch and Jastrow) that no game other than chess would have met this criterion is wholly plausible. As to the derivation of the name, he states a hypothesis (*iskundrée* as the game of Iskander ibn-Phillip Maqudony, i.e. Alexander the Great) to which we shall later return.

The view that chess is mentioned in the Talmud has been discounted or neglected on inadequate grounds by successive chess historians.³⁸ The reason for its rejection is that it contradicts the conventional dating of the events which brought chess to the Sassanian Empire of Persia in which the Talmudic Academies were situated. On the basis of a small number of Sanskrit writings and some legends recorded by early Arab chess

³⁷ Murray, pp. 46-7.

³⁸ Murray (p. 446) states that the 'frequently expressed belief that chess is mentioned in the *Babylonian Talmud* has no basis in fact, and is due to blunders on the part of commentators.' This may be compared with Hyde, *Syntagma* vol. 2, p. 27, and also e.g. Willard Fiske, *Chess in Iceland and in Icelandic Literature* (Florence, 1905), p. 173. At a later date, Harry Golombek restates the view that no reference to chess has been found in literature earlier than 600 AD; see *A History of Chess* (London, 1976), p. 27.

writers,³⁹ the game of chess is generally thought to have originated in India. In the prevalent view, it first travelled westward from there to Persia in the reign of Chosroes I (531-79) -- and hence cannot have been known to the writers of the Talmud, of which the text was finalized in about 500.

Historians have nonetheless had to admit that this conventional account is less than conclusive, since it largely relies -- for want of better evidence -- on the narration of events in the epic poem *Shahnama* ('Book of Kings') by Firdausi, a work completed only in 1008 and containing strong elements of propaganda and myth. In the next section, I shall review the circumstances and aims of Firdausi's work, and show that its reliability as a source is much inferior to that of the Talmud.

Firdausi and the *Shahnama*

The story of how the mythopoeic *Shahnama* came to be written is itself complicated by an admixture of legend. The uncertainty surrounding it merely underlines the more general fact that we lack a reliable account of Persian history in the sixth century. The Sassanian dynasty which ruled Persia from 224 to 636 AD did not itself possess a 'sense of history'. Even where records existed, they were subsequently lost in the turmoil of the Arab invasion and the following years of Mohammedanization and Arabization of the Persian Empire.

It is said, however, that in 562 the Khagan (Emperor) Chosroes I gave orders that a collection of all the tales and legends relating to the ancient kings of Persia should be compiled and deposited in the royal library. The collection of stories, written in the old dialect and called *Khoda'iana* ('Book of Kings'), was revised during the course of the next forty years by Danishwer. According to other accounts, the collection was initiated by the last Sassanian Khagan, Yazdajird, who gave a copy to the Caliph Omar I (the reputed destroyer of Ptolemy's Alexandrian library).

Whatever its origin, the work survived the biblioclasm of the early Arab caliphs and their generals, and next appeared in the eighth century -- when it was paraphrased in Arabic by a learned Persian gentleman who had embraced Islam but shared the aims of those concerned to preserve the traditional Pahlavian

³⁹ See Murray, pp. 207-16.

literature.

Eventually, the work came into the hands of Sultan Mahmud at Ghazni,⁴⁰ who ordered his finest court poet, Dakiki, to put it into Persian verse. Before he had made much progress Dakiki was assassinated, but in due course the task was taken over by Abul l'Kasim Mansur (or Hassan), the Persian poet who adopted the *nom de plume* of Firdausi.⁴¹

For some years, Firdausi (c. 940-1020) worked on the epic poem -- the *Shahnama* -- in obscurity, but in his 58th year he gained admission to Mahmud by sending him specimens of the work.⁴² The story of the subsequent dealings between poet and sultan can be briefly told. Greatly pleased with what he had seen of the *Shahnama*, Mahmud ordered his treasurer, Khojan Hasan Maimandi, to pay Firdausi 1,000 gold dinars for every thousand couplets completed; but the poet preferred to allow the sum to accumulate until the whole was finished. His purpose was to fulfil the great dream of his childhood, namely to amass sufficient capital to construct a dike in his native town of Tus (in Tabaristan, northern Persia), which suffered greatly from defective irrigation. Owing to this resolution, and to the jealousy of treasurer Hasan Maimandi, who even refused to advance sufficient for the necessities of life, Firdausi passed the greater part of his years in great privation while at the same time enjoying royal favour and international fame.

At length, after more than thirty years' work, the *Shahnama* was finished in 1008 AD, and Mahmud ordered the treasurer to pay Firdausi 60,000 gold dinars;⁴³ but the jealous official sent 60,000 silver dirhams instead (worth about one twentieth of the promised sum). Firdausi was extremely upset, and instantly gave the money away. Furthermore he sent back a sealed letter with instructions to hand it to the Sultan at a propitious moment after a period of twenty days. The letter contained a satire, taunting

⁴⁰ In the 12th century, Benjamin of Tudela visited Ghazni and reported that it had one of the largest Jewish populations (80,000) of any Persian town. See *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, critical text, translation and commentary by Marcus Nathan Adler (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), p. 58. See also note 63 below.

⁴¹ The name Firdausi (variations are Firdosi, Firdusi etc.) means both 'garden' and 'paradise'.

⁴² See Richard N. Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia: The Arabs in the East*, paperback ed. (London, 1988), p. 156. Further biographical information on Firdausi is in *Chambers' Encyclopaedia* and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Also A synopsis of the available biographical material on Firdausi is given by P.B. Vachha, *Firdousi and the Shahnama: A Study of the Great Persian Epic of the Homer of the East* (Bombay, 1950).

⁴³ In fact, no extant copy of the work has more than 56,000 couplets.

Mahmud on his slavish birth. When Mahmud received it, he in turn went into a violent rage. He offered a reward for the capture of Firdausi, who had wisely set off (with no more than his staff and a dervish cloak) to Mazandaran. There the prince of Jurjan at first received him with great favour, promising continuing protection and patronage, but, on learning the circumstances in which Firdausi had left Ghazni and fearing the wrath of his superior sovereign, dismissed him. Firdausi next found refuge at the court of the Caliph of Baghdad, but again Mahmud ordered Firdausi to be delivered up.

Firdausi went to his birthplace, Tus, hoping to spend the rest of his days quietly. The story goes that the Sultan repented and ordered the money to be paid to Firdausi in full, but it arrived just as the poet was being buried, in 1020 AD. His daughter declined to accept the payment on the grounds that it would ill become her to accept what was not offered to her father in his lifetime.

What Firdausi undertook in his epic poem⁴⁴ was the resurrection of an idealized past. Experiencing his own time as one of cultural deprivation consequent upon the Arab conquest, he articulated the Persian yearnings for the Sassanian Empire⁴⁵ -- whose most illustrious representative was the monarch Chosroes I, called *Anushiryan* ('of the immortal soul').⁴⁶ While deeply versed in Arabic language and literature, Firdausi deliberately cultivated Pahlavi or Old Persian, for 'Arabic had so much entered the warp and woof of Persian that literary figures such as Firdausi feared that the Persian language and all the heritage of the pre-Islamic age would vanish.'⁴⁷ In the pursuit of these ends, the poet to a large extent built his epic on legendary and fictitious accounts of events.

It is significant that Firdausi, as already mentioned, was a native of the Tabaristan and Jurjan⁴⁸ area, the region

⁴⁴ The *Shahnama* exists in many beautiful manuscripts; it was first published in Calcutta in 1829 (4 vols). A complete translation into French by Julius Mohl, with the Persian text on the facing pages, was published in seven volumes in Paris, 1838-78.

⁴⁵ One manifestation of these feelings was the literary and scholarly movement known as the *Shu'ubiya* which arose in 9th-century Baghdad; see Frye, p. 22.

⁴⁶ See Frye, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Frye, p. 174.

incorporating the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. It was in this area -- geographically isolated, and at that time recognizing only a nominal submission to Baghdad -- that the nostalgia for the Pahlavian past was most consistently nurtured by Persian writers and patriots.⁴⁹

I shall have more to say later about the Tabaristan region in an attempt to define its importance for the history of chess. What concerns us at present is that the ethos of myth-making and yearning for the past supplied the conditions for Firdausi's description of how the game of chess was brought from India to the court of Emperor Chosroes.

Firdausi relates that an ambassador from the Raja of India arrived bringing many precious gifts including a finely constructed chessboard. He addressed Chosroes as follows:

O king, may you live as long as the heavens endure! Command your wise men to examine this chessboard, and to deliberate together in every way in order that they may discover the rules of this noble game, and recognize the several pieces by their names. Bid them try to discover the moves of the Foot-soldiers (*piyada*), the Elephants (*pil*), and the other members of the army, viz. the Chariots (*rukḥ*), the Horses (*asp*), the Counsellor (*farzin*), the King (*shah*), and how to place them on their squares. If they can discover the rules of this beautiful game, they will excel all the wise men of the world, and we will willingly remit to this court the tributes and dues which the king demands of us, but if the wise men of Iran are unable to solve the riddle, they ought to desist from demanding tribute from us, for they will not be our equals in wisdom; nay, rather, you ought to pay tribute to us, for wisdom is more excellent than everything else of which man may boast himself.⁵⁰

The chessmen were then placed on the board. After several days during which the wise men of Persia tried in vain to deduce the workings of the game, the king's minister Buzurjmīhr studied it for a day and a night and unravelled the secret. He then invented the game of *nard* as a challenge to the sages of India -- who failed to reciprocate his feat.

Does this story have a basis in reality? It is largely consistent with the events narrated in the Pahlavi work *Chatrang-namagh*

⁴⁸ Persian: Gurgan. Firdausi was born in Shadab, a suburb of Tus.

⁴⁹ See Frye, p. 118.

⁵⁰ Quoted from Murray, p. 156.

or *Vizarishn i Chatrang*, which is thought to have been written in the seventh century and indicates that in the view of the Persians, chess came to them from India as a game for two players without dice.⁵¹

However, even if this episode, like other sections of the *Shahnama*, is based loosely on fact, it gives no reliable basis for dating the events. As the chess historian I.M.Linder has pointed out,⁵² it would have suited Firdausi's purpose to ascribe any event reflecting glory on the Persians to the reign of Chosroes I.

For want of any better evidence, H.J.R.Murray, following Hyde, accepted the substance of Firdausi's narrative and concluded that the earliest date for the introduction of chess into Persia was in the reign of Chosroes I.⁵³ Yet if the account does have a historical basis, the true date could have been later -- or earlier.

Enough has been said by now to show how great a contrast exists between the literary manner adopted by Firdausi and the type of writing contained in the Talmud.

The conscious and deliberate efforts undertaken in crucial periods by the Jewish leaders and rabbis to save the nation's

⁵¹ See e.g. Arthur Christensen, *The Epics of the Kings in Ancient Iranian Traditions*, translated from the French by Farrokh Vajifdar (Bombay, 1991), pp. 21-2: 'The *Chatrangnamagh* takes us back to the times of Khusro Anosharvan (531-579). Here is its summary: The king of India whose name in the Pahlavi scripts has been read as Divsarm or Yasodharm, sends presents to Anosharvan and a game of chess with a letter inviting the king of Iran to have this game explained by his wise men; if they are unsuccessful in this, Anosharvan must pay a tribute to the Indian king. Anosharvan asks for a three days' respite. The learned men of Persia try in vain to explain the game. But on the third day, Vuzurgmihr, son of Boktagh, presents himself and offers to explain the game and at the same time to replace another game of his own invention in the messengers' hands, which the king of India must have explained by his scholars under penalty of paying a double tribute to Persia. The following day, Vuzurgmihr explains the game of chess and wins twelve games against the messenger. Thereafter Vuzurgmihr is sent to the court of the Indian king with all kinds of precious objects, and presents to that king the game of tric-trac invented by him -- a game which he designates under the name of *Nev-Ardasher*, and which is generally called Nard. The king asks for a delay of fourteen days to consult his sages, but as nobody knew to explain the game, he remits the double tribute to Vuzurgmihr and sends him back with rich presents and great honours.'

⁵² I.M.Linder, *Chess in Old Russia*, translated by Martin P.Rice (Zürich, 1979), pp. 19-20.

⁵³ See Murray, chapter 8, p. 155.

culture -- its distinguishing way of life -- through the awareness of its history, might seem in some ways to offer a parallel to the Persian yearnings for a past age of which I have spoken. The historical consciousness gave sustenance to the exiled Jewish community in Babylon, as recorded in the Old Testament; and it manifested itself most remarkably in the era following the destruction of the second Jewish commonwealth by the Romans in 70 AD -- when the devastation of Jerusalem and Judaea sent a flood of refugees to join the settlements of Jews who had remained in Babylon and prospered there. But this Jewish sense of history which eventually found its embodiment in the Talmud was grounded on system and continuity -- on the concern of each generation to record its own social and legal arrangements while methodically studying and preserving the heritage of the past. The labours devoted to past and contemporary laws and customs by the Talmudic Academies -- a process of first repeating, then adding, and finally codifying -- resulted in a body of writing which not only contains revised and updated principles of the law, but supplies us with an authentic chronicle of the daily life of the time.

It is for these reasons that the Talmud, as source material for the history of chess, stands in a wholly different category from the *Shahnama*, a work written a full four centuries after the events it purports to describe, and generally denied the status of reliable history.

If the uncertain date for the arrival of chess in Persia had been located only 100-150 years earlier by the conventional wisdom, the interpretation of our talmudic passages as references to chess would have encountered little resistance.

The Talmud was completed a least that number of years before the account referred to in Firdausi. Indeed the reference to Mar Samuel is over 300 years earlier. This co-incides with Ardashir founder of the Sassanian dynasty. (See pages. 40-41).

The theory that chess originated in India places reliance on references to the game in a number of Sanskrit works. Only three of these comparatively rare works have so far been printed and brought to the notice of scholars, and their traditional dating is open to question. In his preface to an edition⁵⁴ of one text

⁵⁴ Krishnagar College, March 1946. There are four manuscripts of the text preserved in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. See also Chakravarti's account of the known works in Sanskrit dealing with chess, in *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 14 (1938), pp. 75-9.

entitled *Satarañja*, Chintaharan Chakravarti has written:

Considering the paucity of the literature on the subject of Sanskrit [there is a necessity for] its systematic and critical study for investigating the origin and development of the game. . . . In one manuscript the work is introduced as a discourse given by Kṛṣṇa to Rādhā. This is evidently to prove its antiquity. But the very title seems to betray its comparative lateness. *Satarañja* is not an old Sanskrit word; it is the Sanskritised form of the Persian *Satrahja* (supposed to be an adaptation of the original Sanskrit form *Caturanga*).⁵⁵

‘Alexander’s Game’

Given the unreliability of Firdausi’s story, is there an alternative view of early chess history into which the talmudic references can be fitted?

The earliest undisputed reference to chess in any written source occurs in the Pahlavi romance *Karnamak-i-Artakshatr-i-Papakan*, which is thought to have been written in about 600 AD.⁵⁶ Arthur Christensen notes that this ‘little prose romance’ is one of the three pieces of narrative literature whose Pahlavi texts still exist.⁵⁷ (I have already referred to another, the *Chatrang-namagh*.) The subject of the work is the exploits of Ardshir or Ardashir (Artaxerxes), the son of Papak (Babakan). Ardshir, the founder of the Sassanian dynasty, ruled Persia from

⁵⁵ The form of the Persian word (*shatranj*, *shitranj* etc.) was discussed by as-Safadi (D. 1363) in his *Sharh Lamiyat al-Ajam* (see Murray, p. 186). The name as-Safadi derives from Safad, a hill town in Galilee (within the Persian/Abassid Empire) and the seat of a *yeshiva*.

⁵⁶ See Murray, p. 149; Eales, p. 26.

⁵⁷ Christensen, p. 40. He adds: ‘the style in which it is composed makes us suspect that our text is but an abridgement of a vaster *Karnamagh*. Mas’udi (Muruj II., p. 162) mentions the *Karnamagh* “in which were recounted the history, wars, and wanderings of Ardashir and his life in general”. The author of the *Fihrist* mentions (119.3) a “Life of Ardashir, composed in Arabic verse by Aban el-Lahiqi”. Besides, our *Karnamagh*, or rather its presumed original, had been made use of by Arab and Persian authors: by Tabari, Dinawari, Tha’alibi, Firdausi and others. In the *Shahnameh* we have a very detailed version of it.’

We recall that Samuel Krauss (see p. 24 above) ascribed the invention of *nerdshir* to Ardeshir Babekan. Compare also the speculations in *The Delight of Kings* on p. 114 below, where chess is attributed to a Persian sage who invented it for ‘Ardushia, the Shah of Persia . . . the same one as we know as King Achashverosh.’

212 to 241 AD -- about the time of Mar Samuel. The passage which concerns us reads as follows:

When Ardawan saw Artakhshir, he rejoiced and esteemed him highly. He commanded him to accompany his sons and knights to the chase and to the games of ball. Artakhshir did this, and by God's help he became doughtier and more skilled than them all in ball-play, in horsemanship, in chess (*chatrang*), in hunting, and in other accomplishments.⁵⁹

One view of how chess may have arrived in Persia before the time of Ardshir is considered by Alexander Kohut in the article I have quoted before. According to this view, chess is of European origin and its ancestor was introduced into Asia in the era of Alexander the Great. For his observations on this subject, Kohut draws on material published by Duncan Forbes and Albrecht Weber.⁶⁰

Forbes reproduces an account of a form of chess played on an enlarged board with 56 pieces and said to have been invented by 'an ancient Grecian sage by the name of Hermes'. This game, called 'perfect chess', was allegedly brought to India by Alexander and his army and shortly afterwards transformed by Khagan Kaid's minister Sassa, into a game played with 32 pieces; it was in this abridged form that the game reached Persia in the time of Chosroes.⁶¹ Kohut observes:

⁵⁹ Quoted from Murray, p. 149.

⁶⁰ 'Einige Daten über das Schachspiel nach indischen Quellen', *Monatsbericht der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin* (8 Feb. 1872).

⁶¹ Forbes, pp. 151-2, where J. Mill's *History of British India* (1804) is quoted: 'The game proved by far too scientific and refined for the "stupid Hindus", who "completely spoiled the game by their abridgement thereof."' Compare the Royal Asiatic Society's manuscript mentioned by Murray, p. 177.

Professor Weber does not place much weight on this theory, but he adds nonetheless that 'the Indian game may have arisen out of acquaintance with occidental games (*ludus latrunculorum*). This would be the same kind of process that we can observe in other fields (such as fables, concepts of astrology and astronomy, etc. etc.): a cultural entity of western origin is imported into India, takes on a new form there, and returns in this new form to the West.'

What if the Talmud could give us a hint in support of this conjecture? I am thinking of our enigmatic word *iskundre*. It is well known that *Iskander* is the Arabic and Persian version of the name Alexander. What if the Talmud intended to designate chess as *iskundre* = the Iskander (Alexander) game? It should be no objection that elsewhere in the Talmud Alexander the Great is always written as *Alexandros*, for Alexander's game may have been written differently on purpose, . . . precisely to distinguish it from the *name* Alexander.⁶²

Kohut, then, considers it was plausible 'to designate chess, which must have existed in Mar Samuel's time, as the Iskander game, on the assumption that Alexander the great was its inventor or mediator.'

The hypothesis can draw support from a Persian book written by Ibn Yehia el Telmeini (died 1375), called *A Model of Fighting* ('by the movement of chess pieces'). The book refers to Iskander ibn-Phillip Maqudony (that is, Alexander son of Philip of Macedonia). It asserts that he was very fond of chess and instructed 'wise men' to keep him entertained playing the game; 'it also helped him to plan and prepare for war, as it provided the player with various tactics and techniques.'⁶³

Both Benjamin of Tudela and Marco Polo record the general belief current in their time, that Alexander the Great traversed the

⁶² Kohut, p. 132; he notes that the truncation of Alexander to Iskander occurred because 'strangely enough, the *Al* was taken as an article.'

⁶³ See *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, translated and commented by Marcus Nathan Adler (London and Oxford, 1907). This work has been likened to a 'Baedeker of the twelfth century' (Dimont, *Jews, God and History*), and figures among the achievements of Spanish Jewry that I shall consider in the next chapter. Benjamin set out from Saragossa in 1159 and travelled through Provence, Italy, Greece, Palestine and Persia, as far as the borders of China. His *Itinerary*, which gives particular attention to the details of social life among Jewish communities, was written in Hebrew and was translated into Latin, English, Dutch and French.

paths of Derbend between the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea.⁶⁴ This place is called in Turkish *Demis-Kapi* or the Iron Gates, while the Persian designation is *Sadd-i-Iskander* -- the rampart of Alexander.

Irrespective of Alexander's itinerary, however, the region on the shores of the Caspian Sea offers a promising field for further investigation into the origins and early history of chess.

The region of Tabaristan and Jurjan, to the south and east, was the home of the earliest Persian chessplayers of renown, including As-Suli (d. 946).⁶⁵ There appears to be no personal connection between As-Suli and Ali Ibn Suhl Ibn Rabban Tabari (also known as Suhl of Tabaristan), a ninth-century Jewish physician and Muslim convert, yet the latter too provides us with information on chess, treating it in a medical book as a 'remedy for low spirits'.⁶⁶ In a treatise on arithmetic⁶⁷ written about 975, doctors, mathematicians and astronomers -- a social circle in which Jews played a major role -- are recorded as a group with a major interest in chess.⁶⁸

In connection with Firdausi, I referred to the conservative

⁶⁴ Benjamin of Tudela, pp. 40-1.

⁶⁵ See below, pp. 95, 100.

⁶⁶ See Frye, pp. 164-5. Ali Ibn Suhl was the son of the well-known Jewish astronomer and mathematician Rabbi Suhl Ibn Rabban. He distinguished himself in various fields: taking the post of secretary to Mazyar ibn Qarin (prince of Ali's native Tabaristan), he became a prominent figure at the courts of the caliphs al-Mu'tasim and al-Mutawakkil. His works include a book in praise of Islam called *Kitab al-Din wa al-Dawla* ('The Book of Religion and Empire'); for this and further information, see H.Friedenwald, *Jews and Medicine*, vol. 1 (1967), p. 173, and Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, vol. I (Weimar, 1898), p. 231.

⁶⁷ The book was later translated into German by Professor Dieterici (University of Berlin, 1865).

In the field of medicine, further leading figures to be mentioned are Avicenna, Zakariyya al-Razi (d. 924) -- a pupil of Ali Ibn Suhl -- and Ali b. al-Abbas al-Majusi (d. 994); all these, in addition to practising as physicians and writing books on medicine, were scholars in other areas.

⁶⁸ On p. 138, Frye mentions Musa al-Nikrisi, a *Qaraite* Jew from Jurjan, as the informant of Abut-Rashan Muhammad Ahmad al-Biruni -- the Islamic scholar who 'travelled for a considerable period in India, tells us about the arithmetic and chess of the Hindus, notes peculiarities connected with the game of chess, and deals with several questions of mathematical geography (projection azimuths).' Al-Biruni was born in Khiva, lived in Khwarazm (adjacent to the Caspian Sea area) and died at Ghazna in 1048 (Frye, p. 43).

tendencies of the culture of the Caspian Sea coastal area -- tendencies nurtured by the relative isolation of this district from the other satrapies of the Abassid Empire. Aspects of this orientation towards the past were the survival of Zoroastrianism late into Islamic times, and a concern for the preservation of the Pahlavi language.⁶⁹ Whether the interest in chess can be seen as part of the same intellectual continuity reaching back to the venerated era of the Parthian Empire -- the state in which the Talmudic Academies flourished⁷⁰ -- can only be established with confidence by the disclosure of new evidence.

Remote from the rest of Persia, the region of Tabaristan and Jurjan formed a geographical and economic unit with the territories of the Khazar Khanate to the north and west of the Caspian -- or Khazar Sea. I shall reveal in the next chapter that these territories supply archaeological evidence of the spread of chess.⁷¹

Given the notoriously scanty evidence on which early chess history relies, any conclusions -- whether in harmony with the conventional wisdom or opposed to it -- can at present only be tentative. To determine the date at which the game first arrived in the Caspian region, from Europe (perhaps with Alexander) or from India -- or whether, indeed, it was in this region that chess originated -- would form an agenda for further inquiry. To pursue this inquiry further would, however, go beyond the scope of the present dissertation.

⁶⁹ For example, Frye (p. 172) notes that 'From the site of Varamin near Raiy, archaeologists have found some ostrasca engraved with Arabic and some with Pahlavi dating from the 9th and 10th centuries', from which he concludes that both Arabic and Pahlavi were used by local officials. On p. 118, he refers to late Pahlavi historic inscriptions on the tower of Mil-i-Radkan in western Jurjan and the tower of Lagim in eastern Tabaristan.

⁷⁰ Connections between Pahlavi culture and the Talmud are noted e.g. by Christensen (p. 33): 'A Pahlavi book about Nimrod, King of Babylon, mentioned in the *Fihrist* (305.7 and 306.5), was doubtless of Talmudic provenance.' On pp. 22-3, he comments on 'the singular script of the Pahlavi of the Zoroastrian books, the use of Aramaean ideograms, etc.'

⁷¹ See below, p. 67.

Postscript

1 An enigmatic board game

Having spoken of Alexander the Great and games, I should add that there is a curious Hebrew manuscript in the Vatican Library which has a bearing on this subject.

The manuscript in question is the first in a collection of over thirty anonymous pieces of varying lengths. These allegedly date from the fifteenth century and involve the game of chess.⁷² The first item, however, deals not with chess but with some other board game. It features the following diagram:

ix	1	ix	3	ix	5	ix	7		
viii	viii	2	viii	4	viii	6	viii		
vii	1	vii	3	vii	5		c		
vi	vi	2	vi	4	vi	d			
v	1	v	3	4(?)	c	v			
iv	iv	2	iv	d					
iii	1	iii	c						
ii	ii	d							
i	c								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

[DIAGRAM 1]

By way of explanation or comment on the game, the manuscript appends a text which I reproduce first in facsimile form; the Hebrew is written in very old script.

⁷² The collection is classified as Hebrew manuscript 171; see S.E. and J.S. Assemanus, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus*, Part I, vol 1 (Rome 1756), pp. 135-40. For the dating of the collection, see Assemanus, p.140, and Steinschneider, p. 180. The item I discuss here is numbered as 31, and begins at sheet 212 of the manuscript. In Assemanus, this item is said to contain 'the rules of chess', but according to Steinschneider (loc.cit), the titles or headings in the catalogue derive at least partly from the scribes and catalogers employed at the Vatican (mostly ignorant baptized Jews).'

The text was transcribed into current Hebrew script as follows,
by Rafael Lowe, Professor Emeritus of University College London.

		תעתיק	
1	א' וט' אח' ינצח את הט'	ח' וא' הח' ינצח את האחד	
2	א' וז' א' ינצח את הז'	א' וו' הו' ינצח את האחד	
3	א' וה' הא' ינצח את הה'	א' וד' הד' ינצח את האחד	
4	א' וג' הא' ינצח את הג'	א' וב' הב' ינצח את האחד	
5	א' וא' הרודף ינצח את הנרדף		
6	ב"ט(??) השער השני		
7	ב' וט' הט' ינצחו את הב'	ב' וח' הב' ינצחו את הח'	
8	ב' וז' הז' ינצחו את הב'	ב' וו' הב' ינצחו את הו'	
9	ב' וה' הה' ינצחו את הב'	ב' וד' הב' ינצחו את הד'	
10	ב' וג' הג' ינצחו את הב'	ב' וב' הב' ינצחו את הרודף	
11	ג' השער השלישי		
12	ג' וט' הג' ינצחו את הט'	ג' וח' הח' ינצחו את הג'	
13	ג' וז' הג' ינצחו את הז'	ג' וו' הו' ינצחו את הג'	
14	ג' וה' הג' ינצחו את הה'	ג' וד' הד' ינצחו את הג'	
15	ג' וג' הג' ינצחו את הג'	ג' וב' הב' ינצחו את הרודף	
16	השער הרביעי		
17	ד' וט' הט' ינצח את הד'	ד' וח' הד' (sub) ינצח את הח'	
18	ד' וז' הז' ינצח את הד'	ד' וו' הד' ינצח את הו'	
19	ד' וה' הד' ינצח את הה'	ד' וד' הד' ינצח את הרודף	
20	השער החמישי		
21	ה' וט' הה' ינצח את הט'	ה' וח' הח' ינצח את הה'	
22	ה' וז' הה' ינצח את הז'	ה' וו' הו' ינצח את הו'	
23	ה' וה' הה' ינצח את הה'	ה' וד' הד' ינצח את הרודף	
24	השער השישי		
25	ו' וט' הט' ינצח את ו'	ו"ח הו' ינצח את הח'	
26	ו' וה' הה' ינצח את הה'	ו' וו' הו' ינצח את הרודף	
27	השער השביעי		
28	ז' וט' הז' ינצח את הט'	ז' וח' הח' ינצח את הז'	
29	ז' וז' הז' ינצח את הז'	ז' וו' הו' ינצח את הרודף	

The English translation of the text reads as follows:

Line

1	[in the case of]	1 and 9, 8 and 1,	1 defeats 9 8 defeats 1
2		1 and 7, 1 and 6,	1 defeats the 7th 6 defeats the 1
3		1 and 5, 1 and 4,	1 defeats the 5th the 4th defeats the 1
4		1 and 3, 1 and 2,	the 1 defeats the 3rd the 2nd defeats the 1
5		1 and 1,	the challenger defeats the defendant
6		SECOND CHAPTER	
7		2 and 9, 2 and 8,	the 9th defeats the 2nd the 2nd defeats the 8th
8		2 and 7, 2 and 6,	the 7th defeats the 2nd the 2nd defeats the 6th
9		2 and 5, 2 and 4,	the 5th defeats the 2nd the 2nd defeats the 4th
10		2 and 3, 2 and 2,	the 3rd defeats the 2nd the defender defeats the challenger
11		THIRD CHAPTER	
12		3 and 9, 3 and 8,	the 3rd defeats the 9th the 8th defeats the 3rd
13		3 and 7, 3 and 6,	the 3rd defeats the 7th the 6th defeats the 3rd
14		3 and 5, 3 and 4,	the 3rd defeats the 5th the 4th defeats the 3rd
15		3 and 3,	the challenger defeats the defender
16		FOURTH CHAPTER	
17		4 and 9, 4 and 8,	the 9th defeats the 4th the 4th defeats the 8th
18		4 and 7, 4 and 6,	the 7th defeats the 4th the 4th defeats the 6th
19		4 and 5, 4 and 4,	the 4th defeats the 5th the defender defeats the challenger

20	FIFTH CHAPTER
21	5 and 9, the 5th defeats the 9th
	5 and 8, the 8th defeats the 5th
22	5 and 7, the 5th defeats the 7th
	5 and 6, the 6th defeats the 5th
23	5 and 5, the challenger defeats the defender
24	SIXTH CHAPTER
25	6 and 9, the 9th defeats the 6th
	5 and 8, the 6th defeats the 8th
26	6 and 5, the 5th defeats the 6th
	6 and 6, the defender defeats the challenger
27	SEVENTH CHAPTER
28	7 and 9, the 7th defeats the 9th
	7 and 8, the 8th defeats the 7th
29	7 and 7, the challenger defeats the defender.

The rationale of the game remains enigmatic. Dr Ricardo Calvo, a chess Grandmaster from Madrid, has offered a commentary on it,⁷³ from which I now quote:

As far I understand it, the diagram deals with an unknown board game, played in an irregular, almost triangular area in the upper left part of the board, with 7 pieces, 4 'challengers' and 3 'defenders' which are initially aligned on the long diagonal at the edge of the playing area. The numerals on the squares range from 1 to 9, and are represented with Roman ciphers in the black squares and with Arabic numbers in the white ones. The rest of the board, with no numbers on the squares, seems to play no role at all in the game. (I shall refer to the squares using algebraic notation as in chess, but with the letters a-i for the files and the numbers 1-9 for the ranks.)

First of all, two mistakes are evident. If the sequence of numbers is to make sense, the empty square f7 should bear the number 'vii'. And the 'v' of f5 should instead be placed on the square d5. This is also suggested by the correction to the written Hebrew text.

The corrected diagram is as follows:

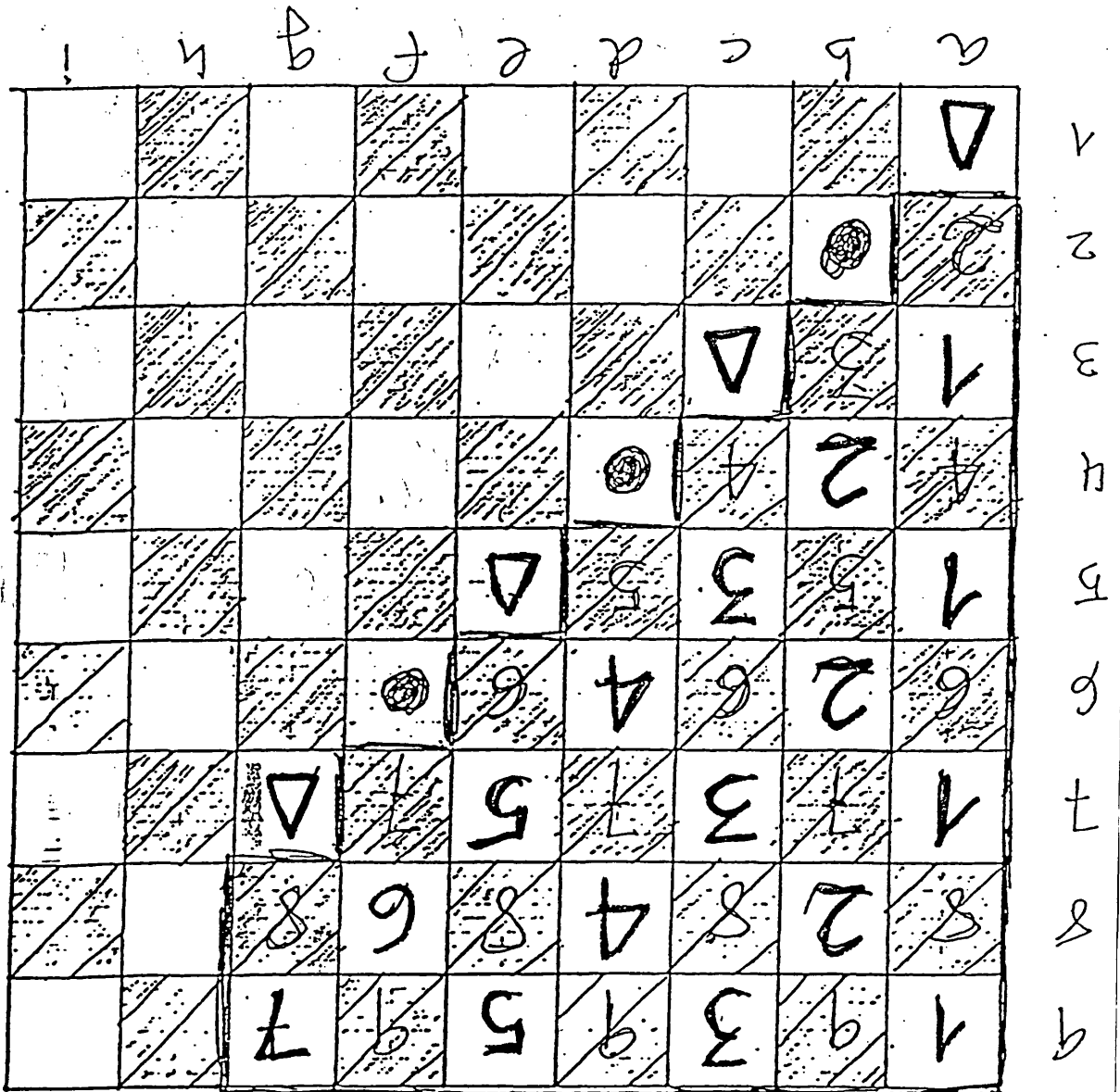
⁷³ The passages I quote are slightly adapted from a letter of Ricardo Calvo to myself.

[DIAGRAM 2]

I 101 G

⊙ = DEFENDER

Δ = CHALLENGER



Calvo continues:

It is reasonable to assume that the game consisted in moving the challenging and defending pieces into the playing area, most probably in turn; the final victory would be determined by some kind of alignment, or by some kind of captures. The kind of board games known as 'race games' may also fit in with this structure of numbered squares. This is suggested, at any rate, by the 'staircase' formation leading up to the top right.

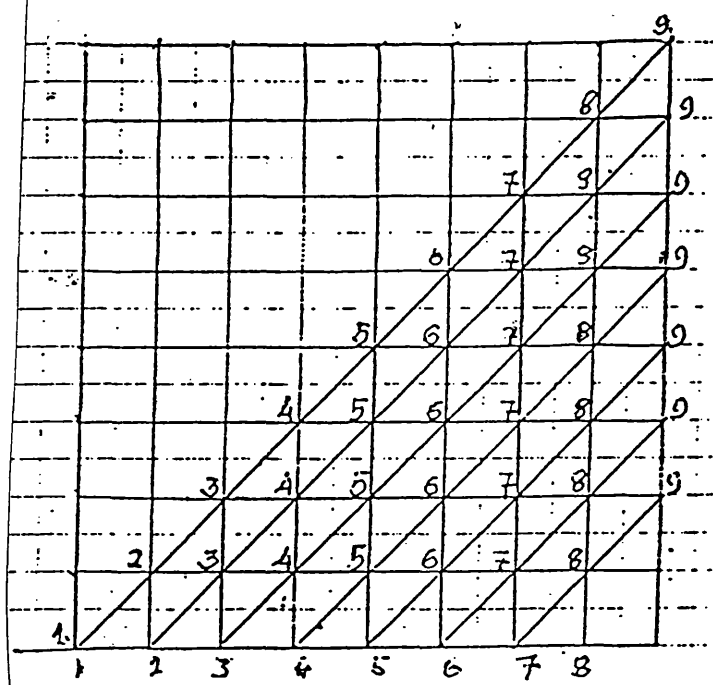
The translation of the text gives some information on the possible rules of play. The first line states '1 and 9, 1 defeats 9' -- so a piece placed on a9 defeats a piece placed on b9. Since the squares alternate in colour, with all the 1's on white squares and all the 9's on black squares, it follows that neither challengers nor defenders move solely along the diagonals -- since all the pieces are initially placed on the long white diagonal at the edge of the playing area.

1 wins against all other odd numbers. But since the distance between the 1 and the rightmost number increases from rank to rank, this points to a further conclusion: whatever the final alignment was, it cannot have been composed solely of adjacent squares. This is borne out by the statement '1 and 1, the challenger defeats the defendant.' All four squares with a 1 (a3, a5, a7 and a9) are separated from each other by black squares. So the alignments or captures determining defeat or victory may be based either on adjacent squares or on more distant ones. The same is true of the other 'chapters'.

The game seems to be new; at least there is nothing similar in H.J.R.Murray's comprehensive book *A History of Board Games Other Than Chess*. The whole thing is a subject of speculation. Was it played with or without dice? What was the aim of the game? Why do the challengers outnumber the defenders? Since the text is Hebrew, and numbers are determined by letters, the possibility of a written message in the sequence of numbers must be borne in mind. . . .

Another Grandmaster, Yuri Averbakh of Moscow, writes: 'I think the game is similar to alquerque. In this game, the pieces are arranged not on the squares but on the intersections of the lines.'⁷⁴ He appends his own version of the diagram, as follows:

⁷⁴ From a letter of Grandmaster Yuri Averbakh to myself (December 1991).



Drawing amended by
Grandmaster Yuri Averbakh
(Moscow)

[DIAGRAM 3]

The link between this game and Alexander is supplied by a story in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* by Lopez Garcia St Lazar.⁷⁵ The story concerns Aristotle's advice to Alexander the Great when the latter wished to find the propitious moment for starting a battle. In one of the four accounts which the author wrote, the decision was made by a calculation of 'magic' numbers, using the same set of figures -- arranged in exactly the same way -- as in the diagram I have reproduced.⁷⁶ (The device of rationalizing 'lucky' numbers was presumably considered an improvement on cutting open the entrails of a freshly slaughtered sheep and reading one's decision from these....)

It seems, then, that Ibn Yehia el Telmeini and the scholars I quoted in the same context were not alone in ascribing to Alexander an interest in board games and a belief in their relevance to warfare.

⁷⁵ It was John of Seville (Avendeth), a baptized member of the Ibn Daud family, who was responsible for the translation of the *Secretum Secretorum* and its introduction to Europe; see Cecil Roth, *The Jewish Contribution to Civilisation* (London, 1938), pp. 49-50.

⁷⁶ Compare *Jahrbuch für romanische und englische Litteratur*, vol.7 (1872), p. 375.

2 Two exegetic curiosities

- Before leaving the subject of chess and the Talmud, I should mention for completeness the following attempt to identify an allusion to the game.

L. Dukes in the journal *Ben Chananja* (1844, p. 601) quotes a passage in *Baba Batra 4a*, where it is said:

Herod is neither רֶכָּא (Recha) nor the son of a רֶכָּא (Recha).

Dukes seeks to explain this through the Persian word *rokh*, though the word is explained far more correctly as 'King'; it probably goes back to the Indo-European *raga / regere / rex*.⁷⁷

Dukes was a nineteenth-century Hungarian historian of Jewish literature. His research covered all aspects of language and literature, Bible exegesis, medieval Jewish literature, Hebrew grammar and the masoretic text, and talmudic sayings.⁷⁸

Ben Chananja was the first Hungarian Jewish learned periodical. It was published in German between the years 1844 and 1867 and was founded and edited by Leopold Löw.⁷⁹

Finally, a curiosity which derives from A. Alexandre.

In *Chess Player's Chronicle* (1849) pp. 310-11, and *Schachzeitung* (1849) pp. 12-14, Albert (Aaron) Alexandre published a letter which facetiously reads a mention of chess into the following passage from 2 Samuel 2:

1 3 And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met them by the pool of Gibeon; and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool.

1 4 And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men, I pray thee, arise and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise.

⁷⁷ Steinschneider, p. 158.

⁷⁸ See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, pp. 266-7.

⁷⁹ See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 4, p. 474.

1 5 Then they arose and went over by number; twelve for Benjamin, and for Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David.

1 6 And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together: wherefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is in Gibeon.

1 7 And the battle was very sore that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.

(The biblical reference is given incorrectly in Steinschneider, p. 158.)

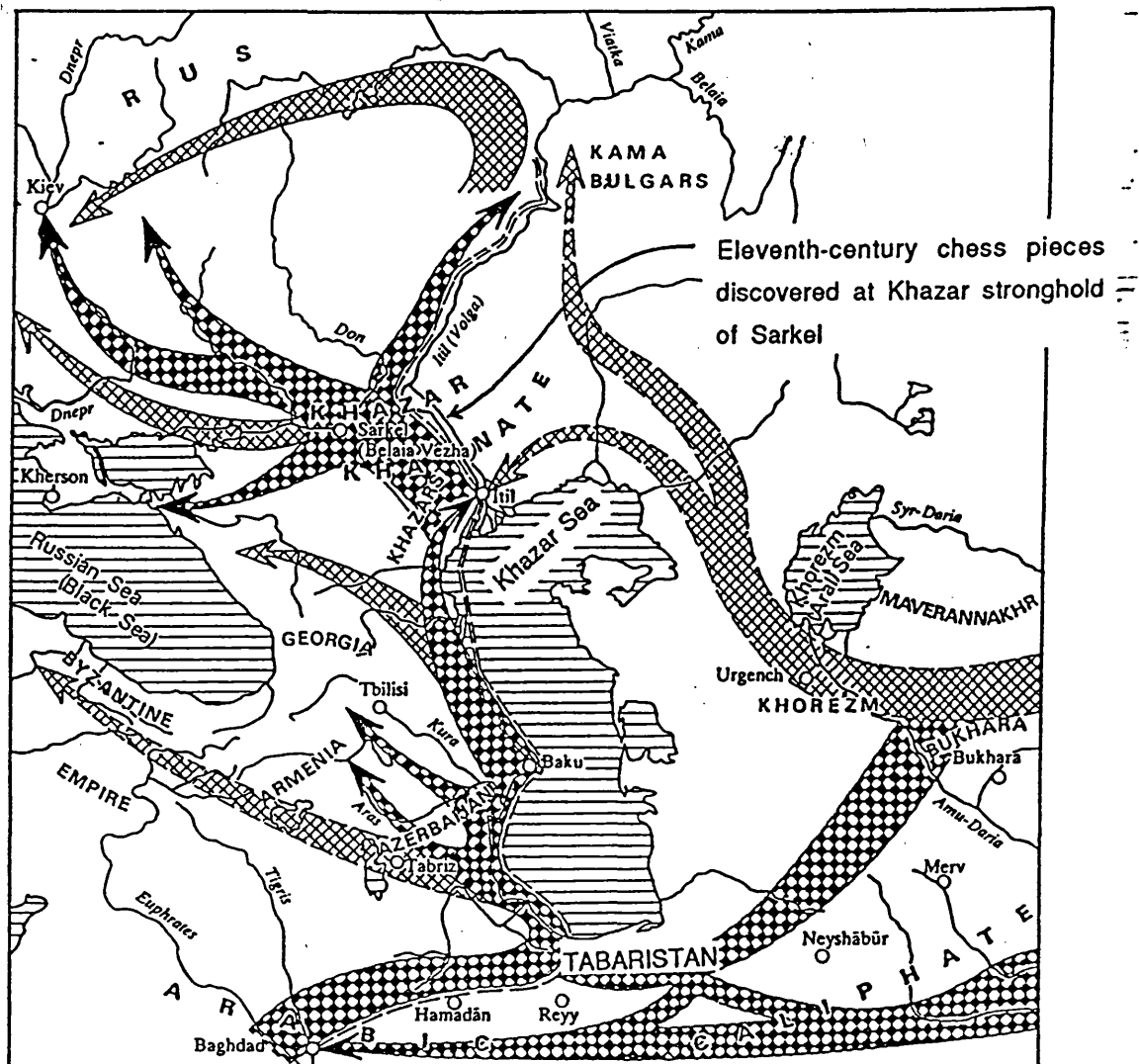
Alexandre (c. 1766 - 1850) was a distinguished Jewish scholar, and one of the most respected authors on the subject of chess and chess history; he was the author of *Encyclopédie des échecs* (Paris, 1837). In *Chess Player's Chronicle* he entered into an academic correspondence in which various scholars argued about the history and origins of chess. Alexandre put forward the notion that the passage in Samuel contained the origins of the game.

Alexandre is of course joking, but legends ascribing the invention of chess to such figures as Moses and King Solomon have recurred persistently in the literature of the game. For some examples, see below, pp. 131, 158.

H I S T O R I Æ
S H A H I L U D I I,
P A R S II^{da},
Q U Æ E S T H E B R A I C A ;
S E U
T R I A S J U D Æ O R U M
D E L U D O
S C A C H O R U M.

Y

Title page of the Hebrew section of Thomas
Hyde's *Mandragorias, seu Historia*
Shāhiludii, in *Syntagma Dissertationum*
(1767)



Assumed routes by which chess spread from Central Asia and Persia in the 8th and 9th centuries.



In part supported by archeological finds.

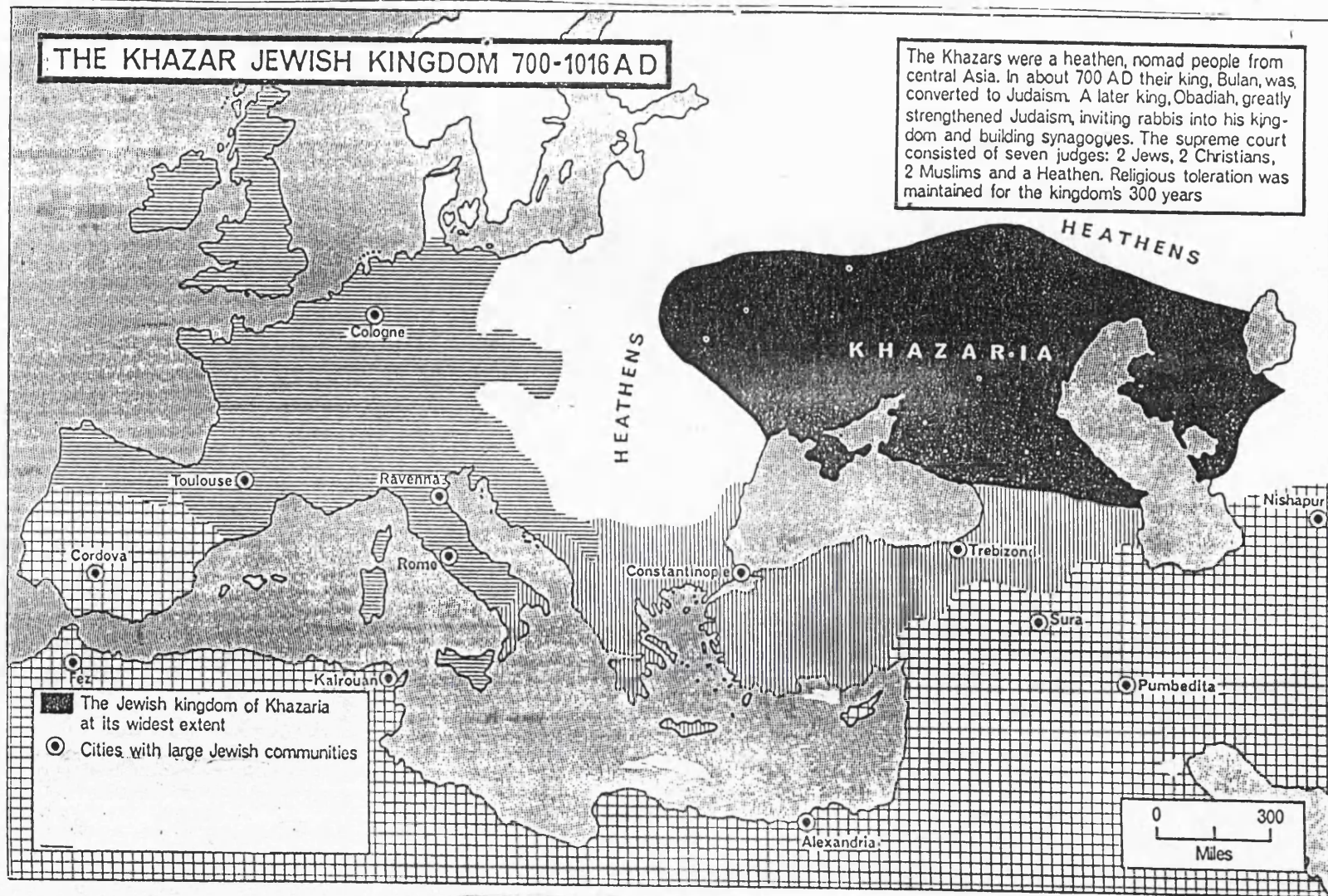


Unsupported by archeological finds.



The Arabic trade route to Eastern Europe in the 8th and 9th centuries.

See above, pp. 43-4
and below, pp. 66-7



The Khazar Khanate at the time of the correspondence between Hasdai Ibn Shaprut and Khagan Joseph (see pp. 67-8 below)

Chapter 3

THE JEWISH 'GOLDEN AGE': CHESS IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN

Arab and Jew

From Persia, the game of chess travelled throughout the Mohammedan Empire. It was the Muslims who introduced chess to Europe in the wake of the invasion of Spain in the eighth century.¹ Of the interest which the game aroused, a well-known social historian has written:

Among the games with which people diverted themselves in Moslem Spain in their free time, such as backgammon and checkers, chess was the most popular. For the people of those generations it had symbolic significance, since it reflected the struggle on the battlefield and, moreover, called for a keen mind. In this way, chess was a simulated war on a higher level. It was played a lot especially in the epoch of the 'provincial kings'. Abu Dja'far Ahmad b. Abbas, the foe of Samuel the Nagid, was an enthusiastic chess player, and the Cordovan poet Abu 'Umar Yusuf b. Harun ar-Ramadi composed a long *kasida* about chess. Even the crowned rulers of Spain delighted in the game. Kings and nobles had chessmen that were works of art; there were, for example, some that were gilded or made of ivory.²

¹ See e.g. Murray, pp. 405-10; Eales, pp. 39-43.

² Quoted from Eliahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain* (Philadelphia, 1984), vol. 3, pp. 59, 156-8. Ashtor refers to Ibn'Abdun, p. 243, lines 10-11, and Levi-Provencal, *Seville musulmane*, p. 118 (on the general popularity of chess); Dhakhira, 1, 2, p. 177 (on Abu Dja'far Ahmad b. Abbas etc.); F.M.Pareja Casanas, *Libro de ajedrez* (Madrid, 1935), vol. 1, p. lxxix (for Abu 'Umar Yusuf b. Harun ar-Ramadi); and J.Ferrandis Torres, *Marfiles y azabaches españoles*, pp. 92-3 (on ornate chessmen).

In the same place, Ashtor recounts a 'famous tale' from the second half of the eleventh century: the Vizier of Seville played chess against the king of Castile on the understanding that if the latter won he would receive the Vizier's beautiful chessboard, while if he lost he would renounce conquests in Seville. The Vizier won, and the king kept his word. See *Al-Marrakushi*, pp. 73-4, and the French paraphrase in Dozy, *Recherches*, vol. 3, pp. 102-4.

The same writer records that 'the game of chess and the splendour of the chessmen also spread in Christian Spain in the eleventh century, for in the wills of Christian princes they are described as if they were precious treasures.'³

In Italy chess was known in the same period, having probably arrived there by an independent route, from the East through Byzantium. In the twelfth century, chess arrived in France, Germany and England, and by 1200 it had become a favourite gambling game throughout Europe -- to such an extent that it was explicitly prohibited by the council of Paris⁴ in 1212, and afterwards by Louis IX.

The spread of knowledge about chess from the Muslim to the Christian world was merely a minor aspect of a broad cultural phenomenon:

It is a paradoxical but well established fact that even in the period of the crusades more new learning came to the west from the Moslem 'enemy' than through eastern Christian civilisation. This was true not only of science and mathematics but also of classical literature. The Aristotelian texts which were to revolutionise European philosophy were first translated into Latin in the twelfth century from Arabic, and the main translating centres were in areas of cultural co-existence: Spain and Sicily, and to a lesser extent the Latin states founded in Palestine by the crusaders.⁵

To understand the role of the Jews in the dissemination of chess and its literature, we need to summarize the political context in which Spanish Jewry at that time lived and worked.

Subjected to a policy of systematic anti-semitism under the visigoth kings, the Jews in Spain welcomed the Arab invaders. To the 'literate and industrious Jewish communities who provided them with reliable tax incomes and served them in innumerable ways',⁶ the Arabs provided some safeguard against persecution; many Jews became traders throughout the Arab world. We shall see particular significance in the fact that the Jews of the Arabic countries soon acquired the Arabic language, akin in many roots and formations to the Hebrew which was more or less

³ Ashtor, loc. cit., referring to Tassilo von der Lasa, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur des Schachspiels: Forschungen* (Leipzig, 1897), pp. 29ff.

⁴ *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, p. 18.

⁵ Eales, p. 42.

⁶ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (London, 1987), p. 175.

familiar to them.⁷

The enthusiasm which the Arabs displayed for their language and poetry, and the care which they took to render their literature pure, symmetric and melodious, influenced their Jewish neighbours and taught them to purify their own language. Abraham Ibn Ezra and Jehudah Halevi were both examples of this.⁸

What is known as the Jewish Golden Age of civilization corresponds, indeed, to the Mohammedan Golden Age and the period of the Islamic Empire in Spain. In the pursuit of our specialized theme, we shall encounter some of the very numerous Jewish philosophers, physicians, talmudists and poets who flourished in the Andalusian kingdoms of Granada, Toledo and Córdoba -- the most successful area of Jewish settlement in the eighth to eleventh centuries.

The Omayyid caliphs who ruled Spain from 756 to 1031 are known to have treated the Jews with dignity and respect. Of the long succession of Jews who attained distinction in the service of Spanish rulers, the first on whom we possess information is Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (926-75), court physician to Abd al-Rahman II of Córdoba (912-61). Ibn Shaprut was an accomplished diplomat whose knowledge of Latin -- unusual in his milieu -- enabled him to negotiate successfully with the Christian princes of northern Spain and with the Christian emperors of East and West. He typifies the physicians whom Muslim rulers additionally trusted with political duties; finally he became Vizier of the realm.⁹

⁷ See H. Graetz, *Popular History of the Jews*, translated by A.B. Rhine (6 vols), 4th ed. (New York, 1930), vol. 4, p. 20.

Steinschneider (referring to *Journal of the German Oriental Society*, vol. 24, 1870, pp. 356 ff) mentions an assertion by Ibn Ezra that a Jew was sent to India and served as an interpreter under one of the first Abbasids (Almansor?). Steinschneider comments that if this report is based on fact, the same Jew could also have been indirectly involved in the transplantation of the game of chess.

⁸ Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 4, pp. 20-21.

⁹ In the late 940s, when a manuscript of the pharmaceutical work of Dioscorides was brought to Córdoba from Byzantium, Ibn Shaprut was a member of the group which translated it from Greek into Arabic. He was appointed leader of the Jewish population in Muslim Spain. Information on Ibn Shaprut (whom we shall encounter again; see below, pp. 67-8) is in Filosseno Luzzatto, *Notice sur Abou-lousof Hasdai Ibn-Schaprouit* (1852); and Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 3, p. 106.

Similar distinction was attained by Samuel Ibn Naghrella (993-1056), Hebrew poet, talmudist and master of Arabic, who became Vizier of the King of Granada;¹⁰ and by his son and successor Joseph Ibn Naghrella, who was responsible for the construction of the Alhambra Palace. As a munificent patron of scholarship, Samuel became the protector of the poet and philosopher Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021-69), some of whose philosophical works were written in Arabic and translated into Latin.

The lives of tens of thousands of Jews were disrupted when the tolerance of the Omayyid dynasty gave way to the Muslim fundamentalism of its successors: the Almoravides (*Al-Murabitun*) whose rule began in 1090, and the still more bigoted and violent Almohades (*Al-Muwahiddun*), the sect of Moroccan origin founded by Muhammid Ibn Tumard (d. 1130), who claimed the role of the Mahdi (the one led by God). Gaining power in Spain in 1145, the Almohades aspired to restore by force the pure faith of Islam. They displayed constant insecurity in the face of inquiry and knowledge, and demanded immediate conversion to Islam of both Christian and Jewish minorities. To this end they initiated investigations and inquisitions, and the few native Christian communities disappeared.¹¹

The Christian conquests in Andalusia in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were initially assisted by Jews who had suffered from the fanaticism of the Almohades; the Jews were repaid for this by the confidence of the Christian kings.¹² Subsequently, in the increasing tension between Arab and Christian, the Jews appear to have endeavoured to distance themselves from the conflict. In general,

The Jews took no part in the unceasing struggle for power between the Christian monarchs and the Saracen chieftains. Their utility as peaceable

¹⁰ Ibn Naghrella also held the position of *Nagid* or Prince of the Jewish community of Granada. He had a trade background, though he first attracted the attention of his ruler by his literary skills. See Ashtor, vol. 3, p. 80, and Rafael Loewe, *Ibn Gabirol* (London, 1989), p. 83.

¹¹ Among the Jews who fled Andalusia were Abraham Ibn Ezra (see below, pp. 56ff.) and the family of Maimonides (see below, p. 68).

¹² Thus for example, 'In an expedition against Moslem Seville, which Alphonso [X] led whilst still only Crown Prince, Jewish soldiers participated in the fighting. As a gesture of gratitude, Alphonso assigned to his Jewish soldiers a separate village called Aldea de los Judios.' See Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 3, p. 351. Compare also *The History of Jews in Spain* (1847). For Alphonso's relevance to our theme, see below, pp. 87ff.

subjects, their talents and industry were acknowledged by all, and made useful to both Christian and Mohammedan governments.¹³

Just as among the Muslims, it became the custom among Christian rulers to entrust governmental positions to Jews. The latter, indeed, represented a superior culture to that of the Spanish; it was they who played the principal role in bringing the achievements of Islamic civilization to Catholic Spain.

Moses Cohen: *Disciplina Clericalis*

The work of Moses Cohen (known also as Moses Sefardi) exemplifies the mediating role of the Jews in the transfer of knowledge and culture, while offering an indication of how the spread of chess was furthered by this process.¹⁴

Moses Cohen (born c. 1062 in Huesca) was physician to the Christian King Alphonso VI of Galicia, Asturias, Leon and Castile.¹⁵ Of the latter, we should recall that in order to further his ambitions which led to the conquest of Toledo in 1085, he had needed the services of Jewish diplomatists to secure the neutrality (or where possible, the assistance) of the Arab kings not directly involved in the conflict. Moses Cohen was a beneficiary of the liberties which the king granted to the Jews in return for these services. He received a traditional Jewish education, but at the age of 44 he was baptized in the Cathedral of his native city in 1106 on St Peter's day. In honour of the saint and his godfather the king, he took the name of Petrus Alphonsi.¹⁶ Once converted to Christianity, he was able to further himself within the aristocratic and even the church hierarchy.

¹³ E.H.Lindo, *The History of the Jews of Spain and Portugal* [1st ed. 1848], quoted from the reprint (New York, 1970), p. 49.

¹⁴ Biographical material on Moses Cohen is in Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 3. See also *Legacy of Israel*, pp. 208-9.

¹⁵ Murray (pp. 203, 407) mentions an anecdote (1224) from the Arabic writer al-Marrakoshi, describing Alfonso VI playing chess against b. Ammar in about 1078.

¹⁶ Graetz, loc cit. Graetz adds: 'Even as a Christian he used or rather misused his education in a polemic against Judaism.'

Petrus Alphonsi is quoted in the chess sermon of Jacobus de Cessolis, mentioned on p. 88 below. Compare Murray, p. 541.

From our own viewpoint, Moses Cohen is notable for providing one of the earliest known references to chess by a European. This occurs in his translation of *Disciplina Clericalis*. The following extract is the allegory of the chess game which was to be incorporated into the *Gesta Romanorum*:

The queen is our soul, which can never learn to wage war abroad, but is driven to do good works from within the body. For our soul, that is reason, should direct our body, like the rider his horse, towards virtue, and teach the body not to go beyond the bounds of the church's teachings. It must proceed from the square of one virtue to that of another. So too must the queen go forwards on the chess board for a long period and not jump, but remain within the bounds fixed for it. Dyna, the daughter of Jacob, preserved her maidenhood so long as she kept quietly within her brother's house, but as soon as she, driven by curiosity, took herself off to foreign parts, she was dishonoured herself.¹⁷

Later in the same work, chess is mentioned as one of the seven accomplishments or *probitates* of the nobility (as opposed to the clergy) -- the skills expected of a knight:

The skills that one must be acquainted with are as follows: Riding, swimming, archery, boxing, hawking, chess and verse writing.¹⁸

The *Disciplina Clericalis* has been described as the channel by which many Eastern folk-tales passed to the West.¹⁹ The transmission of traditional oriental literature through the agency of Jewish translators is a theme to which we shall return²⁰ in connection with their patron Alphonso 'The Wise'.

¹⁷ *Disciplina Clericalis*, chapter 4, section 8. I quote from the translation by P.R.Quarrie (London and Henley, 1977), which is based on the German edition by Eberhard Hermes (1970). Compare *Legacy of Israel*, p. 209.

¹⁸ *Disciplina Clericalis* (Paris, 1824), p. 42. (*Probitates vero haec sunt: equitare, natare, sagittare, cestibus certare, acupare, scacis ludere, versificari.*) See also Murray, pp. 407-8.

¹⁹ *Legacy of Israel*, p. 209, where it is noted that some of the stories in the *Disciplina Clericalis* are printed at the end of Caxton's English *Aesop* of 1483.

²⁰ See below, pp. 91-2.

Judah Halevi: *Ha Kuzari*

When Moses Cohen used the game of chess as an allegory of the human faculties, he was pursuing a Christian didactic purpose. In *Ha Kuzari* (c. 1100), Judah Halevi uses a similar chess allegory in the course of his apologia for the Jewish religion.

Judah Halevi (1075-1141) was born in Toledo.²¹ He studied algebra, grammar, Arabic, astronomy, mathematics and poetry, and eventually chose to be a physician. For extended talmudic studies, he went to the famous *yeshiva* in Lucena in southern Spain. I shall have more to say later about the city of Lucena, in connection with the chess writer whose name was derived from it;²² it was reported to have been founded by Jews, and indeed was called "Jews' Town" . . .

Halevi wrote eight hundred known poems, including the famous group known as 'Poems of Zion' and three hundred and fifty liturgical verses; he 'abandoned himself completely to his muse . . . ; and to an extent Halevi may be said to have taken on the role of the wandering poet.'²³ His own words eloquently describe his fundamental sentiment:

לְבִי בְּמִזְרָח

לְבִי בְּמִזְרָח, וְאֲנִי בְּסוֹף מַעֲרָב –

MY HEART IS IN THE EAST

My heart is in the East and I am at the edge of the West

The book *Ha Kuzari* seeks to establish Judaism as a religion that stands up to rigid questioning and challenge. As a framework for its philosophical argument, it narrates the historical episode of the conversion of a large proportion of the Khazar people in 740 AD. It is worth dwelling a little on this episode and its implications, since they happen to have independent relevance to the theme of chess history.

Established at the end of the seventh century AD in the North Caucasus and lower Volga region, the Khanate of the Khazars has

²¹ The dates are those given by Paul Johnson, p. 197, though they are subject to some disagreement.

²² See below, p. 101.

²³ Max I. Dimont, *Jews, God and History* (New York, 1962), p. 197.

been described as a kind of buffer-state between Islam and the Byzantine Empire.²⁴ (Its influence as a political power was to last until the middle of the tenth century.) The Khanate became the focal point of trade between the Arab Empire and the north; the trade of the Khazars came notably from Babylon, Baghdad and other parts of the Mesopotamian area.

In earlier times, the nomadic Khazar tribe had practised a form of Altaic shamanism, but by the middle of the eighth century they began to become settled and affluent enough to decide upon the choice of a civilizing religion. As recounted by Halevi, the Khagan (King) Bulan listened to a Mohammedan and a Christian arguing for their respective faiths. His interest was aroused when both referred to Judaism as the father of religion. Bulan thereupon sent for a Jewish scholar who expounded his philosophy and prevailed on the Khagan to adopt the Jewish religion for his people.

The implications were political as well as religious. To embrace Christianity would have been to defer to the supreme authority of the Byzantine Emperor, while conversion to Islam would have shown preference for the Persian Caliph. Judaism was politically neutral, at a time when the state of 'cold war' between Muslim and Christian meant that 'there was as good as no direct commercial intercourse between Moslem and Christian worlds. What trade there was lay in the hands of Jewish merchants. They could trade freely in both areas of civilization.'²⁵

²⁴ See *The Legacy of Islam*, edited by Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume (Oxford, 1931), pp. 100-2 (p. 100 quoted). Further information is from D.M.Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars* [1954], paperback ed. (1976), which includes an extensive bibliography. Of the wars between the Khazars and the Arabs, Dunlop writes: 'on the line of the Caucasus the Arabs met the forces of an organized military power which effectively prevented them from extending their conquests in this direction. . . . but for the existence of the Khazars in the region north of the Caucasus, Byzantium, the bulwark of European civilization in the east, would have found itself outflanked by the Arabs, and the history of Christendom and Islam might well have been very different from what we know.' This is quoted in Arthur Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and its Heritage* (London, 1976), p. 72. As the epigraph to Part 1 of this book, Koestler quotes Muqadassi, *Descriptio Imperii Moslemici* (tenth century): 'In Khazaria, sheep, honey, and Jews exist in large quantities.'

²⁵ Baron, *Social and Religious History*, vol. 3, p. 221. In the same place Baron refers to the political and economic pressures on Jews in the Byzantine Empire, leading to the migration of Jewish refugees who furthered the 'conversion' of Khazaria. See also p. 197 for the role of Jewish immigrants from the region around Khiva and other parts of the

It was through Khazar territory that all trade had to pass to the town of Kiev and to the northern part of present-day Russia. This commercial activity is of interest for its role in the spread of chess, a role indicated by the discovery of early eleventh-century chess pieces at Belaya Vezha, the site of the Khazar fortress of Sarkel.²⁶

Much importance has been attached to these archaeological findings by supporters of the hypothesis that chess spread from Persia to northern Russia via the Volga trade route during the period of dominance of the Khazar Khanate. The hypothesis draws further support from the Muslim-style chess pieces unearthed near Novgorod, authenticated by the discoveries of large quantities of Mohammedan coins from the same period.²⁷ The evidence from archaeology has been taken to confirm the view advanced by the first Russian chess historians, M.K.Gonayev and I.T.Savenkov, who used an analysis of Old Russian chess terminology and general historical data to deduce the role of the Khazars in transmitting chess to Russia.²⁸

The story of the conversion of the Khazars might well be dismissed as a fabrication if it were not so well authenticated. The story of how these same events became known in Muslim Spain is no less remarkable -- the occasion being the famous exchange of letters in Hebrew between Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, statesman of the Caliphate of Córdoba (who had learned of the existence of a Jewish kingdom and inquired about its arrangements with sympathetic curiosity) and the Khazar Khagan Joseph, whose reply to Hasdai included the details of the conversion under Khagan Bulan.²⁹ (As a result of this exchange,

Muslim empire.

²⁶ See I.Linder, *Chess in Old Russia*, translated by Martin P. Rice (Zürich, 1979), pp. 48-9; M.I.Artamonov, *Istoriya Khazar* (1962); and B.A.Rybakov in *Sovietskaya Arkheologiya*, 18 (1953), 128-50.

²⁷ *Legacy of Islam*, p. 100.

²⁸ However, a more sceptical view of this hypothesis is given by Eales, pp. 47-8.

²⁹ The manuscript of Ibn Shaprut's letter (dated in the period 953-61) can be seen in the library of Christ Church, Oxford (Ms 193 p. 12). For how the letter was transmitted to the Khagan, see e.g. Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 3, pp. 106-9, and *Encyclopedia Judaica*, pp. 950-1; compare Artamonov, and Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe*, p. 72.

Joseph's reply exists in a Long Version and a Short Version. The latter is in the

which occurred about 960 AD, some trade developed between the Khazar Empire and the Muslim south of Spain.)

Thus it was that the history of the Khazars became available to Judah Halevi for the purposes of his philosophical book which sets forth the tenets of the Jewish faith. *Ha Kuzari* contains a chapter entitled 'The Realm of Man', which examines the characteristics and inclinations of mankind; and it is here that an analogy with the game of chess expresses man's ability to control his emotions and desires:

ספר מאמר חמישי הבוורי 108

הענין שירצה, כי הוא מושל בסבותיו האמצעיות. ועל כן לא יתכן שינצח החלש את החזק בשחוק האשקאק"ש הנקראת שטרו"ג בערבי, ולא יאמר הצלחה יריג מול אשרשי"ר ובמלחמת "האשקאק"ש (נ"ל במלחמת האשטרו"ג) כאשר יאמר במלחמת שני מלכים גלמים, כי סבות "האשרשי"ר ובמלחמת השטרו"ג (נ"ל מלחמת השטרי"ג נמצאות כלם, וינצח החכם בהנהגתו תמיד, ולא יירא סבה טבעית שצריך להתגבר בה ולא סבה מקרית, אלא בעת נכרי מהמת התעלמות, וההתעלמות נכנס בסכרית כאשר אמרנו. ועם כל זה הכל מיוחס אל הסבה הראשונה בדרכים הנזכרים. אך אל הכונה הראשונה, בהדושי בני ישראל כל ימי היות השכינה בתוכם, אבל אחר כן הענין מסופק אלא בלבות המאמינים, האם ההדושים האלה בכונה ראשונה מן האלהים או בסבות גלגלים או מקרים. ואין טענה פוסקת, אך הטוב שיורה הכל אליו יתברך, כל שכן הדברים הגדולים כמות והנצח והמלחמות וההצלחה וההכרון והדומה לזה:

אמר

אוצר נחמד

פסולטיו כיד יעס כחזק לו לכות נמשך כטות, או כחזק לו וכטותיו נטות, טמן סכמות תלויות נחשבתו ולגרו: ההלש את החזק. מי שדיעקו תלויה כחזק כזה את מי שדיעקו חזק: האשקאק"ש. נ"ל שאל לאני"ל: כי סבות מלחמת השטרו"ג נמצאות. זה כיודע יורה לחזק כידו כלית סכנים כיד יעס, והוא נונה לו סבות המלחמות מה שאלו כעמדו יודע ומכין אותם עד שכלד כיד מכין לחזק כשף כטות: שצריך להנהגות בה. שגמר שכל יומן לו זלם ככנס יולה, מלחמ סכל כידו, וכשאל שאל למקד מטא כזה: אלא בעת נכרי וס'. מלד לפעמים מעטות מיכס זכ כהכס לו לנו כל עמו לשון מערכת כמותו כהון, וזה נכנס תחת ככלות

Christ Church library. The Long Version (supposed to date from the 13th century) was published by A.Harkavy in 1874, from a manuscript of the Second Firkovich Collection in the St Petersburg Public Library.

The two letters were published by Buxtorf, in his edition of the book *Cosri* [viz. Halevi's *Ha-Kuzari*] (1660).

He is master over his intermediary causes. For a similar reason it is unlikely that the weak chess player should beat the strong one. One cannot speak of good or bad fortune in a game of chess, as in a war between two princes. For the causes of the game are open completely to study, and the expert will always be the conquerer. He need fear nothing in the ordinary way which can cause him great difficulty, neither need he fear anything accidental, except perhaps anything unusual arising from inattention.³⁰

We note that the word used for chess is האשפז"ש, of which the implications were discussed in our previous chapter.

Halevi's reference to the game provides further demonstration that the Jews in Spain were familiar with chess by the eleventh to the twelfth century. We shall now turn to a text that offers a detailed description of the game itself.

³⁰ The Hebrew text is quoted from the edition by Yehudah Even Samuel, Tel-Aviv 1972. The translation is quoted from *The Kuzari*, ed. Schocken Books (1962), p. 289.

Abraham Ibn Ezra: *Verses on the Game of Chess*

The poem on chess by Abraham Ibn Ezra which I shall now examine is one of the landmarks of medieval chess literature. A complete English translation of the poem is presented below.

Renowned for his talmudic learning, the widely travelled Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) possessed an immensely versatile mind. In addition to his accomplishments as poet, philosopher, exegete and grammarian (with a complete knowledge of Greek and Arabic), he distinguished himself as a physician, arithmetician -- who 'could easily turn from mathematics to symbolism of numbers and letters'³¹ -- and astronomer. I have earlier noted the tendency of these activities to be accompanied by an interest in chess.

The political disruption brought about by the Almohades forced Ibn Ezra to leave his native Toledo; in the subsequent years spent travelling from town to town struggling to earn a living, he embodied the proverbial impecunious student. A poem entitled 'Out of Luck' testifies poignantly to his lot:

בְּלִי מָזַל

א

גָּלְגַל וּמְזֻלֹת בְּמַעְמָדָם
נָטוּ בְּמַהֲלָכָם לְמוֹלְדָתִי:
לֹא יִהְיוּ גְרוֹת סְחוּרָתִי –
לֹא יִחַשְׁשׁוּ שְׂמִי עַדִּי מוֹתִי!

ב

אֵינֶנּוּ לְהַצְלִיחַ וְלֹא אוֹכֵל,
כִּי עֲנוּתוֹנִי כּוֹכְבִּי שְׁמִי:
לֹא אֶהְיֶה סוֹחֵר בְּתַכְרִיכִין –
לֹא יִגְוַעוּן אִישִׁים בְּכָל יְמִי!

³¹ See Baron, *Social and Religious History*, vol. 8. For further biographical material, see *Abraham Ibn Ezra y su tiempo: Actas del Simposio Internacional: Madrid, Tudela, Toledo. 1-8 febrero 1989*, edited by Fernando Diaz Esteban (Madrid, 1990).

The heavenly sphere and the constellation
Strayed from their path when I
was born. If my business were in candles,
the sun would not set until I died!

However I struggle, I cannot succeed,
for my stars have ruined me: If I were
a dealer in shrouds, no one would die
as long as I lived.³²

Turning to the poem on chess, we should note the main facts of the textual history, since they have a bearing on my argument. The poem was first printed in 1694 in Hyde's *De Ludis Orientalibus*, on the basis of a sixteenth-century manuscript. Since Hyde's time, three earlier manuscripts have come to light,³³ the oldest dating from 1450. The manuscripts give the Hebrew text without vowels. Hyde added the *nekudot* for easier comprehension;³⁴ Steinschneider later held this to be inadvisable (in some places alternative readings were plausible), and he dispensed with the 'pointing' in his own reprint. The various editions subsequent to Hyde were listed in our opening chapter.

To facilitate discussion of the chess content of the poem, I have kept the translation as literal as seemed feasible, and have maintained a line-by-line correspondence with the original.³⁵

³² *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, edited and translated by T. Carmi (London, 1981), p. 353.

³³ See Murray, p. 509.

³⁴ See above, p. 12.

³⁵ The only complete English translation offered earlier and based directly on the Hebrew text is by Nina Davis, in *Songs of Exile* (Philadelphia, 1901), pp. 129-31. It makes considerable use of poetic licence.

VERSES ON THE GAME OF CHESS³⁶ BY RABBI ABRAHAM IBN EZRA

I will relate in song of a battle arranged
of old created in antiquity.
It was arranged by people of understanding and intellect
who fixed it upon eight rows
and on each row is engraved 5
upon a tablet eight divisions.
The rows are square following one another
and there are two camps standing opposite one another.
The kings stand together with their armies
to fight and the battle is between the two of them. 1 0
The faces of each is ready for the fight
and they constantly travel [move] and stop [encamp]
but they do not draw swords in battle,
their battle is a battle of thoughts.
and they can be recognised 1 5
by marked and sealed tokens on their bodies.
Men who see them when they are excited
would think they were Edomites and Ethiopians.
And the Ethiopians have stretched forth their hands in battle,
the Edomites pursue them. 2 0
The foot soldiers come first
to fight on the battle field
ever marching straight before him
but to capture moves sideways.
He does not stray from his path 2 5
nor does he move [step] backwards.
(At the begining he may leap
anywhere witin three squares [chequers])
Should he advance his steps
to the eighth row 3 0
like fers then in any direction he can return
and his battle then is like the battle of the other.
And the fers turns its step
and it can step now to its four sides.
And the elephant now comes closer to the battle line 3 5

³⁶ Murray (p. 447) notes that 'there is no distinctive Hebrew name for chess; the Jews generally transliterated the ordinary name in the country where they were writing. Thus we have in Abraham Ibn Ezra *shahmat*; in Catalanian works, *isqaqis*, *isqas*, *isqaqs* from the Cat. *scachs*; in Italian works, *sqaqi*, *sqaqire*, *isqaqi*, *hisqaqi*, *shakh* from It. *scacchi*, *scacchiere*; and in a Polish work *tshekh* from Pol. *szach*.'

and he stands upon the side as if in ambush.
He walks like the fers but over him
has an advantage, he can go in three places.
Then the horse in battle his feet are quite swift
and he walks upon a road which is not quite straight. 4 0
Curved are his ways.
In the square it has three borders.
The rook goes in a straight line [roadway].
Upon the battlefield he walks along its whole breadth and its length.
He does not look for crooked ways, 4 5
his path is without any perversity or obliquity.
The king goes [walks] on all sides
in all directions and he helps his subjects
and he is also careful whilst he settles down
or when he goes out to fight and wherever he rests 5 0
and if his enemy comes upon him with threats
and he hits at him, then he runs away from his spot
And if the rook threatens him,
[and follows him from room to room]
and there are also times when he ran away [from it] 5 5
and times when his fighters will crown him
and one will kill the other
with great anger [fury]
And the heroes of both sides
without any shedding of blood. 6 0
And there are times when the Ethiopians vanquish
and then the Edomites are stronger
and the Ethiopians and their king in battle become weakened.
And should the king be caught in their net 6 5
without any mercy they will treat him
Once he is caught in their net there is no way of escape, no mercy
[salvation]
you cannot run away to any refuge town
as he wil be judged by the enemy and wiped out,
there is no salvation and they will put him to death 7 0
And his army would kill them all for his sake
and their own life would they give to redeem him.
And their glory once it is gone, they are no longer
in power once their Lord has been defeated.
They will continue to fight another time 7 5
and their casualties can be revived -- for in death is resurrection.

Clearly the poem describes the Arab or old European form of chess, which had existed essentially unchanged since the earliest recorded history of the game. This version of chess was to endure until the turn of the sixteenth century, as we shall see in the final sections of this chapter.³⁷ The following synopsis highlights the main characteristics of medieval chess.

The chessmen are coloured black and red, and it is the black army that starts the game (lines 18-19).

The foot soldier (| גְּבוּר), or pawn (lines 21-30), advances in a straight line; but in order to make a capture, he 'turns aside', i.e. moves forward diagonally. When he reaches the far side of the battlefield, he acquires the status of the *fers*, who figures in lines 33-4.

The *fers*, or counsellor, is the forerunner of the modern queen, but has far less mobility; he moves diagonally one square at a time. Imported from Arabic, the word (| פֶּרַח) was a source of confusion to copyists and translators, some of whom associated it with *al-faras* (horseman, knight) rather than *al-firzan*.³⁸ (The term *fers* was taken over into English and is found in Chaucer.)

The elephant (| הַפִּיל) moves diagonally like the *fers*, but always two squares at once, i.e. he jumps to the third square from the point of departure (lines 35-8). This is the ancestor of the piece which today in English is called the bishop.³⁹

The horse (| הַסּוּס) moves three squares along a 'crooked path', i.e. two squares in a straight line and one at right-angles (see lines 39-42). This is identical with the knight's move in modern chess.

The piece designated as | הַרְוּחַ (lines 43-6) moves in straight lines across the whole length and breadth of the battlefield -- just as the rook moves in the modern game. The name of this piece is equivalent to the Spanish *roque* and the Persian *rukḥ*; 'this word was in use among the Muslims in Spain for a chariot, and the idea of a chariot seems to explain at once the straight move and devastating power of the rook.'⁴⁰

³⁷ See especially the section on Lucena (pp. 100ff. below).

³⁸ Compare Steinschneider, p. 165, note 12.

³⁹ This passage, however, is difficult, and Steinschneider (p. 165) considers it may be corrupt. As Murray (p. 510) observes, there is an anomaly in the suggestion that the elephant was a stronger piece than the *fers*; the opposite was actually the case.

In a note appended to line 36, Van der Linde states that the expression 'ambusher' seems to have been common in the middle ages to denote the bishop.

The king (המלך) also moves like his modern counterpart -- one square in any direction (lines 47-8). There is, however, no hint of any special move resembling modern castling.

Thus far, the moves of the chessmen described in the poem conform to the usual view of the medieval game. Yet there is one seeming anachronism: returning to lines 27-8, we find that the foot soldier appears to have the option of advancing two spaces on his first move. It is generally thought that the pawn's double move, an important step in the evolution of the rules of chess, was not introduced until considerably later.⁴¹

However, in the manuscripts discovered since Hyde, the lines now numbered 27-8 do not refer to the pawn at all, but are placed elsewhere. They come immediately after what is now line 34, i.e. they follow the description of the move of the *fers*. In that place they would indeed make sense; they would indicate a privilege of the *fers* not otherwise mentioned in the poem, namely his power of jumping two spaces in any direction on his first move.⁴²

On the other hand, lines 27-8 may be correctly placed. Before standardization was achieved by printing, minor local variations in the rules were possible, hence a double pawn move may in fact have been known to Ibn Ezra. In this case we may suppose that the copyist of the 1450 manuscript transferred the pair of lines to comply with the movements of the chess pieces as he knew them.⁴³

Scholars at various times have queried the authorship of certain poems traditionally attributed to Ibn Ezra. Given the diverse and prolific nature of his work,⁴⁴ some such doubts are only to be expected -- and have occasionally proved justified. In the case before us, the seeming anachronism of the double pawn move has

⁴⁰ *Legacy of Islam*, p. 32.

⁴¹ According to Murray (p. 459), this modification of the rules was in process of adoption at the time of the Alphonso manuscript (c.1280).

⁴² Compare Murray, pp. 509-10.

⁴³ It is almost inevitable that in a manuscript transcribed several times, copying errors should have crept in. The various editions and translations of the text were painstakingly compared and criticized by Steinschneider (pp. 164-7, 195-7).

⁴⁴ 'He used poetry for whatever purpose he wished. . . . Thus he composed poems about chess and dice games, the conflict between winter and summer and wine, *shabbat* and festive days. . . .' See *Abraham Ibn Ezra y su tiempo*, pp. 358-9.

But the corpses return after their death
And strike their enemies dead.
I will sing of the repose and the movement
Of each one, wherever they are.
The king and the *Shegal* at his side
And the elephants [*pillim*] and horses next to
them
And [you also have] two chariots
And [warriors] in front of them...
And the king [and likewise] the *Shegal*
And their steps [are not very different].
The elephants move in steps of three
And the horses towards their four corners . . .

In the Hebrew original, the fourteen distichs are in the *redschez* metre, with the same rhyme throughout -- after the fashion of the Arabic *kassida*. The queen is called *shegal* (שגל), and the rooks are designated as chariots (מרכבות). The pawns are 'warriors' or 'heroes' (גבורים), a term which we shall find again in the chess poem by Bonsenior Ibn Yechia.

The other chess pieces are denoted by the same words in both the poems I have quoted. In both cases, the general word for the pieces is *pegarim* (פגרים) -- literally 'bodies' or 'corpses', and in both cases it is said that the bodies will return to life. The nature of the contest, described in lines 13-14 of the longer poem ('they do not draw swords in battle, their battle is a battle of thoughts'), is similarly expressed in the short poem: 'they fight without sword or spear', and 'their war is waged with stratagems.' In the long poem, the *fers* 'can step . . . to its four sides' (*le-arba'at reva'av*); this finds an echo in the short poem, in the description of the knight's move -- 'the horses towards their four corners' (*le-arba rive'eihem*). Further similarity of diction can be seen in the two descriptions of the bishop's move. In the fifth distich of the short poem ('Sometimes one prevails over the other'), the mode of expression echoes line 57 of the longer poem.

The impression that both poems were composed by Ibn Ezra is supported by David Kahana, who includes both in his edition of Ibn Ezra's works. Asserting that the short poem is 'wonderful and

lacks nothing', and that 'the spirit of Ibn Ezra speaks in it', he notes the similarities of diction in the two cases and accepts them as evidence of common authorship rather than imitation. Kahana infers that the short poem was written later and in a different place in Ibn Ezra's travels; the differing words for the chess pieces are explained on the assumption that the poet used 'the names by which they were called among the people of the place where he was living at the time'.⁴⁷

The following Hebrew riddle is likewise ascribed to Ibn Ezra by Kahana:

ארץ בלי אדמה מלכיה ושריה חולכים בלי נשמה
אם המלך שממה לא תחיה כל נשמה.

A land without any earth
Its kings and its princes go without breath
If the king comes to harm no soul will survive.⁴⁸

The resemblance of the second line to the third distich of the short chess poem is evident. The solution is 'chess game'.

⁴⁷ See *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: A Collection of his Poems and Aphorisms, his Riddles and Epigrams*, with a biography, introductions, corrections and notes by David Kahana, new edition, vol. 1 (Warsaw, 1922), pp. 148-50. The long and short poems figure as Nos. 118 and 119 in Kahana's collection. On p. 141, Kahana rejects Egers's scepticism about the authorship of the long poem.

⁴⁸ See No. 71 in Kahana's collection. The riddle was reported by Dukes in *Litteraturblatt des Orients*, 9 (1848), p. 230, and printed as anonymous by Steinschneider, p. 201.

The 'Elegant Address' on Chess by Bonsenior Ibn Yechia

The second of the three Hebrew texts in Hyde's triad appears under the heading

*Oratio elegans de Ludo Scaque, quam composuit Gloria
Oratorum Bonsenior Abben-Jachia, beatae memoriae.*

The text had been printed once prior to Hyde,⁴⁹ in Brecha Hannakdan's edition of *Mishle-Shualim* (Mantua, 1557-8).

Grandmaster Harry Golombek dates the work within a century of Ibn Ezra, and values it highly as an evocation of medieval chess:

Perhaps the best description of the game, its quality and of its purpose, is to be found not in Arabic, but in the Hebrew writings of a Rabbi BonSenior Abu Yachia who lived towards the end of the tenth century.⁵⁰

However, statements as to the date of the work and the author's identity and circumstances can only be tentative. The Hebrew name Ibn Yechia, deriving either from northern Spain or from Provence, is very common.⁵¹ The author of the *K. al-muwatta*, a text containing an early mention of chess, was Yahya ben Yahya who died in Córdoba in 848; a Spanish pupil of the Muslim theological school of Malik, he reports his master's attitude to the game as follows:

I heard Malik say that there was nothing good about chess. He pronounced it *haram*. I heard him denounce chess-playing and other vanities as *haram*, quoting *Sura X.33*, 'When the truth has been scorned, what is left except error?'⁵²

⁴⁹ See below, p. 92, note 96.

⁵⁰ Golombek, *History of Chess*, p. 34.

⁵¹ Steinschneider (p. 169) notes that in the form *Ibn Ja'hja*, the name designates a well-known Spanish family, which, however, appears to have no connection with the author of the work on chess. He claims that the appendage *Bonsenior* is unknown outside the present context, but it was in fact well known among Jews of 11th to 13th-century Provence; corrupted to 'Snare' (written as *Sneer*), it was common among East European Jews who in the course of the Middle Ages migrated across Europe as far as Poland.

⁵² See Murray, p. 189. *Haram* is the Islamic judicial theological expression classifying an action that is not only forbidden but deserves punishment. For the importance of this

Léon Hollænderski describes the author of the chess work as a 'Rabbi of the twelfth century', while Steinschneider speculates that the date of the text may be much later⁵³ -- around 1400.

From the form of the ending (with its reference to Judges 5:31), and from the apostrophizing of the reader at the beginning and in certain other places, commentators have inferred that the description of chess (in 'elegant rhymed prose') was addressed and dedicated to a particular patron.⁵⁴

montage of biblical quotations and allusions. These of course make immediate sense to those versed in the Old Testament, but given our specific aim of viewing the poem in the context of chess history, adherence to the biblical phraseology was not practicable in the translation.⁵⁵

In the beginning the hordes of the armies stand before you. Your eyes will see the king in his glory. Behold, he stands at the head of all his hosts; he will shout, he will raise the battle-cry, he will triumph over his enemies by the strength of his hand and his might. He is established in his stronghold, the fourth station, the place of his abode. At the beginning of his reign, the queen [*shegal*] is at his right hand; he looks upon her with favour. Near to them two horsemen stand ready, mounted upon armoured horses; to right and left of them are two elephants, and two rooks [*rokim* or *rukim*] stand to either side. These are the princes and officers, all endowed with strength. Opposing in full regalia, stand two opposing lines of soldiers, in the same manner as the mighty men of old. Such are the stations and the standards of their armies according to their families and their fathers' houses. And now let us take our fill of love, and I will give you free access among those who stand here. I will show you the marchings and counter-marchings of this army, and I will explain clearly how the battle is turned back at the gate.

text in shedding light on the introduction and dissemination of chess in the Islamic occident, see Reinhardt Wieber, *Das Schachspiel in der arabischen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Walldorf/Hessen, 1972), p. 65.

⁵³ In Steinschneider's view (loc. cit.), an approximate dating of the text can only be arrived at from the internal evidence of its style and manner. His own conclusion is that 'the rhetorical style is reminiscent of the Provençal circle of poets and orators such as Bonfed and Da Piera, which the Benveniste Ibn Labi family (c. 1400) gathered around themselves, perhaps also under the influence of the band of singers "*del gay saber*".'

⁵⁴ Steinschneider (who refers also to Letteris), p. 171.

⁵⁵ The translation is the first complete one in English.

When the King marches from place to place in his domain, there is but one law for him: he may proceed either obliquely or straight; all that he desires he does; but he does not arrogantly lengthen his stride in the combat, lest he should die in battle.

The sure-footed elephants advance three paces in stately march; and unless they take [these] three steps along a crooked path, they cannot hurt or destroy. Behold them tramping forth, and wherever they go, they work complete desolation.

And the horsemen set themselves in formation at the gate, each girt with his weapons of war. Their majestic snorting is terrible. They pace one stage straight across the field, and take another step in an oblique direction, before they stand in their place directly in front of their people.

Before the rooks lies only a straight path. All four have the same movement. They do not turn as they go along the whole length of the path which is before them. If by strength they prevail, none can say them nay; but should one of the officers or servants of the king stand before them, they have no power to pass. Neither by their numbers nor by their wealth can they deviate from the course which they have taken. And yet, however great their strength, it sometimes occurs that one of the lowest rank of the enemy captures one of them; when he thinks himself safe, destruction comes upon him.

When their war rages, it is not to the king's advantage to stand at the edge of the battlefield alongside his troops; he does not attempt to go there, nor is he seen or to be found there unless one of his soldiers stands in front of him in order to shield and protect him and act as his bodyguard. If he arises and walks abroad leaning on his staff, and is then seen, the king rises up in his anger and goes and hides behind a wall or fortress, and he flees and escapes from the battle.

Behold, I have laid before you goodly words, to guide you and to make clear where the king's writ runs. And concerning those men who draw near, have I not written excellent things⁵⁶ to you? I have shown you the laws of the contest, its genius, and its principles, and every sign. There is no one about whom I have not written, with the exception of the woman, who has been kept back from us [until now]. She sits at the top of the high places above the city. She is restless and determined. She girds her loins with strength. Her feet stay not in her house. She moves in every direction and into every corner. Her evolutions are wonderful, her spirit untiring. How comely are her footsteps as she moves diagonally, one step after another, from square to square!

And the King, dressed in black robes, stands on the fourth square,

⁵⁶ Cf. Proverbs 22:20.

which is white. His queen stands on the next square to him, which is black. He draws near to the pitch darkness; his eye is upon her, for he has taken an Ethiopian woman [as his consort]. There is no difference between them as they come towards you; they set out towards you along the same path, at the same pace and by the same route. When the one dies, so does the other. The fatness of their flesh will waste away.

But the black king is strong when there stands before him a great and numerous and powerful people, serving him on the field of battle as a strong army. For they [the pawns] advance in companies, moving forwards, and bravely leap from square to square. Their feet are straight, but they may take plunder or booty by moving to the next square obliquely.

It may occur that one of them increases in strength and might. Then he skips like a hart and advances to the haven of his desire. Reaching his goal, he becomes swifter than the eagles in the sky. He hastens on nimble feet and may perform any task that the woman may do, just as he pleases.

And now the two kings practise deceit against each other, each bent on slaying [*matim laharog*]. The king is held in the galleries.⁵⁷ While the king is sitting in his place, one of the servants of his enemy may order him to leave his borders, in no matter what direction, lest he smite him with pestilence. And if he desires to leave the house where he is ensconced, [it may occur that] he seeks but cannot find [a way], because the opposing warriors press in upon him to take him captive; their net is spread at his feet. Then is his glory turned to destruction. Alas for the lord, alas for his splendour! And his people who are left after him are as nothing; for of what account are they? By one blow the loftiest of men may be humbled; he is brought low and crushed, he sinks down and falls, as his royal opponent casts him down from his greatness until not a shred of it remains. Then he is thrust out and cut off from his honoured position. How could one man pursue so that the one is left in glory and power, and the other dies in bitterness of soul?

Thus may all the enemies of the lord perish, and they that seek his hurt; but may they that love him be as the sun when he goes forth in his strength.

The chess piece which Ibn Ezra called the *fers* is here denoted by the word *shegal* (שגל), equivalent to 'lady' or 'queen', although the movements of this piece are the same as before.

⁵⁷ Cf. Song of Songs 7:5. 'Galleries' is used here in a military sense. Hyde's Latin translation has '*in ambulacris*' -- 'in the avenues'.

Chess and Society -- and Gambling

Jewish scholars differed as to whether the playing of chess should be encouraged. The *halalkhah* disapproved of chess as time-wasting. The *Sefer Hasidim* ('Book of the Pious'), § 400, strongly recommended the game. Among those whose judgement on this question is recorded was Maimonides.

A contemporary of Ibn Ezra (he was born in Cordoba in 1131), Maimonides was another victim of the Almohades and their efforts to enforce conformity to the Muslim faith. In 1160 his family emigrated to Fez; five years later Maimonides moved again, to Egypt where he became physician to Saladin. Of his stature as a Jewish philosopher and teacher, it is said: 'from Moses to Moses, there is none like Moses.'

Contrary to general belief, Maimonides did not condemn the game of chess categorically, but in his comment on the *Mishnah* (Sanhedrin 3:3), he expressed disapproval of chess when it was played for money, and coupled it with the dice game *nard* (backgammon). He declared professional chess players to be unworthy of credence in the law-courts.⁵⁸

Maimonides incidentally provides us with the first European reference to the concept of a 'forced mate' and to chess problems based on this concept.⁵⁹

At a later date, Jedidah Hapenini ben Abraham Badrasi (born in Barcelona in 1250), more generally known as Anbonet Abram, wrote a work on chess with the aim of arresting 'the pernicious vice of gambling with cards and dice' prevalent in his time.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ In *Mishneh Torah*, chapter 10, para. 4, those disqualified from giving evidence are named as those who engage in *kubbiya* (dice) and other games of chance, and racing doves. See also *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 'chess'.

Profiat Duran, who mentions chess in his *Maaseh Efod* (about 1403), deplored indulgence in the game; see Steinschneider, p. 157.

⁵⁹ See Murray, p. 446.

⁶⁰ The work is of interest in indicating an early date for the invention of card games. See Lindo, *History of the Jews of Spain and Portugal* (New York, 1970), pp. 112-13. If Lindo's information is correct, Badrasi was a contemporary of Alphonso X 'The Wise'; however, Graetz gives Badrasi's dates as c. 1280-1340.

Among Badrasi's prolific writings (which include a commentary on the psalms, notes on various talmudic treatises, and a collection from the Grecian and Arabic sages) is a letter addressed to Solomon ben Aderet on 'The Prohibition of Philosophical Studies'. Badrasi also wrote a book called 'An Examination of the World' (concerning the world's

The opinions of moralists appear to have had little effect on the general attitude to the game. H.J.R.Murray quotes a twelfth-century Arab source which confirms the interest taken by the Jews in chess,⁶¹ and the reputation acquired by a number of Jewish players. A certain Al-Yahudi (no fuller name is given) is mentioned as one of the three outstanding players of his generation, with the comment that 'all of these great players could play without looking at the board.'⁶²

In connection with these early references to chess problems and blindfold chess, we may add that one other special adaptation of the game -- the giving of odds -- appears to have been standard practice:

In that era it was customary to classify those who played chess In other words, the ability of each person as a player was considered, and the player of lesser ability was accordingly allowed some advantage at the start of the game.⁶³

A favourable comparison between chess and other games was expressed by Moses Azan (i.e. Hazan, 'cantor'), the author of a poem entitled *Los trabajos de Hercules, y el conde de Lucanor*. The poem was written in Catalanian dialect and translated into Castilian in 1350 by a Jew or a Jewish convert (*converso*).⁶⁴

vanities) which was translated into many European languages. Lindo comments: 'From his eloquence, his co-religionists called him the Orator; and Christians, the Hebrew Cicero.'

⁶¹ Murray (p. 447) notes that 'like all indoor games in the Middle Ages, chess was largely played by Jewish women.' He adds: 'Carrera (1617, p. 102) mentions a young Venetian Jewess as a player of great skill.'

⁶² Murray, p. 203.

⁶³ Quoted from Ashtor (loc. cit.), who gives as his source: Pareja 1:lxvii.

⁶⁴ The translator is characterized by Amador de los Rios (IV, 472) as '*Converso o Christiano*'; compare Steinschneider, p. 178.

Moses Azan is mentioned in Antonius van der Linde, *Das erste Jahrtausend der Schachliteratur (850-1880)*, p. 13. Under the name Hassan or Aḡan (the Spanish pronunciation drops the 'h'), he is referred to by Rodriguez de Castro in *Biblioteca Española* vol. 1, pp. 182-3. See also Jose Paluzie y Lucena, *Manual de Ajedrez*, 2nd ed. (Barcelona, 1921), pp. 251-2.

The identity of Moses Azan is subject to controversy. In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, p. 209, we read that 'the author has been identified with the Moses b. Joseph Aḡan who at Cuenca in 1272 warned King Alfonso X of a conspiracy of the Castilian nobles led by the Infante Felipe.' Amador de los Rios, in *Historia crítica de la literatura española*, vol. 4 (1863), p. 471, places the poem in the 12th century, while Steinschneider ascribes it to

Murray mentions the poem as lost,⁶⁵ but a partial report of its content exists:

It begins with the creation of the world and man's obligation to revere God through the practice of all virtues; with the exception of chess it condemns all games, especially cards (*naipes*), and describes the ill effects of gaming on family and society. The poem closes with an explanation of the rules of chess.⁶⁶

The type of argumentation used by moralists such as I have mentioned has at times been an object of parody. One such parody was composed by Kalonymos ben Kalonymos ('Maestro Calo')⁶⁷, himself a stern moralizer and a scion of a long line of distinguished rabbis⁶⁸ who spoke out against the playing of chess whether it was for money or not.

Kalonymos was born in Provence and was a diligent translator of Arab writings, some of them commissioned by

the 14th century. An account of the dispute is given by Steinschneider on pp. 177-9; in the end we cannot date Moses Azan more precisely than by saying that he was living before 1350 when his Catalan poem was translated into Castilian.

Steinschneider mentions that the identity of the poet has been denied on the grounds that the final stanza contains a reference to the Virgin Mary. He remarks that this detail could have been inserted by the translator or a copyist; As to the opening of the poem (*'En el nombre de Dios poderoso que es sin'*), he asserts: 'This style of religious thought is unlikely to have come from a true Christian but is almost typical amongst Jews' (p. 179).

⁶⁵ Murray, p. 417(n). According to Steinschneider (p. 177), there was a manuscript in the Escorial Palace (reference: L.ij.6), which Amador de los Rios could no longer locate in 1855. I have visited the Escorial Library and tried to obtain a copy from the Librarian, but nothing has yet come of this request.

⁶⁶ Quoted from Steinschneider, p. 177. Compare Anton Schmid, *Literatur des Schachspiels* (Vienna, 1847), p. 386. Compare also the quotation from Asher Anschel on p. 146 below.

⁶⁷ See Cecil Roth, *The Jewish Contribution to Civilisation* (London, 1938), p. 50.

⁶⁸ The family of Kalonymos was transplanted from Lucca to Narbonne as early as 787 as part of Charlemagne's policy of establishing centres of learning in France. The Emperor yielded a considerable part of the city to this family, and gave them almost a princely authority over the community (similar to the power an Arab sheik in that city exercised over the Mohammedans); their descendants, up to the banishment of the Jews from Spain, therefore bore the legitimate title of Prince (*'Nassi'*), and the quarter of the city they occupied was called the 'Court of the Jewish Khagan'. See Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 3, p. 56.

Robert of Anjou. In about 1322 he moved to Castile and in the same year wrote a sermon of rebuke entitled *Eben Bochan* ('The Touchstone'),⁶⁹ in which he condemns 'those who pass the intermediate days of Sukkot playing with cards or dice.'⁷⁰

Kalonymos wrote the talmudic parody *Masechet Purim* ('Purim Tractate')⁷¹ in Rome or Ancona. A passage which calls for our attention refers to a place by the name of *Scacciere*, and speaks of the game of *nardshir* -- a word which we have seen to be ambiguously equated with chess. The passage reads:

They ate the Purim meal in Adar I. R Sachkan the Gambler asked: 'May one play dice on Purim?' R Simon the Drunkard said . 'I saw a place in the Roman domain where they played on Purim and they called it *Scacci*, but I do not remember whether they played dice or *nardshir* or *iskutray* [chess]. Rabbi Chamsan (the Violent One, the Robber) said, 'is that a proof? One cannot adduce *iskakiri* [sic] as evidence because even on all the other days of the year they play dice there and nobody said anything to him.'

Moreover, Rabbi Chamsan said. 'I myself played there both on Purim and on the other days of the year and nobody said anything to me!'

What is the *halacha*? R Gazlan (the Robber) says it is permitted. R Chamdan (the Lustful) says it is forbidden. R Lakchan (the Pilferer) answered him 'These are they who are disqualified as witnesses, the player at dice etc'.

The last sentence is almost a verbatim quotation from a genuine Mishnah passage, *Sanhedrin* 3:3 (on which Maimonides based his judgement of chess). The conclusion of the fictitious discussion is that dice games are forbidden because the sages declared that gambling and frivolity lead people to lechery.

The parody becomes more and more frivolous. It seeks the point of its joke in the recommendation of what is otherwise forbidden. The serious game of chess was not suitable for the celebration of Purim, as it was taking place under the influence

⁶⁹ See *Bodleian Catalogue*, p. 1579, and compare Steinschneider's *Manna* [translations from Hebrew] (Berlin, 1847), p. 12.

⁷⁰ See Steinschneider in Van der Linde, p. 157.

⁷¹ The work appeared, together with two others of a similar type, first in Pesaro (undated; circa 1507-20), and later in Venice (1552). Both editions are very rare. The extract I quote is in chapter 3. It is briefly mentioned in Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 7, p. 306. Steinschneider obtained copies of it from Cod 21, Library of the Leipzig City Council (f.246, reverse), and from the 1552 edition in the British Museum.

of the *Fasching* (carnival); the Purim festival is a time for light-hearted plays and for fancy-dress parties.

Steinschneider notes the ambiguity of the phrase 'a place in the Roman domain', and considers whether the allusion is to a real place. The word *medina* would best suit a Roman provincial town; the name *Scacchiere* (chessboard) perhaps denotes a square (because of the paving) or a street.

Kalonymos's parody was later to find imitators.⁷² An edition of the work itself, however, published in Venice in 1552, is reported to have been burnt by fundamentalist Orthodox Jews.⁷³

The Alphonso Manuscript

Alphonso X was a monarch who was the greatest apostle of Muslim learning in Christian Spain, and King of Castile and Leon from 1252-1284. His scientific fame is based on his encouragement of research in the field of astronomy. According to Baron⁷⁴ scholars could afford to research astronomy because it was easier to enlist the financial support of the numerous patrons of the age for astrological work, especially if it was combined with personal horoscopes for which patrons, their families and whole entourage would pay. Alphonso X was provided with the appellation '*El Sabio*', 'the wise one'. Alphonso's patronage of Arabic learning was copied by his neighbours, the monarchs of Aragon.

Alphonso steered a fine line between treating the Jews with respect and dignity and at the insistence of his church, enacting terrible laws against them. On the whole, in comparison with the conditions of their brethren in England, France and Germany, the Jews of Spain at that time lived well. Alphonso, a lover and patron of science was ambitious to emulate the fame of his

⁷² On parodies, mostly in connection with Purim, see Steinschneider, *Jewish Literature* (London, 1857), pp. 175, 245-6; and compare Zedner, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Books in the Library of the British Museum* (London, 1867), pp. 644-5. One parody with the same title as that of Kalonymos has been reprinted frequently since 1695. See Steinschneider, *Bodleian Catalogue*, p. 603 and addendum; also Zedner, loc. cit.

⁷³ Reported by Wagenseil; see *Bodleian Catalogue*, pp. 582, 1581.

⁷⁴ Baron, *Social and Religious History*.

Moslem predecessors, Abdel al-Rahman III⁷⁵ and al-Hakem⁷⁶. His father 'the saint' (a term often synonymous with religious zeal and hence intolerance), had no regard for the Jews, but Alphonso X 'attracted learned Jews to his court and exploited their talents.'⁷⁷ He was prepared to exploit at the price of seeming tolerant and receptive. Thus, he steered a pragmatic course which enabled him to placate Rome and yet make use of the Jews without whom he could not govern.

In the expedition against Moslem Seville, which Alphonso led whilst still only Crown Prince, Jewish soldiers participated in the fighting. As a gesture of gratitude, Alphonso assigned to his Jewish soldiers a separate village called *Aldea de Los Judios*.⁷⁸ The community of Seville presented the victor with a costly key, artificially wrought; it was inscribed in Hebrew and Spanish with the well-known motto, taken from the Psalms:

The King of Kings opens, the king of the land shall enter.⁷⁹

When Alphonso ascended the throne he entrusted the Jews with many important offices. Graetz in *A Popular History of The Jews*⁸⁰ describes the various posts that Alphonso was prepared to entrust to his Jewish subjects. For example, Don Meir de Malea, an educated Jew well versed in the Talmud was appointed Minister of Finance with the title '*Almoxarif*'. He must have pleased the king because on his death, his position was handed over to his son, Don Isaac Ibn Cid. As with the Muslims so too with Christian rulers; the prevailing custom in Spain became to entrust Jews with governmental positions.

The higher culture of the Spanish Jews, and their participation in all internal and external affairs of the land enabled them to counteract the hostile intentions of their enemies.

Jewish scholars translated important Arabic scientific works for

⁷⁵ Abdel al-Rahman III: Caliph from 929-961 AD.

⁷⁶ Al-Hakem: Caliph from 961-976 AD.

⁷⁷ Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 3, p. 351.

⁷⁸ Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 3, p. 348.

⁷⁹ *The History of the Jews in Spain* together with illustration of the key with this legend written in Hebrew by Don Adolfo de Castro (1847), Pub. John Deighton, London, George Bell, Fleet Street, 1851.

⁸⁰ Op. cit. fn.

the Christians by translating them into Castilian, the vernacular, so that clerics could in turn render the Castilian into Latin.⁸¹ Particularly after the Christian conquests from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, the Jews acted as a link between Christians and Muslims, making the whole spectrum of Arabic scientific knowledge available for translation from the Arabic into Latin. This process of translating Arabic science and education for the benefit of Christian Europe was not confined to Spain, affluent Sicilian society was another example of this process. The translation and writing of the Alphonsine Tables and the Alphonso *Libro Diversos de Acedrex Dados y Tablas* was part of a pattern of translation and writing in which Jews took part over a long period.⁸²

There were three main centres for this fruitful activity of the Jews, as interpreters to Europe of Graeco-Arab science. One was Toledo, at the court of the kings of Castile. Another was Naples, under the auspices of the House of Anjou. The third was Provence, the bridge between France and Spain, where the local Jewish scholars (particularly of the family of Ibn Tibbon) translated large numbers of texts from the Arabic of their native Spain into Hebrew, for the benefit of their co-religionists north of the Pyrenees.⁸³

The influence of the Jews of Spain on the development of the game of chess is not therefore always apparent. Texts were written in Arabic and so the works have not always been credited to the Jews where applicable. Under Alphonso's patronage a vast number of works were undertaken, many being compiled from Arabic sources which were made available to him by Jewish assistants.⁸⁴

⁸¹ See e.g. Roth, p. 49.

⁸² See Walter Mettmann, 'Stand und Aufgaben der alphonsinischen Forschungen', in *Romanisches Jahrbuch*, 14 (1963); E.S. Proctor, 'The King and his Collaborators', *Modern Language Review* (1945) and *Alfonso X of Castile : Patron of Learning and Literature* (1951); also R.J. Burns (ed), *The Words of Alfonso the Learned and James the Conqueror* (1985).

⁸³ Roth, p. 47. He adds: 'in 1273-4 a Jew named Vives translated into French in the house of Henri Bate, at Malines, several books by the Spanish Jewish globe-trotter, exegete and philosopher, Abraham ibn Ezra.'

⁸⁴ These include *Las Siete Partidas*, 'The Seven Divisions of The Law', the *Cronica General*, in which chapters 466-494 are devoted to the strange life of the Prophet Mohammed; and *Grande e General Estoria*, a general history on a vast scale and finally, *Lapidario*, a treatise on precious stones -- to mention but a few important books.

The role of the Jewish translators is typified by the prolific Moses ben Tibbon.

Alphonso X had angered Pope Nicholas III by giving important appointments to Jews. Perhaps to placate the Church and the Pope he created oppressive legislation against the Jews (but did not put this into effect). It is hardly credible that a man who entrusted his own life to a Jewish doctor could have issued a decree that made it an offence for a Christian to accept a remedy from the hand of a Jew.

Such was the position when Don Isaak ibn Cid, upon the order of the king, prepared astronomic tables that brought Alphonso more fame than his military victories or statesmanship could have done. Known as Don Zag (pronounced in a similar way to Isaak or Isaac), Ibn Cid (Sayyid)⁸⁵ was a *Hazan* (cantor) of the Toledo Synagogue⁸⁶ and one of the greatest astronomers of the time.

THE ALPHONSO TABLES OR THE ZAG TABLES

The Alphonso Tables that should properly be called the Zag or Sid Tables, were used by astronomers until the modern astronomic discoveries were made.⁸⁷

Many other Jews also had access to Alphonso's court. He had a Jewish physician named Judah ben Moses Cohen, who was at the same time his astronomer and astrologer. It was he too who was responsible for the famous 'Alphonsine Tables'. Indeed in the preface to this work, we learn that they were prepared by Judah Cohen and Isaac Hazan. *The Legacy of Israel* ⁸⁸ validates this assertion, claiming that the Alphonsine Tables

were prepared under the wise king's direct command by two learned Jews of Toledo, Judah Ben Moses Cohen, a physician, and Isaac ben Cid, a

Among many other works of philosophy, medicine, mathematics and astronomy, Tibbon translated into Hebrew a book by Al-Bitruji (Alpetragius), expressing original ideas on the movements of the planets; also writings of al-Farabi, and Euclid's *Elements*.

The book by Al-Bitruji was translated into Latin in the 16th century by Kalonymos ben David. See *Legacy of Islam*, p. 395. Other works translated by Tibbon include Tabrizi's commentary on the 25 propositions preceding part II of Maimonides's *Guide to the Perplexed*.

⁸⁵ Sayyid = Lord = Cid.

⁸⁶ Graetz, *Popular History*, vol. 3, p. 351.

⁸⁷ *ibid*.

⁸⁸ *Legacy of Israel*.

Hazan, or synagogue precentor. These important tables continued in great repute for centuries. They are to be found in numerous manuscripts and long continued to be reprinted. They were still being consulted by Kepler and Galileo in the seventeenth century.⁸⁹

These celebrated lists of planetary movements form the basic documents of modern scientific astronomy, and helped to explain to inquisitive minds some of the riddles of the universe. The problems of calendaring exerted a powerful influence on promoting astronomical studies among the Jewish intelligentsia.⁹⁰

Mention should also be made of the introduction of Indian fable into Spain through the celebrated collection of stories known as *Kalila E Dimna* (the title refers to the names of two jackals who figure in the first story). One of the fables in this collection includes a chess theme, and has been considered important in shedding light on the early history of the game in India.

Ever since its origin in the third-century Sanskrit version known as *Panchadandachattrabandha* (which was intended as a manual of rules of conduct for princes), this literary material has proved its remarkable adaptability to a variety of geographical and cultural contexts;⁹¹ a list of the languages into which it has been translated over the centuries includes Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, Ethiopian, Malay, Mongolian and Greek.⁹² In its various versions, the book was one of the most popular in the literature of the Islamic world; and the Spanish translation made

⁸⁹ Ibid p. 224.

⁹⁰ Baron, *Social and Religious History*.

⁹¹ The Sanskrit original, consisting probably of 14 chapters, was compiled in Kashmir about 300 and only later attributed to Bidpai. It was translated into Pahlavi in the reign of Chosroes I (to whom I referred in the last chapter). Both these versions are now lost.

The Sanskrit was later recast as *Panchatranta* ('five books', or headings) -- several versions of this text are extant. A popular summary by an author named as Narayana is called *Hitopadesa* or 'Salutary counsel'.

The Pahlavi text was translated into Syriac in the 6th century (this version has been discovered and published). In the 7th century it was translated into Arabic by Abdallah Ibn al-Muqaffa (a Zoroastrian convert to Islam, died c. 757), who greatly revised and expanded it (see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5, p. 706). Roth (p. 46; cf also p. 169) attributes the Arabic translation to an anonymous Jew.

⁹² *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10, pp. 705-6.

from the Arabic text in 1251 is regarded as the earliest attempt at story-telling in the Spanish language.⁹³ Later (1557) the same material was to appear in Jewish circles in Europe under the title of *Mishle Shualim* ('Tales of the Foxes').⁹⁴

The so-called Alphonso manuscript, *Libro Diversos de Axedrez, Dados, y Tablos*, 'The book of Chess, Dice and Backgammon', is the most important translation of all books on chess. The book is obviously compiled from Arabic sources and many of the illustrations show players in oriental dress. Sometimes they are accompanied by oriental musicians, while now and then musicians may be seen having a game amongst themselves, holding their instruments in the left hand in case they are suddenly called upon to play. A flavour of the text can be judged from this extract:

Cheque (*xaque*) is a manner of legal affront to the Lord: when they give him his mate, it is a matter of great dishonour, even if they should conquer him or kill him. (fol 2b)

The description of the game is not altogether in accordance with Muslim practice, but the 103 problems are almost exclusively so. The counsellor (*'al-firzan'*)⁹⁵ moves one square diagonally, but for its first move it can jump to the third square either

⁹³ The Spanish translation, made from the Arabic for Alfonso X, dates from 1251. Editions are available by J.Alemany (Madrid, 1915) and A.G.Solalinde (Madrid, 1917). In view of the comparative isolation of Spain, the rest of Europe knew the work only in a Latin translation entitled *Directorium Humanae Vitae*, by a converted Jew, John of Capua who worked at Padua. See *Legacy of Islam*, p. 196.

In about 1253 (shortly after *Kalila E Dimna*), the Arabic *Book of Sindibad* was translated for the Infante Don Fadrique under the name of *Libro de los engannos e asayamientos de las mujeres*. See *Legacy of Islam*, p. 195, where we read: 'The influence of these and similar works is most obvious in Spanish literature, especially in the earlier period. From them, for example, the Infante John Manuel (who was himself familiar with Arabic) drew the inspiration for *El Conde Lucanor*, in which even the prologue is modelled on the introductions with which all Arabic works are furnished. There are indeed few early prose writings in Spanish which did not draw on materials translated from Arabic.

⁹⁴ *Mischle Shualim* by Berachja ha-Nakdan, edition Mantua 1557/8 fol. 86 verso (*Bodleian Catalogue*, p. 796). The chess poem by Ibn Yechia (see above, pp. 79ff) is printed in the same book; Franz Delitzsch (*History of Jewish Poetry*, Leipzig 1836, p. 70) wrongly attributed it to Elia Levita, dating it 1549.

⁹⁵ *'Al-Firzan'*: The Queen.

diagonally or orthogonally. By the time of Lucena's book⁹⁶ in 1497, this piece was in the process of being displaced by the queen. In Ruy Lopez's book⁹⁷ written in 1561 the queen's power is further developed.

The group of fifteen chess problems which differ strongly from the Arabic pattern, and which according to Murray in *A History of Chess* represent the first appearance of European composers, may well derive from Jewish compilers of the text.

Bearing in mind the large collection of astronomical works translated and supplemented from the Arabic on the orders of Alfonso the Wise, mainly by Jews,⁹⁸ it is evident that the Jewish translators also took part in the compilation of the work on chess and other games⁹⁹

One of the unorthodox chess games given in the manuscript is *Grande Axedrez*, Great Chess:

It is played on a board of 144 squares, with 12 pieces and 12 pawns on each side. Next to the King stood a Gryphon; and then, on each side, came a Cocatrice, a Giraffe, a Unicorn, a Lion and a Rook. The King moved, as in the modern game, to any adjacent square; and although 'castling' had not yet been invented, he could leap to the third square for the first move. The Gryphon (Sp. *aanca*, Ar. *'anqa*) moved one square diagonally followed by any number in a straight line. The *Cocatrices* moved like modern Bishops, though the large board gave them a far greater range and power. The Giraffes had a move resembling the modern Knight, except that their leap was longer; for while the Knight moves one square diagonally and one square straight, the Giraffes moved one square diagonally and four squares straight. The Unicorns also had a complicated move, and were regarded as the most powerful pieces, on the board after the Gryphon; they began like a Knight and went on like a Bishop, with the proviso that they could not take another piece until the move was completed. The Lion could leap to the fourth square in all directions; while the Rook moved as usual: straight, in any direction. The pawns moved as in the ordinary game: one square forward at a time. They had no right of moving two squares for the

⁹⁶ Luis de Lucena, *Repetición de Amores e Arte de Axedres* (Salamanca, 1497) -- see below, pp. 100ff.

⁹⁷ See below, pp. 108ff.

⁹⁸ Steinschneider refers to *Serapeum*, published by R Naumann, Leipzig 1870, p. 295, 'Journal of Mathematics', Leipzig, 1871, Vol XVI, p. 368, 392. The collection was re-published under the title *Libros de saber de Astronomia*, in the splendid format of the original.

first move, but in compensation for that, they started on the fourth row instead of on the second. When they reached the twelfth square of their file, they promoted to the rank and power of the piece on whose file they started.¹⁰⁰

The Chess Manuscript of Abu Zachariya Jahja Ben Ibrahim Al-Hakim

Abu Zachariya Ben Ibrahim al-Hakim lived in the fourteenth century and wrote and transcribed some important texts about chess. He is another example of a Jew recording works in Arabic. Little is known of his life. According to one source,¹⁰¹ he was 'probably a Jewish renegade from Spain or Morocco (1405); according to another, 'in about 1360 he wrote a manual of disputation against the Jews who loosened their tongues against our Prophet.'¹⁰²

The text which concerns us is his unpublished Arabic manuscript entitled:

Nuzhat al-arbab al-abul fi'sh -- Schatranj al-Manqul

('The delight of the intelligent, a description of chess')

The original is in the Constantinople Library.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Source: *Libro diversos de Axedrez, Dados y Tablos*, etc. 1987 by Ediciones Poniente. Madrid. Publicación de Interés Bibliófilo.

¹⁰¹ Gustav Flügel quoted in Steinschneider, *Die arabische Literatur der Juden: Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte der Araber, größtenteils aus handschriftlichen Quellen*, reprint (Hildesheim, Zürich and New York, 1986), p. 171.

¹⁰² *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 4, p. 102. Compare Murray, p. 175. On p. 176, Murray again mentions Abu Zachariya Jahja Ben Ibrahim al-Hakim as being quoted in another work called *Kitab ammudhaj al-qital fi la'b Shatranj* ('Book of the Examples of Warfare in the Game of Chess'); this is 'MS. Arab. 93' in the John Rylands Library, Manchester. (However, Murray's misunderstanding of the construction of Arab names causes confusion. He refers to the author of the MS as 'al-Hakim', as though this were equivalent to an English surname, rather than an adjunct describing his profession -- 'the Doctor/Sage'. The author, incidentally, is not named in Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Weimar and Berlin, 1898-1902). See also Van der Linde, pp. 107-8.

¹⁰³ The official reference is 'MS Abd-al-Hamid I, Constantinople, No. 561'. The catalogue entry '561. *Risala fi'sh-shatranj*', which gives the author as As-Suli, is patently wrong.

The text consists of a discursive introductory section, followed by a collection of chess problems by the famous Persian players of the tenth century, al-Adli and as-Suli.

The introductory part of the work contains reflections on the lawfulness of chess-playing; stories about chess, few of which are to be found in other medieval manuscripts; notes on a group of famous players of the end of the twelfth century; a number of chess problems; an explanation of technical terms used in chess; and further technical material concerning games at odds, the division of players into categories, and standard positions in the openings.

Early Arabic writing on chess is heavily preoccupied with the question of whether the game is permitted by the Muslim religion. We have seen that much the same problem is a recurring theme in early Jewish (and Christian) chess writings, but among the Muslims it seems to have been treated with even greater seriousness. Accordingly, eleven pages of the manuscript (about one-fifth of its volume) are devoted to brief stories and pronouncements concerning the morality of the game. A selection follows.¹⁰⁴

M.b. al-Qasim relates from al-Asma'i from his uncle abu Ruja' al-Kelbi from Ya. b. Sa'id b. al-mussayyab that he asked 'Omar b. al.Khattab about chess. He asked 'what is chess?' He said that there was a woman who had a son and he was killed in war with his companions. And it was told her how it happened. Then they taught her chess and when she understood it she was

The MS names Abu Zachariya Jahja Ben Ibrahim al-Hakim as its author in its opening sentence.

The MS contains 57 leaves, paper, 143 mm. by 70. It is not written in chapters, but presents its material in a continuous sequence, in the manner of most oriental works of the time.

In the Oriental Department of the Bodleian Library there is a facsimile (dating perhaps from the end of the 18th century) of the original 14th-century illuminated manuscript. (Reference: 0.061190/250.). This Arabic ms. is introduced in English written by H.J.R. Murray. It contains a description and bibliography of the authors and a description with translation of the content.

A different manuscript of the same work, ascribed to the 15th century, is in the Rylands Library, Manchester (MS. Arab. 59).

The two manuscripts are in the main identical in content, with some variation in the order of the chess problems which is sufficient to show that the Oxford facsimile is not a transcript from the Manchester MS. The Constantinople/Oxford MS also omits one of the knight's tours included in the Manchester MS.

¹⁰⁴ References after the quotations are to pages of the manuscript. Spaced dots denote an omission.

comforted and they explained chess. And 'Omar said 'there is no harm in it; it has do to with war. (7b)

[The reference is to 'Omar B. Al-Khattab, Caliph; died 644]

Abu'l-H. an-Naqq relates from b. Bassam from al-Fadl b. al-H. from Hamid b. Mas'ada from 'Ur'ura b. Yazid from Sha'bba from Zaid b. Sa'id b. al-Musayyab that he saw no harm in playing chess provided there was no stake on it. 'Ur'ura said that he understood that good men among the Arabs and kings had played chess and that they were not blamed nor was their evidence rejected as lawful. (8b)

[Sa'id b. Al-Musayyab, born 636/7, died 709-10]

A. b. A. relates from M. b. 'Al. b. Saif as-Sijastani from abu Said 'Omar b. Shaiba from abu 'Asim from Musa b. 'Othman b. Yaqtin that he said that he had asked al-H questions about the games of chess and nard, and that he said there is no harm in them provided there is no stake or neglect of prayer or dereliction of duty through it. (9a)

[Al-Hasan al-Basri, d. 728]

Abu Ja'far M. b. Yazid relates from abu 'aun al-Madani from az-Zubair from al-H. b. 'Obaidallah b. al-Mundhar from Safiyya bint Hisham b. 'Urwa that she used to play chess, she and her sisters A'isha and 'Ubaida binat Hisham b. 'Urwa and he did not disapprove of their doing so except on a cloudy day or evening when he said 'put it away', for it is the hour of prayer to God. (9a)

[Hisham b. 'Urwa, 680/1 - 763/4]

Is. b. Ibr. al-Qazzaz relates from Lawin from Jabir from Mughira who saw ash-Sha'bi neglect to stand up for prayer, being intent on chess. (10a)

[Ash-Sha'bi, d. 722/3]

A.b.A relates from A.b.al-H from Ya. from Rashdin from 'Aqil from Rabi'a b. Abu Ar. that he saw no harm in chess but it was abominable during the time of prayer. (11b)

[Rabi'a b. Abu 'Abdarrahman, d. 703/4]

Abu Hassan b. 'Othman relates that abu al-Mulaih said I have a son who is addicted to chess and I cannot prevent him. And I saw the Apostle of God in a dream and complained to him, saying my son is devoted to chess and I cannot prevent him. And he said there is no harm in that. (11b)

Al-Ghalani relates from al-'Ubtî from his father that a man of the Syrian army asked permission to see 'Abdalmalik b. Marwan who was playing chess. He said to a boy, cover it up. He examined the sheikh and when he spoke to him he found he was unlearned. Then he said uncover it, for nothing is *haram* to the ignorant. Some ascribe this to al-Walid b. Yazid. (12a)

['Abdalmalik b. Marwan, Caliph 684-705; al-Walid b. Yazid, Caliph 743-4]

From these various briefly recorded opinions, we can see that chess did not by any means incur wholesale disapproval; it was considered harmless if played in moderation and not played for money. (The numerous admonitions suggest that in practice, stakes usually *were* involved.)

It is notable that chess was played by Arab men and women alike, both old and young, educated and ignorant. A few more examples give some interesting glimpses of chessplayers and their circumstances: --

Ibr. b. Fahd relates from M. b. Marwan from Mahbub b. al-H. that Khalid al-Hadha' said that M. b. Sirin and he entered the prison to see two men of the Quraish and they were playing chess; M. said to one of them, 'Move this, put that there.' (8a)

[B. Sirin, d. 728]

Al-Kuraimi relates from al-Hakim b. Marwan from 'Omar b. Bishair who said that he saw ash-Sha'bi shaving in his cloak and he was playing chess, and when he made a wager he covered his head with his cloak. (9b)

Al-Alabi relates from as-Salat b. Mas'ud from Safyan b. 'Abdalmalik from 'Omair who said that he had seen ash-Sha'bi playing chess by signalling with a reed or with the feather he was shaping. By his side was his cloak, and when people spoke to him he covered his head in it. (10a)

'A. b. A relates from M. b. Wahb al-Muqri from M. b. I. b. Yusuf al-Tamimi from al-Bawaiti that he heard ash-Shafi'i say that Sa'id b.

Jubair used to play chess blindfold, and this is how he played. He turned his head away, and was told that his opponent played thus. He then said that he played thus, and so he signified what he intended because he did not play outwardly unless he had considered and was satisfied with it. (10b)

[Sa'id b. Jubair, 665-714]

Abu'l-H. al-Adwi relates from his father who said that 'Obaidallah b. al-H. the qadi passed some of his equals and they were playing chess and he greeted them saying to you and to you, and they were inattentive so he refused his evidence after that. And one said to him, why did you stop playing chess. He said that he did not refuse his evidence because of his playing but because of his absent-mindedness when he did not return his greeting. Judges accept the evidence of chessplayers as lawful. It is recorded of Abas b. Mu'awia the qadi that he played, and that ash-Shafi'i accepted the evidence of players. (12a)

Abu'l-H. al-Asdi relates from abu Shara'a who said that one of his companions was invited by S. b. al-Mughira, and he was expert in chess. He introduced him to his house and brought him food and he ate and drank. Then he brought the chess and the board and sat while we played, until we overturned the board. And when a book on it was new, he said there is a new book on it which establishes the blessing of God on it. Accordingly he played chess. (12a)

The writer proceeds to explain how chessplayers are divided into five classes, and to state the appropriate odds to be given when players of different classes meet. The top class is called *al'iyat*:

. . . The class of *al'iyat* included Sharara, Jabir, Rabrab, Abu'n-Ma'am, Al-Adli and ar-Razi and others not named. The best of them were Rabrab and ar-Razi. . . .

. . . After these is the class of the *mutaqariba*. They win from the *al'iyat* two or three games in ten according to their excellence in their class. Between the *al'iyat* and the *mutaqariba* is the difference of knight's pawn on the queen's wing, and the difference between the weaker of the *mutaqariba* and the *al'iyat* is a centre pawn. Next the third class. Between them and the *al'iyat* is the difference of a queen. They beat the *mutaqariba* occasionally, just as the *mutaqariba* beat the *al'iyat*, and the best of them are on the verge of surpassing the worst of the *mutaqariba*. Next the fourth class. Between them and the *al'iyat* is the difference of a knight. . . .

Next the fifth class. Between them and the *al'iyat* is the difference of a rook, and what comes after this in the game is contemptible. . . .

. . . Those who are skilled in chess agree that a player when he defeats his opponent 9, 8 or 7 times out of 10 is in a superior class. . . . (13b-14b)

When we read, for example, that a player in the first category can give odds of a queen to a player in the third, we must remember that some of the pieces differed in strength and value from their modern equivalents. The writer defines their relative values thus:

. . . The king is counted beyond value and this is because of his superior dignity. The rook has most value after the king. Its value is a *dirhem*. The value of the knight is $\frac{2}{3}$ *dirhem*. The value of the queen is $\frac{1}{3}$ *dirhem*. Some say $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{8}$ *dirhem*. The value of the bishop is $\frac{1}{4}$ *dirhem*. The bishop which is concordant with the accompanying queen is the more valuable. (14b)

Since the queen only moves diagonally, the assessment of many chess positions depends on whether this piece is 'concordant' with a bishop or with other queens (obtained through the promotion of pawns) -- that is, whether it moves on the same colour of squares. The evaluation of pawns in a variety of positions is treated at some length. For example:

. . . King's pawn and queen's pawn when both together are $\frac{1}{4}$ *dirhem*, the same value as the 2 bishops. . . .

. . . Bishop's pawns and knight's pawns when both together: $\frac{1}{6}$ *dirhem*, . . .

(14b)

A section of the text is devoted to classifying positions in the endgame and stating whether they are won or drawn, for example:

. . . Rook, queen and discordant bishop versus rook is won. (If the queen is concordant with the bishop it is won with ease.) It is related that this happened to ar-Razi. He remained playing it a whole day until night with

one who was inferior to him in the game without winning, and gave it up in disgust. It is won in reality but can be delayed a long time. (15b)

Occasionally the verdict appears to be the same as in modern chess:

. . . 2 rooks versus 2 knights is won. (17a)

. . . rook versus rook and knight: correctly drawn. But is sometimes won when the player is weak as may easily happen. If the player with the extra piece errs, it is not certain that it will injure him, but if the player with the [lone] rook errs, he cannot recover it and the game is won. (16a)

It is evident, however, that a player was deemed to have won if he captured all his opponent's pieces leaving him with a lone king. This would explain such judgements as:

. . . Some say that two knights versus knight can be won by which they mean if the 2 knights can confine the [lone] knight and take away its squares. (15b)

The greater part of the manuscript presents some seventy diagrams of chess problems, together with their solutions. The problems are extracted from works which are otherwise lost, deriving from the famous al-Adli and as-Suli; Abu Zachariya distinguishes carefully between the two. In preserving this otherwise lost material, the manuscript of Abu Zachariya Jahja Ben Ibrahim al-Hakim supplies a major contribution to chess history.

The New Chess: Luis de Lucena and Ruy Lopez

With the completion of the *reconquista* and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the Jewish Golden Age comes to an end.

It happens that this epoch of upheaval in Jewish history was the time of a major transformation of the game of chess. The introduction of new rules -- notably those which greatly enhanced the powers of queen and bishop, and thus dramatically speeded up the tempo of the game -- resulted in a form of chess essentially identical to that which is played today.¹⁰⁵ It happens,

further, that the new chess and the situation of the Jews in the Spain of the Inquisition are reflected within a single book: *Repetición de amores y arte de axedres* (1497?), by Luis de Lucena.¹⁰⁶

The very surname Lucena -- like others such as Rojas, Franco, Montalbán and Torrijos in Castile, or Santangel and de la Caballería in Aragon -- betrayed the origins and background of its bearer, placing him unmistakably in a family of Jewish *conversos*, *marranos* or *anusim*. The surname 'de Lucena' had begun to figure prominently at the start of the fifteenth century, following the series of pogroms against Jews which led to mass conversions to Christianity. In accordance with a widespread practice of naming converted Jews after their place of baptism,¹⁰⁷ the city of Lucena (on the road from Cordoba to Malaga) gave its name to innumerable *conversos*. Lucena had been a noted centre of Jewish settlement since pre-Islamic times, its name deriving possibly from the Hebrew *Eliassana*; during the first caliphates, it was considered a Jewish city.¹⁰⁸

The role of the *conversos* in the Spain of the fifteenth century -- their contribution to virtually every area of social

¹⁰⁵ Eales (pp. 72-3) estimates that the new rules were introduced not more than a decade or two before Lucena's book. He notes that by 1512 (the date of Damiano's *Questo libro da imparare giocare a scachi et de le partite*) the medieval game had been completely superseded.

¹⁰⁶ The original edition, published in Salamanca, is very rare. There are two printed copies in Spain (El Escorial and University of Salamanca) and two in the USA (Library of Congress and Cleveland Library). There is one copy in the British Museum and one in the Burgun Bücherei in Brussels. A copy in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, which in 1953 was used for a facsimile edition of 250 copies, is now missing. Manuscript copies are in Siena and Rio de Janeiro (a recent Brazilian edition is based on the latter). An edition published by the University of North Carolina in 1954 contains an introduction by Jacob Ornstein which remains the most complete study of the work from the literary and historical standpoint.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Caro Baroja: 'when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella ordered that baptism be given to Moors and Jews, many prominent men took the name of the place where this happened.'

¹⁰⁸ In the 13th century, the Arab geographer and traveller Al-Idrisi wrote that 'in Lucena, the Jews are richer and more powerful than in any other Islamic place.' The town still preserves many characteristics of its Jewish past. Its best known brasswork handicraft pieces are candlesticks, and include the traditional Jewish seven-armed one, known locally as *menorah*.

In 853 Natronai Gaon wrote that 'Alisana [Arabic for Lucena] was a Jewish place with no gentiles at all.' The Jews earned their living from olive groves, vineyards, agriculture, commerce and crafts.

life¹⁰⁹ -- has been the object of much study,¹¹⁰ as has the paradox of their partly central and partly marginal status: decisively involved in almost every important event, yet menaced by arbitrary pressures and resentment on the grounds of their origin. As Hernando de Pulgar, official chronicler of the Catholic Kings, put it: 'I do not understand how you manage it. You reject us as relatives, but you choose us as lords.' For the most part, a pretence to the outside world was coupled with the continuation of their own way of life.

The Lucenas attained no less intellectual distinction -- notably within the medical profession -- than other *conversos*. A doctor 'Maestre Martin de Lucena', physician to King John II of Castile, appears in accounts of various court intrigues; his son Francisco was also court physician, and a certain Alfonso de Lucena is mentioned in 1451 as physician of the Duchess of Burgundy. In a different sphere, one Fernando de Lucena¹¹¹ contributed to a topical literary polemic in 1460 by translating into French the pro-feminist treatise *Triunfo de las donas*; and Juan de Lucena (the second son of Maestre Martin) established himself as a printer in Puebla de Montalban and became the first publisher of Hebrew books in Spain.¹¹²

The latter must not be confused with the royal 'ambassador' (counsellor)¹¹³ of the same name, whose son was the author of the chess book. The *embaxador* Don Juan Remirez de Lucena was a humanist¹¹⁴ whose Jewish origin -- which he explicitly admitted

¹⁰⁹ According to Caro Baroja, who examined inquisitorial documentation, the most frequent occupation among *conversos* was that of 'administrator' or lessee; in addition, independent artisans were predominantly *conversos*. I shall presently mention some *conversos* active on a higher social level.

¹¹⁰ A basic reference work is José Amador de los Rios, *Historia social política y religiosa de los Judíos de España y Portugal*. See also e.g. Américo Castro, *La Realidad histórica de España* (México, 1954); and more recently, Stephen Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas* (Madrid, 1978).

¹¹¹ Caro Baroja (p. 419) gives a detailed genealogical tree of this Lucena branch.

¹¹² Together with his daughters Teresa and Catalina, he printed the first Jewish books around 1480 and a 'Machzor'. See Azon Freimann, *A Gazetteer of Hebrew Printing* (New York, 1946), p. 51.

¹¹³ The title is misunderstood by Van der Linde, p. 328. Much of his information on Luis de Lucena is speculative.

¹¹⁴ Literary historians designate Juan de Lucena as one of the most significant pre-*Erasmists*. See, e.g., Rafael Lapesa, *De la Edad Media a nuestros días* (Gredos, 1971).

-- was well known to his contemporaries. In the course of the philosophical dialogue presented in his treatise *De Vita Beata*, we read:

Do not think that I shall be ashamed when you say that my parents are Hebrew. They are, of course, and I love this. Because, if antiquity is nobility, who else comes from so far?¹¹⁵

This and other writings by Juan de Lucena, chief among them the *Epistola exhortatoria a las letras*, were devoted in large measure to a defence of his people. Like Hernando de Pulgar, Juan protested to the Crown against the Inquisition.¹¹⁶ His intellectual attitude reflected the peculiar position of the *conversos* who maintained varying degrees of adherence to their Jewish cultural and religious heritage while outwardly conforming to Catholicism. Irrespective of how sincere their conversion to Christianity might be, they could not help, as newcomers, perceiving the abuses of ecclesiastical life with particular clarity. In his writings, Juan sarcastically attacked the church hierarchy (proposing, for example, to end the war in Granada by sending an army of priests, paid out of the church's treasures). He expressed aversion for the church's liturgical ceremonies -- with their repetition of Latin formulae often misunderstood by the preachers themselves -- which to the Hebrew sensibility seemed pompous and empty, for 'God understands only the language of the heart.' Many of his ideas are

¹¹⁵ Cf. also: 'If a man says that his ancestors are Jewish, . . . you call him a *marrano*, lower than the dust of the earth. Oh unbelievers, Christians who say this! Your eyes are blinded'. Several times Juan de Lucena discusses religious differences between Christendom and Judaism and his book was forbidden by the Inquisition.

¹¹⁶ See J.N.Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms 1250-1516*, vol. 2, 1410-1516: *Castilian Hegemony* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 454-5:

'He was a more important figure than Pulgar, the humanist, protonotary apostolic, and former royal counsellor, Juan de Lucena, also protested to the Crown against the Inquisition. Among other points he remarked: "Holy Mother church destroyed more, and more poisonous heresies, without burning so much wood". But his main argument was a theological one, that the Inquisition had no right to punish *conversos*. They (or their ancestors) had been baptised by force or out of fear. According to the opinion of the Theologian Duns Scotus, their baptism was therefore invalid, and they were not heretics but simply "unfaithful", outside the Church and its jurisdiction. They should be treated with clemency, and convinced by arguments. Lucena was "refuted" by Alfonso Ortiz, a royal chaplain; he was made to recant in public in Cordoba and his work was condemned.'

echoed in his son's book.

For many years, Juan de Lucena's powerful position at court saved him from the clutches of Torquemada, but in 1505 he was finally arrested and imprisoned in Zaragoza. A letter has been preserved which he addressed to King Ferdinand, recalling his past services and complaining of royal ingratitude. He was finally 'reconciled' by the Inquisition.

In the preamble of *Repetición de amores y arte de axedres*, the authorship of the book is stated as follows:

Por Lucena, hijo del muy sapientísimo doctor y reverendo prothonotario don Johan Ramírez de Lucena, embajador y del consejo de los Reyes nuestros señores, estudiando en el preclarísimo studio de la muy noble cibdad de Salamanca.

We note that Luis de Lucena needs only to name his father to establish his own credentials. The fact that he presents himself as a student of Salamanca University is also of significance. The University was at that time dominated by *conversos* to such an extent that relations with the 'old Christians' were fraught with conflict. In an episode related by Caro Baroja, the Christians of the *Colegio Viejo de San Bartolomé* appealed to Queen Isabella, who ordered the expulsion of *conversos*, but the latter were in a position of sufficient power to defy the order.¹¹⁷

Two somewhat curious features of Lucena's book are evident in the title itself. For one thing, the work deals with subjects which appear wholly disparate: a tract about love and women is amalgamated with a treatise on chess. In addition, the word *repetición* requires some comment. The *repetición* was the customary form of teaching at the University of Salamanca. The professor would read out a text and furnish it with pertinent comments, chains of syllogisms and quotations from other authors related to the subject; in view of the scarcity of books, the transmission of knowledge had to be chiefly oral and based on repetition. The opening sections of *Repetición de amores*, which

¹¹⁷ Caro Baroja, vol. 2, p. 228. A similar incident is noted by Gilman (p. 274): on the basis of the statute of 'purity of blood', the College attempted to expel a student of Jewish descent whose arrogance had given offence. The student refused to obey. The College again appealed to the Queen, who answered: 'Throw him out of the window if he doesn't want to go out through the door.'

have been described as an antifeminist treatise¹¹⁸ and which continue that controversy between misogyny and pro-feminism that Fernando de Lucena had also pursued, imitate the form of such lectures.

It required considerable courage for Luis de Lucena to write the first part of the book in the prevailing atmosphere of Inquisitorial Spain. The book begins with a Latin epigram composed by Francisco de Quirós as a homage to Lucena, followed by another more extensive Latin poem, written by Lucena himself, designed to compare love battles with chess battles. The next parts are a preamble and an 'exordium' dedicated to certain ladies. In a scene strongly reminiscent of Act IV of *La Celestina*,¹¹⁹ the famous tragicomedy of Fernando de Rojas, Lucena tells the story of how, while a student in Salamanca, he fell in love with a girl and saw no other way to approach her than through the services of a go-between, an old woman whom he engaged to transmit his love letters. The scheme proved futile; the old procuress was rejected by the girl. The whole story gives Lucena a reason to write the *Repetición* about love and women, following the pattern of the lessons of the university in which he was a student. 'The order of my *Repetición* does not differ from the one used in the scientific lessons', states Lucena.

Even in this part of the book, the game of chess receives a mention. In the house of the go-between (the 'old mother who is a

¹¹⁸ See the study by Barbara Matulka, *An Antifeminist Treatise of Fifteenth-Century Spain: Lucena's 'Repetición de amores'* [New York, 1930].

¹¹⁹ In *The Jewish Contribution to Civilisation* (London, 1938), pp. 95-6, Cecil Roth writes: 'Spain's most important contribution to European literature before *Don Quixote* was *Calisto and Meliboea*, better known as *Celestina*, first printed in 1499. It is a tragicomedy in prose of two lovers, and was marvellously popular in its day, being published time after time and translated into many European languages. In the judgement of the great critic, Menéndez y Pelayo, the work would have deserved the first place in Spanish literature, had Cervantes not written his masterpiece. . . .

'Little was known about Fernando de Rojas, the author of this work, until the recent discovery of an Inquisitorial record, which made it clear that he was a *converso*, i.e. a baptised Jew, hampered for that reason in the exercise of his profession and, to boot, married to the daughter of another *converso* who had been put on trial for Judaising.

'The importance of *Celestina* in European literature, as has been indicated, was vast. But for our purpose it is enough to point out its influence on William Shakespeare. Above all, it had a distinct share in the ancestry of *Romeo and Juliet*, who were, as a modern critic has put it, "own children" to Rojas' tragic lovers. Similarly, the "old bawd" who sustains the comic part foreshadows that most perfect of Shakespearian characters, Juliet's nurse.'

good friend of mine', in Lucena's words), love and chess are played together, in front of a wine jug. Chess here involves gambling, betting money -- it is no more an aesthetic enjoyment than it was in the Islamic cultures.

The part of the book specifically devoted to chess carries an extensive dedication to Prince Juan, the heir to the throne. This dedication is significant for dating the work, which gives no explicit indication of either its date or its publisher.¹²⁰ Prince Juan (born in 1478) died as early as 1497. Since the Prince's occupations to which the dedication refers -- and from which it proposes relaxation through chess -- are not those of a child, we may infer that Lucena's book was written near the end of the Prince's life.

Lucena states that the purpose of his chess treatise is to record 'all the best play which I have seen in Rome and the whole of Italy, France and Spain'.¹²¹ Yet the pioneering achievement of the work seems not to have been fully appreciated by the author. The fact is that Lucena's book is not only the oldest preserved work on the modern version of chess;¹²² it is also the earliest surviving printed book devoted to the playing of the game rather than to moral reflections which use chess as an analogy. The earlier printed work by the Lombard Friar Jacobus de Cessolis -- *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium*¹²³ -- is not a

¹²⁰ Typographical evidence shows that the book was printed by the German Leonardus Hutz and the Navarrist Lope Sanz; see Eales, p. 73, and *Catalogue of Books Printed in the XVth Century now in the British Museum*, B.M. Vol. 8, 'Spain & Portugal'.

¹²¹ The famous 'Lucena position' is of fundamental importance to chess endgame technique; see e.g. Reuben Fine, *Basic Chess Endings* [1941], reprint (New York, 1960), p. 291.

¹²² A Catalan book by Francesch Vicent, *Jochs partits del scachs en nombre de 100*, was printed in Valencia in 1495, but no known copies of it survive. See *Catalogue of Books printed in the XVth Century now in the British Museum*, vol. X (Spain and Portugal), 1971, p. xxv.

¹²³ Written in Latin around the year 1300, this sermon was published at the end of the thirteenth century and became a best-seller all over Europe. The English version entitled *The Game and Playe of the Chesse* was published twice by William Caxton, in Bruges in 1474/5 and at London in about 1483; the latter edition was one of the first books printed in England. See Eales, p. 67, and Kenneth Matthews, *British Chess* (London, 1948), p. 14. Eales adds that 'the "Liber de ludo Scaccorum" in a list of books owned by Henry V in 1422 is probably also de Cessolis.'

An Italian translation was published as *Volgarizzamento del libro de Costumi e degli offizii de'nobili sopra il Giuoco degli scacci di Frate Jacopo da Cessole* (Milan, 1829).

technical chess treatise but a sermon, in which chess purports to illustrate the various strata of society (king, church, judges, commoners...).¹²⁴

Lucena treats the new chess as a matter of course, though it is evident that both versions of the game co-existed at the time; in explaining the rules, Lucena distinguishes carefully between the new game (called '*de la dama*') and the traditional way of playing ('*el viejo*'). The bulk of the treatise consists of 150 chess problems (with woodcut diagrams), of which approximately half belong to medieval chess and the other half to modern chess. A section of the text deals with gamesmanship:

If you are playing chess during the night with only one candle, put it on your left side if you can, because it is thus less disturbing. In case you play during the day, try to seat your opponent facing the light, . . .

This game is better if your opponent has been eating and drinking well. But for yourself, only water and never wine. When you have to play chess a long time, a light meal is convenient, . . .

In the poem which appears near the beginning of the book, Lucena compares love battles with chess battles, but subsequent commentators have been disinclined to trace connections between the two parts, concentrating on either the amatory material or the chess treatise according to their special interest. Both parts nonetheless offer insights into Lucena's attitudes and personality. The view of Christianity and ecclesiastical practices from a standpoint at least partially alien is evident throughout, and finds expression in continual sarcasms.¹²⁵ The figure of 150

¹²⁴ Cessolis compares the chessboard to the city of Babylon. He names the eight pawns as Labourer, Blacksmith, Weaver, Merchant, Physician, Innkeeper, Tax-collector and Gambler. These are the common people, drawn up in front of the nobility, 'to whom they give power and life'. The fact that sermons could readily use such analogies testifies to the popularity of chess at the time. See Kenneth Matthews, loc. cit.

Das Schach oder König-Spiel by Gustavus Selenus (Leipzig, 1616) is another morality book on similar lines.

¹²⁵ The scintillating sardonic attitudes of this establishment were part of its rather special literature which was not infrequently suppressed by the Inquisition. One hundred and twenty years after Luis de Lucena, the *Questions of Zapata* (1629) which were rather similar in style, but perhaps not so guarded as the work of Lucena were still part of the self same sarcastic intellectual approach. The licentiate Zapata, being appointed Professor

chess problems gives rise to the comment: 'like a complete rosary'. Pronouncements like 'The beauty we must search for is in Heaven' would have been taken ironically by a public composed largely of *conversos* such as the students of Salamanca. The language, style and manner of reasoning of the university professors are parodied, and Lucena emulates his father's strictures on the church's ceremonies and mechanical prayers.

I shall not quote Lucena's description of the new game of chess, since such a description is presented in a later work which I examine in detail in the next chapter. I shall merely note at this point that the modern version of the game had secured complete acceptance by 1561, the date of the next major landmark in chess publishing, which bears the following title:

LIBRO DE LA

INVENCION LIBERAL Y ARTE

del juego del Axedrez, muy vtil y prouechosa:
assi para los que de nuevo quisieren depren-
der a jugarlo, como para los que lo saben jugar.

*Compuesta aora nueuamente por Ruylopez de Sigura cle-
rigo, vezino dela villa Cafra. Dirigida al muy illustre se-
nor don Garcia de Toledo, ayo y mayordomo ma-
yor del Serenissimo Principe don
Carlos nuestro senor*

In its form, this book represents a departure from the typically medieval treatise based on a collection of chess problems.¹²⁶ It contains sections on the origins and utility of

of Theology at the University of Salamanca, posed a series of some 66 questions which he presented to a committee of electors of 1629. They were extremely uncomfortable for the inquisition to answer and were of course suppressed. They are however only one example of a plethora of such brilliant works which emanated from Salamanca University. Luis de Lucena in *Repeticion de Amores* was part of the pattern. (The *Questions of Zapata* are included in *Selected Works of Voltaire*, translated by Joseph McCabe, London 1948.)

Luis de Lucena produced his chess book in a special academic university atmosphere, where Jewish intellectuals were transitorily predominant, and shared a common sense of humour. For instance, his ironical quotations in *Repetition de Amores* of St.Paul about Chastity: 'I wish that all men were like me, with no carnal knowledge of women'. In other words, the extinction of mankind.

¹²⁶ See Eales, pp. 82-3.

chess;¹²⁷ a collection of chess openings;¹²⁸ general advice to players, and a code of laws for the game; and a criticism of the writings of the Italian Damiano.

The author identifies himself as *Ruylopez de Sigura clerigo, vezino dela villa Cafra* -- that is, he states his birthplace (Segura), his profession (priest) and his home town (Zafra), in the manner customary at that time. Such information as we have about Ruy Lopez supplies grounds for the conjecture that he too was of Jewish descent. This conjecture is not invalidated (as is often thought) by the fact that he was a priest, since the church contained *converso* priests in large numbers (the Bishop of Burgos was a famous ex-Rabbi). The ancient town of Segura de Leon (on the border with Portugal, some 30 kilometres south-west of Zafra) was a Jewish centre in the fifteenth century. Another famous Ruy Lopez, born not far from Segura in the Portuguese Evora, was a Jew and became physician to Queen Elizabeth I.

Ruy Lopez possessed diplomatic skill (in 1559 he was sent on

Murray states that Ruy Lopez 'belongs essentially to the school of chess which we are accustomed to associate with the name of Philidor. In his analysis, and especially in the games in his second book, we may trace the genesis of that theory of Pawn-play which Philidor reduced to a system two centuries later.' He notes that Ruy Lopez gave the slang word *gambit* (originally an Italian wrestling term) an international currency. (Murray, pp. 813-17.)

¹²⁷ In this connection, Ruy Lopez gives many quotations from Cessolis (translated into Spanish by Reyna as recently as 1549).

¹²⁸ Murray (on p. 816) prints Ruy Lopez's analysis of the chess opening that begins 1 e2-e4 e7-e5 2 Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6 3 Bf1-b5. This opening is known internationally as the Spanish Game, but in English chess literature it is traditionally called 'the Ruy Lopez'. Of its fortunes, the Russian chess master and theorist Anatoly Bikhovsky has written: 'For a long time, the Spanish [Game] was not popular. Preference was given to gambits and sharp, open games. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, when a basically new strategic approach to the openings asserted itself, the Spanish Game became a widespread and formidable weapon.' Bikhovsky explains that at that time, the 'Ruy Lopez' was thought to secure such a large advantage for the player of the white pieces that some players seriously suggested altering the basic starting position of the game!

The above quotation is from page vii of Bikhovsky's highly specialized monograph entitled *Spanish (Ruy Lopez): Chigorin* (London: Batsford, 1983). This book devotes over 100 pages to analysing a single position which can arise after 11 moves of the Spanish Game; similar monographs which are currently available analyse many other branches of this opening in no less detail. Such is the present state of a process that was set in train by the treatise of 1561....

a diplomatic mission to Rome), wide erudition, and a broad-minded approach not only to chess but to philosophical matters. His book is virtually non-Christian. The patron through whom he had obtained a post at court was the well-known *converso* Arias Montano (1527-98), who was born in Fregenal de la Sierra, a mere ten kilometres from Segura. The year 1561, when *La Invencion Liberal y Arte del Juego de Axedrez* was published, was a turning-point in the theological struggle for power. The so-called 'broad-minded tendency', represented by Humanisto lilio Arias Montano, Gardonal Garranza and others, was overthrown by the ultra-orthodox inquisitors led by the Count of Lemos. In dedicating his book to D. Garcia de Toledo, Ruy Lopez asks for his patronage 'in view of the envious enemies'.

These hints that Ruy Lopez may have been a *converso* are inconclusive. It is notable, however, that at the time of the expulsion, Segura de Leon was the principal staging town on the road to Portugal, the chief route of emigration taken by those Jews -- estimated at over two thirds of the Jewish population of Spain -- who chose to leave the land which had been their home for 1,500 years in preference to renouncing their faith.

Postscript

By reason of their time and place, the first poem and riddle reproduced below stand somewhat apart from the rest of this chapter. I include them here, however, because of their affinity with Ibn Ezra. The second poem in this postscript will also be viewed in relation to the Ibn Ezra poems examined previously.

In the following poem, dated circa 1513, it is still the medieval form of chess that is described. The author is Shlomo ben Mazel Tov,¹²⁹ an aesthete, belletrist and editor in Constantinople from

131 The Hebrew text is in Steinschneider (pp. 198-9), who reproduces it from the book *Dibrey Hephhez: 'Acceptable words' or extracts from various unprinted works of eminent Hebrew authors* by Hirsch Edelman, part 1 (London, 1853). The latter book reprints the text from a Bodleian manuscript; see *Bodleian Catalogue*, p. 2371 N. 3053.

The poem is translated into English here for the first time. It contains numerous biblical allusions. Line 8: cf. Genesis 25:3. Line 11: Nahum 2:4. Line 13: Proverbs 30:31. Line 21: Psalms 9:6. Line 22: Nahum 3:2; Ezekiel 13:18, 20. Line 24: Lamentations 3:11. Line 25: Nehemiah 11:35. Line 27: Isaiah 5:2. Line 34: Isaiah 59:10. Line 38: Isaiah 3:3.

1513 to 1549.

שיר על שחוק האישקאק להרב שלמה (בן) מול טוב.

שמעני מתי שכל ואישם בני מדע וכל חכמי חדשים
 לשורר [אשורר?] שיר במלחמה עצומה אשר נלחם אדם בערב וכושם
 מלובשים בשריונות ותהרה וסוהרה ובהרמים למושים
 החורים [סדורים?] הם עלי מורים שמנה ובתיהם הלא ארבע וששים
 5 מלכים נועצו יחדיו בהכמה בערמה קבצו דמין חוגשים
 ומערכה כנגד מערכה בארצותם כעדדי צאן נמושים
 ושגל נצבה על יד ימינם כמו בלה כלולה עם לחשים
 ועמם יעלו שרי גדודים ואיטורים לאומים או למושים
 ושם סוסים ברחים ואמצים לנתרם יחדיו איים ודועשים
 10 ופילים בענקים הגדולים במגדלים לגבר וחלשים
 ורוק יברוק ורכב אש פלוח יהלך פז ויורעלו ברשים
 ורגלים יתנו שם מלפנים בלי ילאו הלא רצים וחשים
 ואחד יעלה גש באחד כמו זרזר וכזאב על הישים
 ומסעם ומצאם אספר לכל אוהב לכל תוקים וחורים
 15 שבליהם ודרכי מהלקחם דעו וראו אנשים מק ונשים
 בהיכל יעמוד מלך וגאון ועל ארבע צדדיו כנהשים
 הלא ישך לזר קרב בדגלו ויהריב את נוה ביתו וישים
 ומלכה עותה דרכה במהלכה (?) ובין (?) ערכה כמגרשים (?) וראשים
 ודגלי ישר מהלכו מעות הוא בעת ילחם אנשים
 20 ואם יגבר ועלה ראש מסלה או ילבש עדי יעל תחשים
 ויקרב אל מעון מלך ושבוה וכל עריו למלחמה נחושים
 וסם חור ומרכבה מריבה מרקדה מצודת נפשים
 וקל מנשרים מהלכו וגברו מאריות בין חמושים
 דרכו מדרו לשני עבריו והאחד במישור בס (?) יקשים
 25 ושר צבא יגבר מהנותו כאיש חל אשר מגוא תרשים
 והא חק [והרוק?] יתרוק שן על משנאו וידו רחבו מים וגורשים

לכל איבים ושוכים את גהדיו ועל פגם הלא יעלו באושים
 ופל יעפל להלחם ולעלות ועליו יתנו און החורים
 מעות הוא ולא יחבן דרכו שלשה הם והם עזם וקשים

והרגלי יונב נהלשים	30 ואם נצה ויתחרה במלכה
והופרים מגבורתם ובושים	והלכח במלכותהם ורשחם
בלי יפול בהוך פדה ומוקשים	ודך לבב הלא ישוב לביתו
ונהז מעות ביהם גרושים	ועת שח רום אנשים ועבדים
וכעורים עלי קדים מגישים	והשיגם בעצמה בין מצרים
ואין עזרה בערה ממערישם	35 והשיע למלך יהנו קל
ונהז מת ואסיר בהבישים	וישח רום שח בלי עתו וקמט
כעל ים ישורח או צאן קדשים	אז שיד יענו צריו במהל
לכל הבם ושד וגבן להשים	שלמה בן למזל טוב ייזרח

POEM ON THE GAME OF *ISHKAK* BY RABBI SHLOMO BEN MAZEL TOV

Give ear you people of intelligence and great men possessed of knowledge, and all who are skilled in magic arts	1
As I sing a song about a mighty battle which was fought by Edom against Arabia and the Ethiopians	2
Dressed in armour and coat of mail with buckler and with sharpened spears	3
They are splendid upon eight rows and their houses number sixty-four	4
Kings take counsel together with wisdom, and with prudence they gather a host of excited people	5
Army against army in their lands are spread out like flocks of sheep	6
And the queen [<i>Shegal</i>] is standing at their right hand like a bride garlanded with magic spells	7
And with them go up commanders of battalions and Assyrians, Leumim or Letushim	8
And horses are there, dappled and red; at their snorting the coastlands tremble and quake	9
And elephants like great giants, with towers for strong and weak	10

[whose mouth spits] lightning and shoots forth chariots of flaming fire so that cypresses are made to tremble	1 1
And foot soldiers are stationed in front of them They run quickly, never tiring.	1 2
And one rises up and draws near to another like a warhorse or like a wolf falling upon goats.	1 3
I will tell of their comings and goings, thee it to every friend To all who search and seek knowledge.	1 4
Know and see their paths and the ways of their divisions you men, children and women.	1 5
In the palace stands the king in majesty and on all four sides, like snakes,	1 6
He is ready to strike and stranger who approaches his banner And attempts to destroy and lay waste his habitation	1 7
And the queen travels a twisted path and [between her path?] like open spaces (?) and heads	1 8
And the foot soldier marches ahead, but turns aside when he fights the weak.	1 9
And if he prevails and reaches the top of the highway, then he will clothe himself in finery and put on sandals of fine leather	2 0
And he will draw near to the dwelling-place of the King and his abode and all his cities uprooted for his war	2 1
And the horse gallops and a quarrelsome chariot bounds forward, hunting men's lives	2 2
And swifter than eagles are his movements And they are stronger than lions among armed men.	2 3
His ways are devious on both sides and one on the plain lays a fowler's snare	2 4

And the general strengthens his camps like a valiant man from the valley of the craftsmen	25
And he grinds his teeth against his enemies and his hands are broader than the sea, and they drive out	26
All their enemies and capture their troops, [wild grapes arise?] and over their corpses a stench goes up (?).	27
The elephant goes up boldly to fight and they [attribute to him] wickedness and wicked designs.	28
He is crooked and he does not keep to straight paths. Three are his moves and they are strong and harsh	29
But if he wins he contends with a queen. And the foot soldiers attack the weak	30
And they are caught in their trap and in their net, and they feel ashamed and disappointed over their own strength	31
And the soft hearted returns to his home so that he does not fall into a trap or snare	32
And when the pride of men and servants is brought low and they are driven out of the house where they dwell	33
They are overtaken with might in the straits and they are like blind men groping along walls	34
They call to the king to save them but there is no help in their distress before those who drive them out	35
And then the pride of the Shah is brought low and he is snatched away before his time and loses his life ['becomes dead'] or is bound among the prisoners	36
And his enemies then sing and dance as the holy flock [Israel] once sang by the sea.	37
Shlomo son of Mazel Tov sings (his song) for every wise man, every prince, everyone skilled in magic charms.	38

The queen moves diagonally, as does the elephant, but the latter only moves over three squares. With the exception of the designation of the queen, this poem is evidently an imitation, in terms of composition and particular expressions, of Ibn Ezra's *Verses on the Game of Chess*.

The following riddle is similarly ascribed to Ben Mazel Tov by David Kahana:¹³⁰

ומה ארץ אשר אינה אדמה ובה אישים וכל מיני בהמה
ועת תפול עלי (?) מלכי אדמה ימותו הם ואין בהם נשמה

And what is a land that is not earth
In which are people and all sorts of animals
And when [disaster] falls upon the Kings of the earth
They die too, yet there is no breath in them.¹³¹

Kahana claims that the author of these lines 'did no more than walk in the footsteps of Ibn Ezra'; compare the similar riddle given on page 78 above.

The date and provenance of the following poem are controversial. It consists of forty-eight metric double lines; the Hebrew original has the same rhyme at the end of the line throughout.

VERSES UPON THE GAME OF /SKAKI/

I will sing aloud a song and it will be [with no empty sound] 1
that I raise my voice as one who is full of joy

I shall write in a book a thing of beauty which has always been 2
an endless delight to me

Lest it be suddenly hidden from me and lest all the people who seek it 3
lose this treasure

Therefore with a voice of poetry and song I will recount to all men 4
this fearful battle

Between two kings who fought together. 5

¹³⁰ Kahana (see above, p. 78 and note 49), p. 150.

¹³¹ Printed by Edelmann. (p. 7) from a Bodleian manuscript, and reprinted by Steinschneider (p. 201); my translation.

One of them is called Kushi, the Ethiopian, and his strength is great.

His enemy who is opposite him goes out among the [common] people and therefore they heartily loathe him 6

Because he considers his enemy as an emaciated runner and as a broken reed in battle. 7

Together they come to fight and they both have an army equal in strength and numbers, (?) each duplicating the other. 8

They have infantry, horses and castles and also a viceroy, second only to the throne 9

The king and the queen dwell amongst their legions with song and rejoicing. 10

They set themselves in array to fight remorselessly in the valley of the field of Shaveh 11

It is eight by eight in every direction, every person within it has a portion of it. 12

When they move together to do battle, then with a terrifying sound 13

We shall hear their trumpet-call as they set out with a great uproar, 14

Because the foot soldiers are sallying forth from their places and they come to wage relentless war. 15

At first they can move but two squares in a straight line along the highway 16

But when they see their enemy before them, it is permissible and praiseworthy for them 17

To seize their enemy by a diagonal movement, and this brings them glory, but not (?) confidence 18

From here they can go only one square at a time and not [as] at first 19

If a foot-soldier can go forward and break through his enemy's camp 20

and nimbly reach

The summit of the hostile camp without suffering any harm 2 1

He will have the same power as a queen, who can go up to any corner 2 2
at any time

When the horses see the legions go up, an uproar is heard 2 3
on the highway

Quickly they run to help the foot-soldiers 2 4
They stride three squares in the valley

Then, by a crooked path, they run like heroes without delay 2 5
or idleness

The castle and the tower of strength [against] siege, 2 6
when he sees the whole battle-front coming towards him

Arises from his place and moves along straight paths 2 7

He has the right to go anywhere in the battle, he can move 2 8
at any moment from the side to a corner

He is second then to the king; 2 9
He runs like a hero, exercising great cunning,

In order to see the battle and to help all who suffer a grievous 3 0
open wound.

He can travel a crooked path, as his heart desires, 3 1
in the midst of battle

The queen can go to all four corners; there is no one 3 2
who can say a word against her

As swift as a gazelle and as strong as a lion, 3 3
she can fight courageously, effortlessly.

The king when he desires to leap, at first, has the legal right 3 4

To go up to a fortress, where he may take his stand, and then 3 5

he has a refuge for a day of distress and destruction

And in his stead he quickly sends a fortress to his [former] 3 6
dwelling place to fight where the wall has fallen

Or if enemies come against him and they shoot, 3 7
he may cut them down [?? with a cry of pain??]

He alone at any time has the right to skip from one square 3 8
to any adjoining square

Each man takes hold of the head of his enemy with great trampling 3 9
of boots and garments rolled in blood

They give their life for the life of their master and are killed 4 0
and much blood flows.

These against those, they fall to the ground mortally wounded 4 1
and expire.

At times the Ethiopians prevail, and the strength of their enemy, 4 2
the white ones, sinks [within?] them

They are all defeated, even the king falls into their net 4 3
[and he is destroyed?]

And they will shed his blood and bring him down, 4 4
with many wounds, as a dead man to the grave.

At other times it happens that the whites prevail 4 5
over the Ethiopians, [inflicting] great anguish.

[Then] we hear the lamenting of the Ethiopians, how they cry out 4 6
and lift up their voice in bitterness as if they were ill

There is no way to save them, nor any healing for their soul. 4 7
Only when they return will they rejoice, and perhaps then glory,
honour and greatness will be theirs.¹³²

¹³² In this poem too, some biblical allusions are worth noting. In line 1, cf. Ecclesiastes 7:6 -- 'as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool.' Line 11: cf. Genesis 14:17.

Steinschneider publishes the poem as anonymous, treating it as an imitation of Ibn Ezra (and dating it tentatively in the sixteenth century).¹³³ He comments: 'But how inferior the imitation is to the original in correct metre and skill!' David Kahana, however, maintains that this is a genuine Ibn Ezra poem, and incorporates it in his collection of Ibn Ezra's works.¹³⁴

In the Hebrew script, the heading of the poem is followed by the letters *lamed yod aleph*. Steinschneider presumes that the letters stand for *li-verakhah yiheyeh amen* -- 'may it be for a blessing, Amen.' Kahana suggests that *yod* has been wrongly substituted for *resh* (a common misreading in manuscripts),¹³⁵ and points out that the amended abbreviation stands for *le-Rabbi Avraham* -- the simple name by which Ibn Ezra was known to his contemporaries. Kahana further argues that if the opening lines are correctly ordered, the name Abraham is spelt out by their initial letters.

Kahana considers that this poem was written in Spain while Ibn Ezra was still a young man -- earlier, that is, than his other two poems on chess. Kahana notes that the rules of the game described in the early poem differ from those of the later poems. His explanation is that whereas the early poem was written in Europe, the second of the three poems describes chess as the poet would have encountered it when travelling in India. In the former case, the description of the two armies as white and black reflected the conflict between European nations and Arab kings; in the latter, it was only natural to represent conflict between black and red....

The fact remains that the poem ascribed by Kahana to Ibn Ezra's early period contains references not only to the double pawn move but to a form of castling -- features normally associated with the modern European version of chess which we shall encounter in the next chapter.

¹³³ Steinschneider, pp. 180-1. The similarity to Ibn Ezra's *Verses on the Game of Chess* is obvious at the beginning ('I will sing . . .'), and at the end, with the description of the colours of Edomim and Kushim.

¹³⁴ The poem figures as No. 117 in Kahana's edition (see note 49 above). Kahana's comments are on pp. 141 and 150.

¹³⁵ For comment on this confusion, see David Diringer, *The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind* (London), p. 305.

Chapter 4

CHESS AND JEWISH LITERATURE: THE POST-RENAISSANCE PERIOD

The Anonymous Treatise *The Delight of Kings*

For an extended description of the new version of chess that emerged in Lucena's time and has endured without fundamental changes up to the present, we turn to the third of the major Hebrew texts in the collection *Shahiludium Traditum in Tribus Scriptis Hebraicis*, contained in Hyde's *De Ludis Orientalibus*. The text bears the title *Ma'adaneh Melech* or *Deliciae Regum* -- 'The Delight of Kings'. The author is anonymous; his identity, and the time and place when the work was written, have been the object of controversy and partly confused speculation. We will turn to these issues after examining the text itself.

The work consists of a short treatise on chess in prose. A curious feature, however, is that before presenting his technical and historical information on the game, the author inserts a preamble -- comprising more than a third of the total material -- which seeks to justify the work by explaining the circumstances of its composition. The original Hebrew is replete with biblical and talmudic quotations (whose sources I have marked below, in the left margin); the anonymous author has constructed page after page of his story by virtually no other means than stringing together quotation after quotation.¹

The text is prefaced by the talmudic motto:

When we were children, we passed for men; now that we are older, will
we pass for children?

(*Baba-Kama*, 92:2)

¹ My translation of *The Delight of Kings* is the first in English. It is given here in somewhat abridged form; spaced dots denote an omission. For the biblical quotations, the English used is that of the Authorised Version. Reference has been made to Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1990); also Solomon Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamentis Concordantiae Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae* (Leipzig, 1896).

The author introduces himself as a man of learning who has been active as a teacher from his youth onwards:

I remember the days of old. It is now 30 years
since my early youth when I diligently presented myself
at the doors of study
Isaiah 8:20 'for instruction and testimony' in order to learn and to teach.

Early in life, he discovered that the world was full of vanity and deceit, and wrote an elegant book in which he condemned gambling:

Psalm 10:7 . . . I entered in a book written by me all the ruses and
devices of this lowly world, for deceit and oppression are
under its tongue. When I made mention of the disgrace
of the time and of its goodness,
I said of the playing of games, it is profane: far be it from you,
and regard it as profanity; and of the joy of those who
Amos 6:13 rejoiced over a thing of naught, I said, the end of
Proverbs 14:13 joy is grief.

Psalm 21:3 . . . and the Lord G-d gave me the tongue of the learned
and I did not restrain
Isaiah 32:4 the expression of my lips from speaking with eloquence.

But now, advanced in years, he is presenting a book which recommends the playing of a game. He confesses that this may seem to contradict his early work:

Cf Gen. 49:21 All the people who observe the splendour of the book with its
beautiful words will see and be amazed that at such a time,
when I have grown old and do not know the day of my death,
I have come to write and compose a book in order to teach
people the science of the playing of games
and to recount its praise.

Indeed, he anticipates a comparison between the two books in favour of the first, and puts into the mouth of an opponent a vehement denunciation of the later work:

Cf I Sam. 15:14 What is this uproar in my ears? . . .

Ezek. 28:12 -- 'you who set the seal on perfection, of perfect beauty,

I Sam. 10:6 Dan. 10:8	who have sat in the seat of G-d in order to judge his people, the people of Israel who sought instruction from your mouth, How you have turned into another man and your splendour has been sadly changed!
Cf Gen. 31:37	. . . I considered the books and submitted the case of both of them to judgement. And I decided between them. The appearance of the one was unlike the appearance of the other; there was no resemblance between them;
Jeremiah 23:28	they were as far apart as east and west; what has the straw to do with the wheat?
Cf Psalm 29:9	In the one, everything cries "Holy"; everything in the other is impure;
Isaiah 44:5, 9:17	the one writes the Lord's name on its hand, the other is godless and an evildoer. What you termed unclean and forbade in your young days, now in your old age, you
Sanhedrin 17a	declare clean and allow it, like a person who offers proof that vermin are clean. . . .
Deut. 9:10, 18:16 Play on Deut. 31:11	And now my father, give glory to the G-d of hosts and on the day of the assembly when all Israel come to pray to the Lord, tear up this book in the presence of them all, tear it
I Kings 11:30	before their eyes into twelve pieces never to be put together again, but entirely consigned to the flames.'

In response to this, the author attests the purity of his motives,
and proposes to recount an incident which will explain them:

Job 5:27	With my own lips I will tell the reason, which was both first and last, why and wherefore I wrote this second book, in order to bear witness to future generations that I am innocent and have done no wrong and you, dear reader, hear it, and know it for your good. ²
----------	--

He now relates how he was called upon to settle a quarrel
between two sons of a friend, which had resulted from the

² The author of the articles on 'Ludi Magister' in *Schachzeitung* (1860) assumes that *The Delight of Kings* begins only at this point; see above, p. 15, note 23.

younger son's habit of gambling:

There was once a man who was an outstanding person in his generation. A perfect man, upright, who walked in the ways of the Torah and the commandments in order to observe and to do them. . . .

Psalm 128:3	He had two sons, like two olive shoots, honoured and beloved, well versed in every kind of learning, both endowed with knowledge and understanding. However, the younger developed a passion for games and he acquired the habit of playing cards for about half an hour after every meal as a means of relaxation, in spite of the fact that his older brother rebuked him affectionately.
Cf Genesis 39:10	And it came to pass that as he spoke to him day by day, but he would not listen, he quarrelled with him and cursed him and struck him.
Exodus 7:23	But even to that he paid not attention; and so his brother
Gen. 37:4	bitterly hated him and could not speak to him peaceably. When their father heard of this sorry business, he was greatly grieved and he approached me,
I Kings 20:43	upset and displeased, and when he told me
Proverbs 10:12	about all the evil which had befallen him he wept. He begged of me to remove the hatred which had stirred up strife between the two brothers.

The author called the brothers together and spoke to them in an attempt to reconcile them. But ...

Esther 1:18	Before I had even finished speaking, the older one started shouting with great contempt and wrath and poured out his anger like fire, fulminating against his younger brother. . .
Cf Esther 2:20	'... The days are over, and the time is past when he was brought up with me as a friend and brother.
Psalm 55:14, 25:14	We used to confide in each other such secrets as the Lord confides to those that fear him,
Deut. 28:13 etc.	when we together studied G-d's Torah and commandments, which we conscientiously fulfilled. . . .
Cf Ex. 32:8	And now, now he has corrupted his ways, and quickly turned aside from the path of goodness and uprightness

which his parents
Cf Job 2:3 taught him and has not held fast to his integrity
Job 34:8 but mixed with evildoers,
Num. 16:26 those wicked people whose minds were set
on busying themselves
Psalm 141:4 with wicked deeds; whose habit was to eat and drink
Cf Ex. 32:6 and then get up to play games, so
Cf Job 1:5 that they spend all their time with cards and dice
and all kinds of games which are the source and origin of all
Hosea 4:2 uncleanness. And these are its consequences: cursing and lying,
murder and theft. Alas for such shame, alas for such disgrace.
Cf Isaiah 22:18 He has brought dishonour upon my father's house,
Psalm 139:22 and for that I do bitterly hate him'.

Job 1:16 Whilst he was still speaking, the younger one started
Gen. 45:2 to weep aloud. He fell his full length upon the ground
1 Sam. 28:20 in shame and consciousness of disgrace.

The author then heard the young brother's defence:

Isaiah 45:13 I aroused him in righteousness and I said to him,
'Stand up, my son;
Joshua 7:10 why are you lying fallen upon your face? Even if
you have made a mistake and have sinned, you can still
Cf Jeremiah 7:5 mend your ways because mercy and
Daniel 9:9 forgiveness belong to the Lord our G-d. . . .'

When I had finished speaking, the lad took courage
and stood up, and this is what he said:

2 Kings 2:12 ' . . . Now, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen
thereof, look and see that my brother, my born brother
who sucked my mother's breasts, seeks my harm. . . .

He said that I play games all day and all night and
waste my time with things of vanity.
Isaiah 38:17 And that I have cast behind me
Torah and learning and the doing of good deeds. . . .

But my witness in Heaven,
Job 16:19 and he that vouches for me is on high. And everyone

Ruth 3:11 in the city of my people,
 everyone within the gates of Zion,
 all those who are distinguished
 in their knowledge of the *halachah*, they all know;
 they will come and declare my innocence.
 For I did not at any time absent myself from the house of study
 even for an hour. . . .

Psalm 118:18 The Lord has chastised me with an evil spirit --
 with depression
I Sam. 16:15 and a sadness of heart which has long troubled me. . . .

Psalm 147:3 And I prayed to the Lord G-d, who
 heals the broken-hearted and who binds up their
 wounds that he might send his word and cure me and remove
Exodus 10:17 this deadly illness from me. And having so prayed, I sought
 the help of the physicians, in accordance with the words
Exodus 21:19 of the Torah 'and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed',
Berachot 60a from which it is deduced that the doctor has been given
 authority to heal. And each one gave me his advice, with
Proverbs 22:20 counsel and knowledge; and this is what they
 said to me. "Your wound will heal and you will
Ecc. 11:10 recover quickly if you remove vexation from your heart. . . .

Cf Proverbs 29:17 . . .If you do this and every day give delight to your soul,
Cf Ecc. 3:1, 4 by setting a time and season for everything your soul
 asks of you, a time to dance and a time to laugh; if you make
Isa. 23:16; Ps 45:1 sweet music, sing many songs, songs of love, and let your heart
Proverbs 23:16 rejoice with all kinds of joy -- for
Proverbs 17:22 a joyful heart is a good medicine -- then you
Cf Job 3:13 will be at rest."
 Their advice seemed good to me, and, as is my habit,
 I considered which of these paths I should choose.
 Eventually, I chose the games
 because it would waste little time. I sought for myself
 a beloved and faithful friend to play games with me
 every day for about half an hour, and I
 found the most suitable and appropriate time of day
 in order not to detract much from my studies.
 That time was after meals because immediately after eating
 when the food has not yet been digested,
 it is difficult to apply oneself to study. . . .

... If there is
Hosea 12:8 anything sinful in this please instruct me.
I would rather choose
Cf Jeremiah 8:3 death than life so as not to sin any more'.

Finally, to heal the quarrel, the author advocated chess as a salutary alternative to cards and dice, and offered to teach the game to both brothers. Thus it was that his book on chess came to be written:

When the lad finished speaking, I took him in my arms and embraced and kissed him, and I said 'May you be blessed by
1 Sam. 15:13 the Lord, my son, you have spoken well
and done well to confess the truth, for he
Prov. 28:13 who confesses and forsakes his transgressions
will earn mercy from Heaven.'
Cf. Eccles. 7:9 To his older brother I said, 'do not hasten to show anger,
because anger drives out understanding. It is true
that the commandment and obligation are laid upon us
Prov. 19:18, 29:17 to correct our son with open reproof and
Cf Gen. 22:12 by hidden love. Therefore do not put forth your hand against
this child to strike him, and do not angrily criticise your
Cf Levit. 25:16 brother, but lessen his reproach according to the fewness
of his years.
Gen. 27:37 And for you, my son, what shall I do for you?
Gen. 48:19 I know, my son, I know
that your heart is wholly true to the Lord your G-d . . .

... But know without doubt that, in any case, there
there is a certain aspect of the game of dice and cards
which calls for prohibition;
for although those who play it may not practise it as their
Isaiah 5:18 profession, its power is such that it draws iniquity
with cords of falsehood, and must be judged [condemned]
because of the way it ends. However, wise men have
indeed said that it is sensible to choose the lesser of two evils.
Come, therefore, let
Cf Num. 24:14 me advise you to give up playing cards and dice;
visit your brother in peace, and both of you learn the game
called *Iskaki*, on condition that you do not play it
for more than half an hour a day, except for the days
of Chanukah and Purim and the intermediate days

of Passover and Sukkot [Tabernacles], because this game requires wisdom and sharp wits, having been invented by men of understanding.' When the brothers heard what I said, they embraced and kissed each other. For in truth they loved each other very much. That was the reason for my writing this book, in order to teach them the rules of this game. And because it was given to kings and princes alone to practise this game and find delight in it, I have called the name of this book,

Genesis 49:20

The Delights of a King, or Royal Dainties.

With this the introductory section ends, and the author announces the contents of the chess treatise proper. Even now, however, it turns out that he has a long way to go before explaining the game's technicalities. Further moral reflections and a historical excursus come first:

Cf Deut. 1:1

Gen. 49:21

And these are the things which I have included in this book, with its eloquent words; and even if it is small in bulk, the reader will find in it delights for his soul.

First of all I have presented the merit of this game and indicated that it is foremost in excellence among games of every kind, and have described the advantages that man derives from it.

Secondly, I have investigated and enquired who invented it and when it was invented.

Thirdly, I have explained its names, because it has many names, and I have given a reason for each.

Fourthly, I have drawn a sketch showing the board upon which this game is founded.

Fifthly, I have described the (chess) pieces, their numbers, the different kinds, their names and appearance, and their order of rank.

Sixth, I have offered instruction, to the best of my ability, on the laws and rules which govern the game. . . .

We will now take these six sections in turn.

1

Chess is contrasted with gambling games, and gamblers are denounced in terms which recall Maimonides and the Talmud itself:

Isaiah 30:7	Such people are disqualified as witnesses
Psalm 10:7	(in court), being regarded as robbers; because
	they openly rob, taking other people's money
	unlawfully and against their will, and because they waste their
	time in vain and useless matters and do not occupy themselves
	with the welfare of the world. Deceit and oppression are
	under their tongue. Their evidence is false, they are
	deceivers. They rely upon extortion and robbery,
	and that is the cause
Proverbs 10:12	of the hatred which stirs up strife, disputes and quarrels
	between brothers and friends.
	But this particular game, the game of chess,
	has many advantages and it must be praised
	because it is the most logical of all games. . . .

. . . for those who constructed it crowned its beauty with
wisdom and instruction and understanding. . . .

The game of chess offers an analogy with the government of a well-ordered kingdom. The officials of such a kingdom are described at some length:

Esther 1:14	Among the king's princes who are placed in command
Gen. 41:43	under his hand
I Kings 4:5	and who sit first in the kingdom, is his viceroy, who
	rides in the king's second chariot, sees the king's face
	and is like a king's friend.
	The second one is adviser to the king, a wise man and
	a prophet. . . .

Ecc. 10:10	The third in line is the general, a man of war and a mighty
	warrior who puts forth his strength and goes out and fights
	against nations. . . .

They also appoint another priest to stand in relation to the high priest like a viceroy to the king. He is the deputy priest [the bishop], who is called the *segen* or the *memunneh*. . . .

They also anoint a further priest who,
when they are about to do
Cf Deut. 20:1-3 battle with their enemies, speaks to the people in the
words of scripture, . . .

The third (in line) was the superintendent [*amarkula*]
who held the keys of the courtyard. . . .

He was appointed to oversee all matters to do with the house
and to supervise all the work of the house of the Lord. He was
called *Amar-kol* because he was the one who speaks [*omer*]
and is in command of everybody [*ha-kol*]; or *mar-kol*
[master of all] because he was a great lord ruling over
everybody, and nobody dared contradict his words. . . .

I Kings 5:16 There were also the chief officers, the officers of the
provinces and the fortified cities, officers of
Exodus 18:21 thousands, officers of hundreds, officers of fifties and
Deut. 16:18 officers of tens, judges and officers in each town, each with its
priests and its ordinary people; each person with his own
work and his burden, this one doing one thing and that one
I Kings 22:20 doing another, to provide food and
Berachot 44a sustenance.
Psalm 104:23 Men go forth to their work and make a living
by dealing with each other.
Cf Berachot 3b And G-d, in his mercy, looks upon them
with a compassionate eye from his holy place on high,
blessing all the work of their hands. . . .

Evidently there is little specific correlation between these
descriptions and the various pieces on the chessboard or the
precise rules of play. Rather the general point is being made that
chess is wholly subject to laws and thus an image of divine order;
to play it is an exercise in reason:

And just as the Divine conduct of affairs is founded
Deut. 4:8 upon righteousness and righteous laws and statutes, through
Levit. 18:5 which a man who fulfils them shall have life, so does this game
observe order in the conduct of affairs, following a line of
rectitude, with upright laws, rules drawn up in truth and
Psalm 148:6 justice [by] a statute which none may transgress,

and in wisdom and understanding. . . .

. . . It is not the purpose of the players to covet
or to rob other people of their money,
but just to sharpen their own intellect. . . .

. . . They enter the game in peace and leave in peace.

The comparison with other games is re-stated:

It is not like the games of dice, dominoes or cards
which are played with the anger implicit
in a game of chance -- the chance fate which befalls fools
and depends entirely on what pieces you can cut or what cards
are dealt to the player. Such players have
no part in intellectual understanding.

Jeremiah 4:22

They are only clever in doing evil,
showing malice in throwing the dominoes
and substituting cards when they are dealt because their sole
purpose is to defraud and deceive each other, and that is
the cause of the enmity between them. . . .

Finally, the advantages of chess are defined as a beneficial
recreation and a training of the intellect:

. . . Wise men have already declared to you,
that a man cannot really understand and acquire wisdom
so long as he is sad, because G-d gave man
wisdom and knowledge and rejoicing;
therefore they have advised that a student
should occupy himself a little every day
in walking or in a game. (This) in order that his study should
be more pleasant and that he should find relief and more
and be well, and not feel his study as a burden,
as we have seen happen to many people who because of
overmuch learning and study have lost their reason.
Their wisdom turned to foolishness because they did not give
their spirits a chance to recover, nor did they allow
themselves any intermissions in their learning. . . .

It is because this game was composed by people of intelligence and knowledge that it is like the community of a city [or province] in which a person learns uprightness and the merit to know how to manage the town in accordance with all its rules, both general and specific. . . .

2

The author reports on his inquiries into the origin of chess. In view of the antiquity of the game, the paucity of writings on the subject, and the disagreement between those that exist, he finds it difficult to reach firm conclusions. He claims to have consulted ancient sources in Greek, Latin, Arabic and Persian. What now follows constitutes the most complete survey -- up until Hyde's researches -- of the various mythological speculations about who invented chess:

(i) The Egyptian sage Thoth -- or Moses

. . . I will begin
with the words of the great scholar, Plato, the greatest of all philosophers, who wrote in his book that in the days of our master, Moses, peace be upon him, there was among the Egyptian sages one named Thoth [Hebrew To'ot], who in the abundance of his wisdom made many discoveries and taught them to the people of his generation.
Amongst them were astronomy, astrology, writing and an alphabet, and he also invented this splendid game which was called the game of *pesephasim* [𐤀𐤓𐤁𐤕 𐤐𐤔𐤓𐤕 mosaics]. . . .

. . . And he taught them
to read, and the Chaldean language. . . .

Cf Exodus 32:1

There were some people who said that it [or he] was Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, when he was living (as he had been from his youth onwards) in the palaces of the Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, whose daughter Batya brought him up as if he were her own son amongst the wise counsellors of Pharaoh. . . .

. . . He did wondrously among them, wonders which had never

before been created anywhere on earth or in any nation.
Because he had strength and might and he triumphed
over their gods -- for among them, too,
the Lord executed judgements by his hand --
therefore they called his name Ta'ut, which
in the Egyptian and Ethiopian languages and also in Aramaic
means principally 'The foreign god of the land'.

Deut. 31:16

(ii) The Greek commander Palamedes

Palamedes was said to have been a leader at the siege of Troy.

In another book I found that Palamedes, the Greek,
one of the leaders of the forces which went to war with
Troy, the great city that was besieged for 10 years,
was a very wise man who invented for the Greeks some
letters to make good deficiencies in their alphabet.
He also taught them about the eclipses of the sun and
moon, and the art of drawing up an army
in battle order, each man
under his standard according to their formations.
He taught this to his people, and in order to spur them on
to understand this noble art, he showed them
this honourable game which is like
armies encamped against each other. All its pieces
are analogous to military officers, from the smallest
to the biggest, as I will explain to you.

Num. 1:52

(iii) Lud, forefather of the Lydians

Others say that when Lud, the father of the Lydians,
and his brother were in camp,
faint with hunger and privation,
they invented various games, among them this game of
Pesephasin [mosaics]. . .

Lamentations 2:19

(iv) Sissa Ben Dahir

The author here reproduces the well-known Corn Story from Indian legend. The Philosopher Sissa was asked by King Belhib to name his reward for inventing chess. In reply he asked for one grain of wheat for the first square of the chessboard, two for the

second square, four for the third, and so on, doubling the numbers up to the sixty-fourth square....

Ezek. 43:11

The people of India boast of a tradition of theirs that a certain philosopher of their nation named Tsitsa [or Sissa] son of Daher, who was a very wise man and expert in astronomy and geometry, in the greatness of his intellect and spirit of understanding devised this beautiful game and brought it before Belhib, the king of India. He explained the characteristics of the game, its ins and outs and all its laws to the king. When the king saw the beauty of this work and the great intellect of its inventor, he said 'Behold, I know that you are a very clever man. I've seen the work of your hands which is very pleasant and therefore ask me any favour and I will grant it to you. Furthermore even if it be half my kingdom your wish will be done.' Then the philosopher answered, and he said, 'If I found favour in your eyes, O king, to grant my request, behold I arrange for you this board with a game on it which is already founded on 64 squares. Command your servants who are looking after the treasures of the grain, that they should put one grain upon the first square, two grains on the second square, four grains on the third square, and so on each square they should put on double the number that was on the previous one, until the end of all the squares, and that will be my reward.'

When the king heard the words of this sage, he became cross and angry with him and in his heart he despised him. 'You speak like a low man, do you really believe that I cannot honour you with great gifts that you've asked from me just this little bit. It appears as if you are just pouring contempt upon the charitable generous gifts which are offered. You have been foolish.' . . .

Of course, when the required amount of grain was calculated, it was found to be incomparably more than was available in the entire kingdom....

(v) An unnamed Persian sage

In a very old book I found that one of the sages of Persia composed this particular game for Ardushia, the Shah of Persia. Ardushia was the same one as we know as King Achashverosh³ because it is a name that was commonly applied to all the kings of Persia. . . .

The king was a despot, and the sage introduced him to chess with the purpose of indirectly teaching him a moral lesson: in real life as in chess, the king's power and security depend on the well-being of his subjects, so he must treat them benignly. According to the same source, the name of the game, *Shatrang*, means in Persian 'king's suffering' or 'king's warning'.

(vi) The Greek Kilion

The name, assigned to one of the seven sages of Greece, is evidently corrupted from Solon.

Finally the author states his own opinion: chess most likely originated in Persia in view of the general use it makes of Persian terminology.

3

As the names of the game, the author mentions:

- (i) *Shatrang*, as above;
- (ii) *Sheshrung*, which refers to the six elements of the army: 'the king, the queen, the elephant, the horse, the rook and the infantry'.
- (iii) *Shak Iskaki* or *Ishkachi*, words corrupted from the Persian *shah*.

4

And now, finally -- after all these digressions -- the author proceeds to explain how the game of chess is actually played. He begins by describing the board:

³ Compare p. 48 above.

You must take (for yourself) a board made of cedar wood. It should be square. Its length should be as its breadth, and upon it you must draw the disposition of blocks, also square, and these blocks become like 'houses', eight by eight in number. And the block serves as the foundation stone, but one of them should be red and one of them should be black, and a different colour must separate between them. . . .

5

The chess pieces are named as:

- (i) King (שֶׁה)
- (ii) Queen (מְלִיכָה)

-- the lady of the kingdom, and in the Persian language she was called *Fierzan*; and some people say that this particular name means viceroy, because it is not usual for queens to go to war. He used to rule as first in the kingdom and provide it with the glory of kingship. . . .

The king and queen each have three 'very honoured princes', namely:

- (iii) Elephant (פִּיל)

In the Persian language it was *Pil*, and so it is also in the language of our own sages.... It is apparent that the ancient eastern people used the *pilim* or elephants to build forts whenever they went out to war, in case the prince should need them in battle.

- (iv) Rider (פֶּרֶשׁ)
- (v) 'Rook' (רֹקֵן)

. . . called *Rock* or *Rouch* in Persian; and there is a debate about the meaning of this name, because there are some people who say that it is the name of a very big bird which is also called *Al Anka*, and others explain it as a very powerful fortress. . . .

The 'princes' are named by reference to the king or queen (i.e. king's elephant, queen's rook etc.).

- (vi) Foot soldier (רֶגֶל)

The two armies are coloured respectively red and black. The author comments on the great diversity of designs for the chess pieces.

⑥

The arrangement of the board and pieces is described:

You prepare the board in such a way that the first square from the first row on your right hand side should be red. Then you take the red king and you put it upon the throne of his kingdom in the fourth square, which is black; and the queen you must set in the fifth square, which again is red. And this rule you must always remember: that the queen sits in the square of its own colour. And the *Pil* or the elephant of the king is at the side of his king and you put him in the third square. But the elephant of the queen is next to her in the sixth square. And the position of the horse or rider of the king is in the second square, and that of the queen is on the seventh square. And the rook or *Rouch* stands at each corner where he lurks in the first square and in the eighth house. There are eight infantry soldiers who stand together upon the second row, each one in front of his master, to serve them and fight with them. . . .

The moves of the pieces are as follows:

When they travel forwards, the foot soldiers (pawns) go first. And their steps are straight, from one square to the next. Once they move, they cannot go back. Initially they have the right to move two squares at once. If they want to take an opposing piece, then (like a person shooting an arrow) they must strike sideways to the right or left (diagonally).

The rook must travel in straight lines to wherever it wants to go; it can go as long as there is nothing barring its way to its objective.

The *Parash* or horseman mounts upon a leaping chariot. He skips forwards and backwards over the heads of the other warriors. He jumps over one row of squares and lands in the row beyond; he then turns either to the right or to the left, and settles in the next square, which is different in colour from the square where he started.

The *Pil* or the elephant spreads terror around him; he moves diagonally in whatever direction he wishes, as long as there is nothing intervening between him and the place that he wants to go to; and he never changes colour [i.e. the colour of his square].

The queen, who has the duty of guarding her lord, goes under her own power wherever she wishes; she possesses the moves of all the combatants, except that she cannot change the colour of her square in the same way as the *Parash* and she cannot jump (over).

The king sits firmly upon his throne and only moves from one

square to the next. He does not go out of the door of his house (square) at any time, unless the situation forces him to. And if any of the combatants, moving according to the rules of this war, comes to the place where an enemy stands, then he has the power to drive him off his square and stand (on it) in his stead. . . .

The author next places the chess pieces in a hierarchy of value. The king naturally comes first:

His princes and his servants will not let him be vanquished, because he is worth more than 10,000 of them. And should he die, then the enemy of the king will take all, and that will be an end to the battle. . . .

The other pieces rank in the order: queen, rook, bishop, knight; though a qualification is added --

The *Pil* or the bishop is more important than the knight. But since the *Pil* or the bishop can only move diagonally on squares of one colour, cannot turn sideways, and is less able than the knight to help the king against the enemy, players take more care with the knight than with the bishop.⁴

As to the pawn, it has the possibility of promotion:

. . . If the foot soldier has advanced far enough by his own strength to pitch his tent in the furthest row, where the enemy king and his princes are encamped, then his lord can anoint him in place of the queen. However if she is still alive, he can become commander-in-chief in place of any other who was killed in the battle; that will be his reward.

Finally, mention is made of the special rules and practices concerning the king. An explanation of *check* is given:

The soldiers kill any of their enemies, but against the king they do not attack all of a sudden; they pay him homage, for when the king is harassed and needs to escape from those who pursue him and are hard upon him, they warn him '*Shah*', as if to say: 'Your Majesty, beware, take great care of your life.'

⁴ The sense is a little enigmatic. Chessplayers agree that in certain types of position the knight is worth more than the bishop, but it is not clear why the bishop is 'less able to help the king'.

This is followed by an interesting reference to a form of *castling*:

And though he is not allowed to deviate from his path and move otherwise than from square to square, if when danger threatens he sees space between himself and his rook or the queen's rook, he may move towards the square of one of them, and the rook will stand next to him like a solidly fortified wall of brass.

And the treatise concludes with a definition of *checkmate*:

If in spite of all this he cannot escape from his enemies' hands, because they have surrounded him so that there is no room to withdraw to the right or left, then they will give him one warning after another, finally saying to him '*Shah mat*', which means the king is dead, or the king is smitten with madness and is close to death, because his end will very shortly come. But for the victor, there is the glory and honour of prevailing against his foes.

* * * * *

Hyde does not name the manuscript source from which he printed the text.⁵ The date of the work and the identity of the author have been a matter for conjecture.⁶ The chief clues are the particular version of the rules of chess given in part 6 of the treatise, and the references to the author's earlier work -- the tract against gambling⁷ -- which occur in the introductory section.

A succession of bibliographers have asserted that *The Delight of Kings* was the work of Jedaja Ha-Penini ben Abraham Berdarschi (Badrasi), whom we have mentioned before as an

⁵ MS Michael 485 is only a copy of a print. The Ghirondi-Schoenblum MS 4 is quite modern.

⁶ Compare the entry in the *Bodleian Catalogue*, p. 604.

⁷ We have seen that in some editions, *The Delight of Kings* is attributed to Ibn Ezra (see pp. 14-16 above). The same mistake is presumably made by Felix Torres Amat in *Memorias para ayudar a formar un diccionario critico de los escritores catalanos*, 4th ed. (Barcelona, 1836). As reported by Steinschneider (p. 162), Torres Amat states that Ibn Ezra composed his *Verses on the Game of Chess* to suppress every kind of game, i.e. Torres Amat assumes that the *Verses* are the tract that is mentioned in the introduction to *The Delight of Kings*. In fact, of course, the Ibn Ezra poem makes no mention of any game other than chess. (Torres Amat's book is 'missing' from the Escorial Royal Library.)

author who flourished at the end of the thirteenth century and spoke out against gambling.⁸ This opinion was first challenged by Joseph Zedner, on the grounds of the style of the work and its reference to card-playing.⁹

In any case, *The Delight of Kings* unmistakably describes the modern version of chess which became standard only in the sixteenth century. The characteristics of this version are that the pawn may advance two squares on its first move, the bishop (or elephant) moves any number of squares on an unobstructed diagonal, and the queen enjoys a similar freedom of movement both diagonally and orthogonally (see section 6 of the treatise). In addition, the king may 'castle' ¹⁰

In categorically rejecting the ascription to Jedaja Ha-Penini, Steinschneider put forward the suggestion that *The Delight of Kings* was the work of the Venetian Rabbi Leon (or Jehuda) di Modena, the author of *Eldad and Medad, or The Gambler Reformed* -- a tract against the vices of gambling,¹¹ which was published in Venice in 1595 and reprinted (anonymously, and probably without the author's knowledge) in Prague in 1615. The tract is described by Hyde, in the chapter of *De Ludis Orientalibus* entitled *Historia Aleae*:

Anyone wishing to know more of this should consult the Hebrew booklet entitled *Sûr Merâ*, i.e. *Declina à malo*. This book is written in the form of a dialogue between two people, Eldad and Medad. The former denounces games, because strife and evil arise from them; whereas the latter praises them, and after some other arguments suggests that from games (which sometimes lead to loss of money, and quarrels) one may learn some lessons and skills which are otherwise difficult to acquire . . .

⁸ See e.g. Don Joseph Rodriguez de Castro, *Biblioteca Española*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1781), p. 177; Anton Schmid, *Literatur des Schachspiels* (Vienna, 1847), pp. 204-5; and Leopold Zunz, *Geschichte und Literatur*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1845), p. 468; also Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 7, p. 277. For Badrasi, see above, p. 83.

⁹ See Steinschneider, p. 172. The issue is discussed in *Schachzeitung*, 15 (1860), pp. 36-71.

¹⁰ Forbes (p. 113) considers the king's right of castling to be decisive for the dating of the work. He notes: 'By the term "Castling" I mean the *modern* mode of castling, which is not older than the first half of the sixteenth century.'

¹¹ Steinschneider uses the edition of Leipzig 1683, with German translation by F.A.Christian (*Bodleian Catalogue* No. 1352 and Addenda).

For the provenance of the names *Eldad* and *Medad*, see Numbers 11:26.

. . . [Medad] says that the Rabbis are inconsistent in this matter, seeing that some of them condemn games while others permit them. Again Eldad counters by invoking the pronouncement of a certain Rabbi, expressing the vanity of games; and Medad in turn adduces another pronouncement in which the usefulness and congeniality of games are asserted. But he [Medad] is finally convinced and led to repentance by the arguments of the other, acknowledging that 'Of cards and dice it is said: blessed is he who does not see them.'¹²

From the same source, Hyde reproduces a pair of poems expressing the two opposite viewpoints. The first is headed *Rhythmus contra Ludos*:

The player of <i>Cubia</i> And his end is ruin	his wound is open he will be cursed within the (city) gates
He will be parted from his money He will rebel against his Maker And he will think that he will profit And in his whole life he will not succeed And he will go from city to city And he is poor and slight (insignificant) And he will return to dust In <i>Pesach</i> and <i>Succot</i> His head is dishevelled For he will surely do harm and he will eat in haste and he will not find loosing and all the people of his house and on the day of his death	and he will add to his iniquity with false oaths and he will never succeed and his days will be bitter he will not know his place skipping over mountains with breaks (shatters) and wounds he will wish for <i>Purim</i> and his clothes are torn to himself and others without (having time) to 'bench' in affliction on <i>Kippurim</i> will hate him will celebrate with rejoicing and song ¹³

The second poem is introduced by Hyde as *Alius Rhythmus mimicus, contrarium sententiam probans, pro Ludis*:

The play of <i>Cubia</i> And in its cup is always full And if its good for his creators	its work is clean in all men to loose his money
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¹² *De Ludis Orientalibus*, pp. 122-3; *Syntagma Dissertationum*, vol. 2, p. 302.

¹³ For this and the following poem, see *De Ludis Orientalibus*, pp. 123-6, and *Syntagma Dissertationum*, vol. 2, pp. 303-5.

This will be his own fault	people who lie, teller of lies
He will get over and will win	like a merchant and win
And it is usual to give	to the sweeten the bitterness
Without this in every town	(with) great wealth and youth
And righteous like goat	jumping on the hills (of success)
When he plays he will succeed	at his play as in the <i>Succah</i>
And in his days its <i>Chanuka</i> in <i>Pesach</i>	and <i>Purim</i> in <i>Passing</i> and <i>Lots</i>
And his head is not shaven	and he does not tear his clothes
And at the <i>chupah</i> to be at the head	and redeems others
He eats in haste	and has too much food
And remains thin	with afflictions of <i>Kippur</i>
This game and its knowledge	great is its skill
Let each man's covenant be made	with joy and song.

Leon di Modena, the author of *Eldad and Medad*, was born in Venice in 1571. At the age of twelve he was translating Latin poetry into Hebrew, and within the next three years¹⁴ he wrote *Eldad and Medad*. Ironically, as Max Dimont observes, Leon 'himself had a penchant for gambling, and although this deeply shamed him, he appears to have been unable to curb this vice.' In fact, 'because he moved within high Christian social circles, the Rabbis dared not denounce him, even though in 1628, the Rabbis of Venice published an order excommunicating any member of the congregation who played cards within a period of six years'.¹⁵

A versatile and prolific author,¹⁶ Leon di Modena published a great deal anonymously, under a pseudonym, or with obscure indications of his name.¹⁷ He is famed mainly for two works;

¹⁴ In a *responsum* of the year 1638, Leon prides himself on having written the book at the precocious age of 13 (i.e. in 1584). Max Dimont (see note 10 below) gives the date as two years later.

¹⁵ Max Dimont, *The Indestructible Jews*, pp. 298-9. Further biographical material is in M. Soave, 'Vita de Giuda Arie Modena', *Corriere Israelitico* 2 (1863-4). Leon's grandfather was a Knight of the Golden Fleece.

¹⁶ Steinschneider notes that 'This cultured and active writer wrote among other things, in 1616, a work in Italian on the customs and practices of the Jews for an English Magnate (*Bodleian Catalogue*, p. 535, revised in the additions). An autograph (*ex dono auctoris* 1628) of this work, with a dedication to Claudius Mallier, Ambassador in Venice, can now be found in Cambridge (*Hebrew Bibliography*, XI, 76). It is possible that the manuscript of the chess book might have ended up in Oxford in a similar way.'

¹⁷ E.g. two other works are issued by the same publisher as the games book, namely the superstitious *Sod Juscharim* ('The Council of the Upright', 1595), which -- like the

one published in his own name presented a defence of all talmudic laws and the right of the Rabbis to turn custom into law. The other, published anonymously, opposed his previous work, indicating the invalidity of ghetto talmudic laws. His profligate life often left him penniless, and he sold many of his works yet unpublished in order to pay his gambling debts. He died in 1648.

To support his conjecture¹⁸ that *The Delight of Kings* was written by Leon di Modena, Steinschneider points to both the content and the tone of the introductory section which takes such pains to anticipate and rebut objections to the work. The anonymous author presents himself as a teacher of morals and law; Leon was indeed such a teacher from as early as 1589 (until 1612), and a preacher from 1593. The tone adopted in the chess treatise only suits a man who could assume that his person and his previous moral writings were widely known. A man like Leon di Modena more than anyone could have feared that an apologia for chess would expose him to a charge of inconsistency.

The Delight of Kings refers to two brothers, one of whom gambles as a relaxation. Leon himself had a brother Samuel and a step-brother Abraham Parenzo, who ruined themselves through gambling; it was this that induced him to write *Eldad and Medad*.

Steinschneider proceeds to draw attention to stylistic similarities between *Eldad and Medad* and *The Delight of Kings*. The former makes elegant use of word-play; Steinschneider finds a parallel to this in the latter work, in utterances such as:

לשחקן אמרתי מחלל חלילה וחולין הוא לך

('I said of the playing of games, it is profane: far be it from you, and regard it as profanity' -- a play on Ecclesiastes 2:2, 'I said of laughter: it is madness')

introduction to the chess book -- claims to be drawn from 'old' sources (*Catal. Bodl.* p. 1351), and in 1600 a Hebrew version of the Italian ethical work *Fior di virtu* (ibid, p. 1354 No. 34; cf. Soave, loc. cit., p. 156). Geiger (*Hebr. Bibliogr.* VI, 23; cf. *Catal. Bodl.*, p. 2911, No. 8235) conjectured that Modena also translated his own work 'Shield and buckler' (*Magen ve-Tsinnah*) into Italian without naming himself.

¹⁸ See Steinschneider in Van der Linde, pp. 174-7. The main points of his argument were included by Steinschneider in an article of *The Hebrew Bibliography*, entitled 'Jehuda di Modena, Author of a Book on Chess' (1872, No. 79, pp. 60-3). There is a special reprint of this article in 50 copies (Altona, 1872).

-- or in the following, where two biblical phrases run together and are given a slightly altered meaning:

ובארשה שפתי כל מנעתי לדבר צחות

(cf. Psalms 21:3 and Isaiah 32:4).

The introduction to the chess treatise states that thirty years have elapsed since 'my early youth' which saw the tract against gambling. If this time-span is reckoned from 1584-6, when *Eldad and Medad* was originally written, we arrive at a date of 1614-16 for *The Delight of Kings*; however, if we reckon from the actual publication of the first work, this places the chess treatise in the period of 1625.

The earlier date is less likely, however, since a man of 43 would scarcely write 'I have grown old and do not know the date of my death' (see p. 121 above). In his autobiography (begun in 1618), Leon reports that during the night of 20/21 December 1616, he was told in a dream that he would die in 1621. Other signs based on superstition led him to expect death at the age of 50 or 52. If we assume that Leon had passed that age when he wrote *The Delight of Kings*, the remark 'I . . . do not know the date of my death' is readily explained.

The thirty-year time-span may, of course, be a round figure, giving us the latitude for a plausible dating of the chess book in the period 1625-7, during which Leon di Modena renounced card games.¹⁹

Steinschneider admits that his evidence for the date and authorship of *The Delight of Kings* is inconclusive, but no alternative hypothesis of equal coherence has been offered.

Chess and morals: some further views

In the previous chapter, a number of pronouncements on the intellectual and moral status of chess, its relation to law and custom, were quoted from Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan

¹⁹ Soave, in *Corriere Israelitico*, 3 (1864-5), reports (from a collection of letters discovered by him) a promise made by Judah (da Modena) before witnesses not to play cards for two years.

However, at the age of 60, during the plague years of 1630-1, Leon di Modena once again relapsed into gambling; see *Autobiography* f.16b, and Soave, p. 216.

sources in medieval Spain. The theme was taken further in *The Delight of Kings*, and I shall now develop it with some judgements emanating from Jewish circles in various parts of Europe.

These judgements almost always refer to chess in conjunction with other games.

In times of trouble, the Rabbis would sometimes prohibit games in general as a temporary measure to avoid levity and encourage repentance, in the hope that self-denial would placate God's wrath and put an end to the evil. Chess, however, was omitted from the prohibition. Thus, for example:

in 1416 the Jews of Forli bound themselves not to play dice, cards or any game of chance for ten years. Exceptions were made (a) in favour of one dice-game whose identity is now doubtful, and of chess, provided the stake never exceeded four silver *bolognini*, (b) in favour of cards on fast-days or in time of sickness, provided the stake never exceeded one *quattrino*.²⁰

It is from a *responsum* of Leon di Modena that we learn of a similar episode. During the festival of Sukkot (Tabernacles) in the year 5336 (Autumn 1575), in consequence of an outbreak of plague, three Rabbis in Cremona issued a ban on the playing of games in that city. Considering the moral cause of the plague to be the fundamental evil of gambling, they decreed that no man or woman aged 10 or over should play any game, whether dice or any other, with the exception of chess (איסקאקי), *Iscacchi*, if it was not played for money.²¹ This ban was to be effective until

²⁰ Murray, pp. 447. See also *Encyclopedia Judaica*, under the entry 'chess'; and I. Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (1932). Abrahams quotes instances of personal vows to abstain from games for a season, which occur frequently from the beginning of the fifteenth century. One of 1 April 1491, undertakes not to play any game except draughts (the translation is doubtful; possibly *mere/s* is meant) and chess.

²¹ See Steinschneider, pp. 177, 190-1, and MS Almanzi 256 in the British Museum; the relevant passage is at f.54. Compare also the miscellaneous collection *Cod. Bisliches* 9, now in the Bodleian Library, and the reprint in Isak Lampronti's *Reallexicon (Pachad Jizchak, ספר יצחק)*, part III fol. 54, Venice 1789. This responsum, which is very interesting from the point of view of the history of games, was dated at the end of 5407 (i.e. 1547) instead of 5390 (i.e. 1630) through a printer's error; it was written two years after the issue of a ban on gambling in Venice at the beginning of 1628. In it, the author mentions the book against gambling which he wrote at the age of 13, and which was 'printed 35 years ago in Venice and 13 years ago in Prague'; he also writes about his 38

the month of Nisan (Spring) of the year 5336 (1576).

In *Shiltey ha-gibborim* (on *Erubim*, 127b), the use of special chessmen made of silver is prescribed as a means of rendering the Sabbath day special, although wooden men are not categorically forbidden.²²

In another part of Europe, a verdict on chess was given by Moses Isserlis of Krakow (died 1573?). Describing chess as 'a game with bones [*Knochen*] which is called *Tschech*', this otherwise strict teacher allows the game on the Sabbath, but not for money.²³

In a later period, in Turkey, the stern moralist Elia Kohen of Smyrna echoed the pronouncement of Ga'on Ashkenazi. In *Shebet Musar* ('Rod of Correction'), first published in Constantinople in 1712, Kohen objects not to the game of chess itself but to its effect of wasting time and leading to the contempt of study, since, after all, study sharpens the mind just as chess allegedly does. Kohen focuses his disapproval on the enthusiastic players who play chess at every free moment, and who therefore are not using it to sharpen their minds as they claim.²⁴

At the same time, in Frankfurt am Main, we encounter a ruling on gambling games similar to the one issued in Forlì that I years as a preacher.

Compare also the biography of Leon di Modena by M. Soave (mentioned in note 18 above), IV (1864/5), p. 118 (where the year of the events described is incorrectly given as autumn 1576), and the excerpt from Leon's *Autobiography* in Geiger (*Leon da Modena*, Hebr. f. 16b).

²² See Murray, p. 446, and I. Abrahams, op. cit. (*Shiltey ha-gibborim* is 16th-century Germany.) The tradition of keeping separate silver chessmen for special use on the sabbath was maintained in some families until a generation ago.

²³ See Steinschneider, p. 192. The same view is expressed in Abraham Abele Gombiner's *Magen Avraham*.

'It was Isserlis who transformed Joseph Caro's Sephardic-orientated code [viz. the code of law *Shulchan Aruch*, circa 1550] into an acceptable Ashkenazi-orientated one' -- M. Dimont, *The Indestructible Jews* (USA, 1971), p. 297. Strangely enough, Caro himself makes no mention of chess in his great code.

²⁴ *Shebet Musar* was printed many times and later translated into German and Spanish. The criticism of chess is at the beginning of chapter 32; compare Zunz, *History and Literature*, Berlin 1845, p. 174.

R. Aaron Sason of Constantinople recommends the avoidance of chess on the Sabbath (*Responsa*, No. 180). Elijah de Vidas appears to have been the sole *halakist* who absolutely forbade the game (*Shebet Musar*, 1712, ch. xiii).

have mentioned:

In the year 1711, after the great fire, the Jewish community of Frankfurt resolved that such games should be discontinued for 14 years out of sorrow and repentance, but that they should be permitted to invalids and newly delivered mothers for their pleasure and to pass the time, and additionally chess, which is permitted to them all the year round even now, after the fire; hence some well-to-do Jews teach their children chess and have them instructed in it, for the reason that it does not so much encourage greed but, on the contrary, sharpens the mind and requires thought.²⁵

It was in Frankfurt, fifteen years after these events, that an edition of *The Delight of Kings* was published, incorporating the chess poems of Ibn Ezra and Ibn Yechia (see above, page 13 of the Introduction). The preface to this edition, written by Asher Anshel of Worms,²⁶ may be quoted at this point; containing virtually no technical information on chess, it verbosely collates the various moral and intellectual advantages imputed to chess in *The Delight of Kings* and elsewhere. The preface, like *The Delight of Kings* itself, employs a style of Hebrew writing based on concatenations of biblical quotations. It begins by speaking at length of

the creation of man, the highest of all creatures; his achievements and capabilities up to the time this was written.

Adam had all these qualities but sinned and was expelled from Eden.

God, through his prophets, called on men to mend their ways, telling them of reward and punishment. But they would not pay heed; they followed their bodily desires and sought material and transient pleasures.²⁷

On the second page, Anshel promises to 'put his hand on his

²⁵ See Johann Jacob Schudt, *Jewish Curiosities* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1714), book VI, chapter 35, p. 317.

²⁶ Anshel describes himself as 'the lowliest of the lowly, Asher Anshel, son of the wonderful Rabbi R. Wolf of Worms'; and the publisher of the volume as 'the beloved of the Lord, the most learned Suesskind (son of the distinguished Rabbi Isaac of Pinczow, grandson of the great and godly Kabbalist Perez Ba'al Shem)'.

²⁷ The contents of this preface suggest the possibility that it was reproduced from the chess poem of Moses Azan, which commenced in a remarkably similar manner; see above, page 85.

mouth', that is, curb his verbosity; in fact, however, such relevance to chess as his expatiations possess emerges only on page five. Those who sought to correct the sinful lives of men, Anschel tells us, 'invented various games which people would love to play but in which moral instruction was concealed.' He continues:

The finest of these was that known to the ordinary people of the land as *Schachspiel* that is to say, the king's game, because it was chosen for the delight of the King [*ma'adanne ha-melekh*] and his officers and ministers and his military commanders, who would learn from it, in peace, the conduct of war.

The inventor of the game had several purposes in mind:

First, to teach kings and princes to avoid arrogance and deal justly with their subjects, who risk their lives to protect them and who suffer with the king if disaster befalls him.

(Compare the 'warning' given to King Ardschir by the Persian sage according to *The Delight of Kings*; see page 134 above.)

Secondly, the use of stratagems in war, the need to protect the king, and not to underestimate the enemy, any one of whose foot-soldiers may force him into sore straits.

In addition, the hierarchy of the chess pieces provides a reflection of civilized order. A lesson is derived from the strict observance of laws in the conduct of the game; 'even the king must moderate his pace and not follow his material desires.' A final advantage of chess 'arises from the rule by which a foot-soldier who reaches the last row of the enemy becomes a chief [*rosh*], as a man can in real life by serving his king.'

In the foreword to his translation -- published in Frankfurt in 1743 -- of the edition that contains Anschel's reflections, 'Ludi Magister' expatiates further on the allegorical theme of 'how princes and lords should act towards the loyal subjects under their command and not forget, whether through tyranny or arrogance, that they are fathers of their country, and human beings too, whom death and checkmate can befall just as is represented in this popular game.'²⁸

Finally, the moral implications of chess, in particular the question whether the ritual laws of the Jews permit the use of

²⁸ Ludi Magister, p. 14; compare *Schachzeitung* (1860), p. 333.

chessmen on the Sabbath, were examined by the well-known scholar and bibliographer Ch.J.D.Azulai, who lived on into the beginning of the nineteenth century. Quoting various authorities from among the oriental Jews both in favour and against, Azulai asserts that the playing of chess is permissible only as a remedy against melancholy.²⁹

Notwithstanding erudite verdicts of this kind, the fact remains that by the sixteenth century the game had become 'a recognized pastime for men on the Sabbath and on festivals, though as a rule on these occasions the stake was omitted.'³⁰

* * * * *

A manuscript in the Vatican Library, allegedly dating from the fifteenth century and consisting of more than thirty diverse pieces of varying lengths, contains numerous references to chess.³¹

I obtained copies of many of these manuscript writings and have researched and translated a number of them. Some of the manuscripts are written in very old script; they were first transcribed into current Hebrew writing and then translated into English.

I have already quoted and discussed the first of these Hebrew writings (see pages 45-53 above). The rest are reproduced below. The original text of the first item is given in facsimile before being transcribed and translated.

The transcription from the original manuscript (on the following page and page 154) to modern Hebrew print was carried out by Emeritus Professor Rafael Loewe

²⁹ See Steinschneider, p. 192, and A.Berliner, *Aus dem inneren Leben der deutschen Juden im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1871), pp. 12, 15, note 63.

³⁰ See Murray, p. 496, and I.Abrahams, chapter 22.

³¹ Vatican Hebrew manuscript 171; see above, p.45, note 72. The poem I reproduce on p. 154 is item number 2 in the collection, on sheet 4 of the manuscript.

From time to time, Rabbis have felt that the playing of chess has interfered with study (of the Torah), which is perhaps the most important precept of the Jewish religion.

In this record of a sermon, it is evident that in Cremona in 1576, people have, in the Rabbis' opinion, become over-enthusiastic about chess.

The sermon also contains an important reference to *Shiltey-ha-gibborim* and the talmudic reference of *Sanhedrin* 24b. It is also an indication of the great degree of popularity of the game at the time.³²

- (1) ידעי מ(עלה) כ(בודו) שוקד ושומר לדעת עת טוב מצב ושלום כל בני ביתנו. ע(ל) כ(כן) (2) יצאתי לקראתו בקול מבשר, כי ההודאה לאל כולנו טובבי(ם) על קוטב הבריאות (3) והשלו(ם) איש ממנו לא נעדר בקטן כגדול. ולמען לא יראו פני ריקס לגבי (4) מ(עלה) כ(בודו) אשמיענו מילתא חדתא. כי בשבת חזון דרש דרש לנו הגאון אשכנזי (5) והנה שרף כמעט כל אשר היו שמה לסבת חום הרב. וכן האריך במעט (6) כשלש שעומ ובחור הבאים אסר צחוק האישקקי בשבת, לא שיש בו אסור (7) אלא שהוא גורם לבטל תורה. הדבר יצא מפיו כי לביה ידידיה מי שיעבר (8) דבריו מוחרם ומנודה הוא לגבי(ה) דידי(ה). ראה אבי גם ראה עד היכן הגיע (9) גאותו של זה ומיניה וביה אוכל ללמוד כי גם הצחוק עשה לנו מר שחירב (10) כולם בחדא מחטא יומדדו. ומלמד להועיל האלוף הר(ב) ר(בי) י"ק(?) מצא עזר להתיר (11) גמור במסכת סנהדרין בהרי"ף פ(רק) זה בורר, במשנת אלו הם הפסולים לעדות(?) דמחמה שמה בעל שלטי הגבורים, ו(י) אין בזו אסור שלא לצחוק בשקאקי... בשבת. (13) ואני אמרתי אגלה אזן מ(עלה) כ(בוד) ה(ורחו) לאשר כל הדבר הקשה יביאון

Letter No. 35

Reports a sermon delivered on Shabbat *Hazon* [if in the same year as the foregoing letter, = 12 July 1578] by 'Ha-ga'on Ashkenazi', i.e. Dr Eliezer Ashkenazi (1513-86), who was in Cremona in 1576 [see *Enc. Jud.* 3, 725], in the course of which he asserted that chess is not to be played on sabbath, not because it is inherently forbidden, but as leading to neglect of the study of Torah... The writer states that a young rabbi adduced grounds to show the propriety of indulging in it on the sabbath by citing *Isaac Al-fasi on the Talmud, Sanhedrin 24b* and the commentary (*Shiltey ha-gibborim*) on Al-fasi, and invites the opinion of his correspondent as to this refutation, obviously being himself reluctant to accept Dr Ashkenazi's embargo.

³² It is noticeable that chess here continues to be denoted by the talmudic word

ס' 15179

שירה

שירי חתונה, חידות, קינות, נוסחי מצבות ושירים למועדים.
44 דף.

בדמשת-קויטמן A 541
מאה י"ז, איס
כולל בין השאר שירים מאת "יעקב סגרי" (ממנו רבים, ביניהם
גם שירי הד 40א), "שיר ממורי רבי כמ"ר נחמן מיסטר" (18ב),
"מחנה חננאל" (19א ואילך ביניהם "שיר על הסקאקי" שיר
מרשי" [1] ז"ל על האשכנזים" (19א), "שירים מאת כמ"ר
יהודה מוסקאטו", ביניהם על הרעש בפירארא בשנת של"א (23א-
24א), "הראב"ד [=אברהם בן דוד פרוינצאל" (36א ואילך), מעון
הסואלים מחור מקדש מעט למשה מריאמי (31א ואילך), "שאלתיאל
מלאולסה", "אברהם מע" אניילו", "יהודה מפילי" (38א), "שמעיה
מריורי" (39א). - 27ב: שירים מסוגים שונים כדוגמאות
למשוררים בסופם "סליק
מרק שירה" - 30א: מרשם
ספר, 30ב: רשימת כביסה
להורדת כחם דיו מעל
באיטלקית.

15179 "0"

SONG

Wedding songs, puzzles, dirges, inscriptions on gravestones and the songs
of high holidays. 44 pages.

Budapest Kaufman 501A

17th century, Italy

Included among the songs is a song from Jacob Segri (many songs of
thanksgiving).

Songs from my Rabbi and teacher Nachman Mystri (18B). Song of
Chananel (19A), in between them a 'song about chess', a song from Rashi
'the blessed memory of the Ashkenazim' (19A). A song from Rabbi-
Teacher Yehudah Moscato. Among them a song about the earthquake in
Ferrara (23A 24B). A song from Rabbi Abraham Ben David. Provincial
(36A)

The inquiries devoted to Moses Moriety (36A -)

Shaltiel Maliwata

Abraham Anailo

Yehuda Mamili (38A)

Shmaga Marivri (39A)

Various songs etc. etc.

Apparently the following sermon notes are intended for a funeral oration for (perhaps) a chess enthusiast, in which the rhythmic verse may be found useful. They may also be appropriate for a sermon on the 'high holidays'. The 'gates' referred to are the cemetery gates.

It would appear that Shmuel Rabbinoitch used the material in New York in the twentieth century.

ניחמט

ס' 35247

דרשות

רבינוביץ, שמואל

דרשות, מאת "שמואל ראבינאוויץ". 39,108 דף.
ניו יורק-בהמ"ל 1407 Rab. מאה כ', אשכ
דרשות לפרשיות השבוע, למועדים, למאורעות
מיוחדים והספדים. כולל גם שירים אחדים, בין
השאר מהלך משחק שחמט בחרוזים ובסופו חתימת
המחבר (בסוף כה"י). - בראש כה"י הרצאה בידי
על הרעיון הציוני שנכתבה על ידי אשה. - 45א:
"בעלתי בשנה העברה בהאמבורג על האניה לנסוע
לאמריקה בארץ מוצאו רוסיה". - בסוף כרך א'
(108א-108ב)
כרוך מכתב משנת
מאיר מיכל".
[Mic. 5921]
לפנים 100a Rab.

35247 "0"

SERMON

Rabbi Shmuel Rabbinoitch 35247 "0"

Sermon from Rav 'Shmuel Rabbinoitch' 108, page 39

New York

Century 20

Sermon on the portion of the Torah reading (for the week), for Holidays, for 'High' Holidays, and especially for HEPED in funeral orations. Including various songs between the gates 'in the course of this' the game of chess in rhythmic verse and its end sealed joined together (at the end the handwriting) a lecture in Yiddish about the Zionist ideas (concert) written by a woman. 4JA 'When I emigrated last year from Hamburg on a ship to journey to America from the land to which I belong, Russia' -- At the end of Part 1 (108A-108B)

Added to a funeral oration from the manuscript before Rab.

100a Meir 'Michael' Mic 5921.

Alt from the previous manuscript

There follows a bundle of manuscripts comprising a compilation of letters which feature references to chess amongst a variety of unconnected communal matters.

לחכמ

ס' 3026

אגרות

אגרונים. 162 דף.

פריס-כ"ח H 2A

מאה ט"ז-י"ז, איטליה.

בכתיבות שונות. - באגרון הראשון 1א-94ב: מכתבים מסביב
שנת ש"מ רבים מקרימונה ומנטובה ומוזכרים בהם קרובים
ממשפחות פאנו ואוטולינגו. בין השאר הספד על ר"י קרו
(9א-9ב) פורסם מכ"י זה הקובץ ר' יוסף קצנרן חשכ"ט עמ'
שנ"ט דיון באיסור לשחק האישקל בשבת (814) אגרות
בענין החמיכה ביהודי ירושלים וצפת (66ב, 66ב) פורסמו
ע"י א' דוד, שלם ג' (חשמי"א), בהמשך הסכמת הקהל על התכשיתין
והסעודות (95ב), אגרות מאת "מנחם קרמי" מ"קרימונה" ובני
משפחת סביב שנה שמ"ב, אגרות מהטולאמיו אגרת מוקר
שלה "משה בסולה בכמ"ר מרדכי פה פאנו אל חלמידו יעקב
בכמ"ר יחיאל פינצי... בביאדאנה" (129ב-132א) בקשת תמיכה
לישוב בירושלים (151ב-152א), אגרת אל "אברהם
פייובי מריו" בענין
וחשובתו (162א-162ב).

3026 "0"

Various writings in first letters 1A 94B. Letters from around the year (1770 AD) and many from Cremona and Mantua and mentioned in relations of the family Panu and Otoling. Between the chess Spanish printed this brought/gathered together by R Joseph Eitryrum 729 (in 1969) concerning laws forbidding the playing of chess on Shabbat: (14).

The remainder of this letter concerns itself with various communal matters not relevant to our theme.

A further item in the same collection of Hebrew writings is the short poem on chess ascribed to Ibn Ezra, translated on page 76-7 above. It appears on the same sheet as a poem entitled 'Ode to a Lazy Gambler', and I reproduce this sheet in facsimile.

סדר על שחק חסידים

והלחמנו יעידון בין שנים .
 ואל חול כט חל עתה .
 וס נש ודח אין כפיהם .
 וסחוק נכונים חשייהם .
 וסם טאן נכילוק כפיהם .
 ויקיל חליל שונאיהם .
 לכל אחר ואחר כאשר הם .
 והעלים והמוסים עליהם .
 ונבוקים לעניהם שר חלוקה .
 ואין שנים ל ככ פעמיהם .
 והמוסים לחכמה רכעיהם .
 והעדים נס לחאריהם .
 וכתחכם כדרך ונעליהם .
 וואך חזק כעין לא ספריהם .

חלבים נשאו חחר לאמר .
 ונחמה זה כדח נקוד סמיה .
 וסח חנים כלח חרב ונחמה .
 וסלחמם כדח כולק שויק .
 ופעם יכבד אק אלק .
 ויטבוכים חחר ונח .
 וסחם וסחם חסוד .
 וסחך וסחך לעד .
 וסחם שנים עמד .
 והחלך שנים כן נש .
 והחלים חלים בשל .
 וסחם לחנים כל בעים .
 וסם חחך כלחם חחך .
 חחכים חחך חחכים לחחם .

והשן ער נח ונלס .
 והחלים לחלם שלס .
 אין יודעו יולו לחלם .
 עוהדים על חשמו ואח חולם .

על חלח חבוש חלם .
 ובחוק חל חחך עחיה .
 עם לחי חחך עחך .
 חחם חחך חחך חחך .

I now give the text of the chess poem in modern script:

חרוז על שחוק האישקקי.	
מלכים נפגשו אחד לאחד	ומלחמה יערוך בין שניהם
ומהנה זה כמהנה זה במספר	וחל מל פני חל פניהם
ונלחמים בלא חרב ודומה	וגם נפש ורח און בפיהם
ומלחמתם בתהבולות ערוכה	ובמדתם נבונים מעשיהם
5 ופעם יגברו אלה לאלה	ושם נראה נפילות פגרים
וישובו פגרים אחרי מות	ויפילו חללים שונאיהם
ישיבהם והליכתם (?) אסור	לכל אחד ואחד כאשר הם
והמלך והשגל לצד	והפילים והסוסים עליהם
ומרכבות שנים עוד אלה	וגבורים לפניהם (?) עוד כמדם
10 והמלך שהם כן השגל	ואין שום בלכת פעמיהם
הפילים הליכתם בשליש	הסוסים לארבע רבעיהם
ומרכבות לפנים כל כנגדם	ומצדם גם מאחדיהם
ושם תראה בכל פנים חדשות	ותתוכם בדרך מעגליהם
הכמים הקדו אותם למראש	וזאת חקר בעיני כל ספרים

The following charming verse is among the Vatican Library papers on chess, and could refer to an enthusiastic player who sleeps until late in the morning -- particularly one who plays chess with dice and gambles.

הנה אדם יושב ונרדם	הנה אדם יושב ונרדם
הנה אדם יושב ונרדם	הנה אדם יושב ונרדם
הנה אדם יושב ונרדם	הנה אדם יושב ונרדם
הנה אדם יושב ונרדם	הנה אדם יושב ונרדם

Ode to a Lazy Gambler (14th/15th Century)

Lazybones, are you not ashamed?

You sleep till morning and you hear nothing

And in your ears a voice calls

And praise God with a full heart

People do not know your work

How will those who know him be able to ignore?

Get up what's wrong with you sleepyhead, get up you rascal.

Two stories from the *Ma'aseh Book*

The *Ma'aseh Book* is a collection of stories (*ma'aseh* meaning story or tale) deriving from oral traditions handed down from generation to generation. It contains much talmudic material. The book was written in Yiddish and first published in Basle in 1602, under the title *Ayn Shoyne Mayse Bukh* by Jacob B. Abraham of Mezhibezh.³³ The book is part of Yiddish folk-lore and is designed to appeal to ordinary people in a simple style serving to implicate morals and religious standards.

The *Ma'aseh Book* is divided into three parts. The first (and main) section is devoted to stories from Talmud and Midrash; the second contains a cycle of 27 legends and traditional narratives drawn from the great mystics of medieval Germany, the authors of *Sefer Hasidim*: Rabbi Samuel and his son Rabbi Judah He-Hasid.

In the book, there are two stories relevant to chess. One is about 'The Jewish Child Who Was Stolen By A Servant And Later Became A Pope.'³⁴

This legend concerns Rabbi Simeon the Great of Mainz on the

³³ A German version was published as 'First part / of Jewish histories / or / talmudic / rabbinical / strange legends / . . . / from their own books rendered into / printed German by / Christophorus Helvicus, Professor of Scripture and Hebrew language in the University / of Giessen / Printed in Giessen by Caspar Chemlein / in the year 1612' / 8vo.

I shall quote from *Ma'aseh Book: Book of Jewish Tales and Legends*, translated from the Judeo-German by Moses Gastor, two volumes in one, facsimile of original 1934 edition (Philadelphia, 1981).

³⁴ See Keats, *Chessmen for Collectors*, p. 199.

The same story was used as the basis of a polemical tract against the Jews by an anonymous Frankfurt teacher: 'The life of / Elchanan / or / Elchonon [i.e. Andreas] / a pope / invented by the Jews / with necessary annotations / explained / by / JCA / Gymn. Francof. Coll / Frankfurt am Main / Published by Johann Benjamin Andreae / 1753' (8vo 4 sheets + 86 pages).

According to Steinschneider (p. 187), the author was perhaps made aware of the *Ma'aseh Book* by 'Ludi Magister' (p. 13), and transliterated the legend into German characters from the edition published in Homburg in 1727 (f. 87-8). Compare *Schachzeitung* (1860), p. 333. Steinschneider comments: 'The school teacher inflated two pages of the *Ma'aseh Book* to 86 by his notes. The tone and content of these must have produced the opposite of the intended effect in every unprejudiced reader; namely disgust and indignation at the meanness it revealed, . . .'

Rhine. His son was stolen from him by one of his Christian servants. She took the boy and had him baptized as a Christian, and he was brought up by priests and received a wide education. Eventually he became a cardinal in Rome; he was well respected and admired, and when the Pope died, he took his place. He remembered however that he was a Jew and who his father was. He remained where he was because he could not tear himself away from the high esteem in which he was held.

In an effort to bring his father Rabbi Simeon to Rome, the Pope enacted a harsh decree against the Jews of Mainz, knowing that this would bring his father to Rome to beg for mercy. The Jews of Mainz were terrified by these harsh rules, and elected Rabbi Simeon to go to plead their case. Thus the rabbi joined an elected group who went to Rome.

So they arose and went to Rome to [see] the Pope. On arrival they announced themselves to the Jews and they presented the matter to them. When the Jews heard this they were much surprised and they said that the Jews had never had a better Pope, because he could not live without Jews. He secretly kept Jews around him at all times; they had to play chess [*Schachspiel*] with him. Moreover, they had heard nothing of the evil decree which had been promulgated.

Rabbi Simeon himself went before the Pope who argued several talmudic points with him, impressing the Rabbi with his knowledge. The Pope invited Rabbi Simeon to play chess with him.

'Now I have Jews around me every day. They play chess with me. You, too -- play chess with me. Your case won't be so bad.' Now although Rabbi Simeon the Great was a master of chess, who had no equal in the whole world, the Pope still checkmated him, which much surprised Simeon the Great.

Thus despite the fact that Rabbi Simeon was a great player, he lost to the Pope. 'Some say that Rabbi Simeon the Great was able to tell from the game of chess that he was of the seed of the Jews.'

Finally the Pope revealed his identity to his father and claimed his willingness to return to the faith and thus to abandon the decree.

Another version of this legend is that Rabbi Simeon recognised the Pope as his son while they were playing chess, for the Pope used a move that his father had taught him and which he

alone knew about.

Some say that Rabbi Simeon the Great recognized his son through the game of chess, because he had taught him a move when the boy was still small. And now he had made the same move with his father, [thus showing] that he was his son.

The story as related in the *Ma'aseh Book* is an adaptation of a legend dating from the beginning of the 14th century³⁵ and existing in two versions. One version refers to Simeon Hagadol (meaning, no doubt, the elder), son of Isak Ben Abun; Simeon had lived in Mainz towards the beginning of the 11th century.³⁶ In the other version, Simeon's role is assigned to Solomon ben Aderet, the Rabbi of Barcelona (circa 1300); this time the son is abducted by a clergyman and in the end sets fire to himself.³⁷

It is significant that neither version of the original legend makes any mention of chess.³⁸ The incorporation of chess into the *Ma'aseh Book* version seems merely to testify to the spread of the game among German Jews at the time when the old legend was becoming more extensively known.

The second relevant story in the *Ma'aseh Book* speaks of King Solomon as the inventor of chess. It relates that one day he was playing chess with his chief counsellor, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, who became increasingly frustrated at his inability to win a game against the King. When the king went to look out of the window, Benaiah took a knight off the board and thus when the game was resumed, he won.

The King was puzzled at his loss, but soon realized the reason for this and wanted to devise a scheme to encourage Benaiah to confess.

³⁵ See Halberstamm in Kobak's *Jeschurun Hebr*, VI (1868), p. 122; compare *Ha-Maggid* (1871), p. 21.

³⁶ See the sources in *Bodleian Catalogue*, p. 2601; *Hebrew Bibliography*, V (1862), pp. 69-70; Zunz, *History of Literature*, p. 111.

³⁷ See the Catalogue of Hebrew MSS, mostly from the Literary Remains of Rabbi M.S.Ghirondi, autographed Berlin 1872, p. 11 Cod 29 f.56.

³⁸ Gaster notes that the story is hardly a genuine Solomon tale but is more likely a German folktale; see *Ma'aseh Book*, ed. cit., p. 265, No. 426.

The King saw two men intent on theft and disguised himself so cleverly that he managed to manoeuvre them into the palace and into a room filled with treasures where he locked them in. The King then went to his counsellors in order to ask their advice as to what to do with one who steals. Benaiah thought the King was referring to his own theft and thus he confessed and begged for forgiveness. The King assured him that he had long forgiven him, and explained the true reason he had called the Sanhedrin together. In fact the reason why he had devised this plan was that in case Benaiah had not confessed, the Sanhedrin would not have been assembled in vain.

Moses Mendelssohn and Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*

Mendelssohn (1729-86) is said to have remarked that chess was too serious to be a game, and too much of a game to be serious.³⁹

Moses Mendelssohn was a German Jew who at the age of fourteen left the world of the ghetto and went to Berlin. He acquired a great range of secular knowledge, and with the help of his friend Lessing he began to publish his philosophical writings. He wrote German with great elegance, and endeavoured to make it the language of intellectual argument. He was driven by the reaction of his gentile fellow-scholars, into 'a rationalist defence of Judaism, or, more precisely, into a demonstration of how Jews, while remaining attached to the essentials of their faith, could become part of a general European culture.'⁴⁰ As his prestige increased, so did his involvement in defending his people against persecution and ignorance, on the one hand explaining Jewish custom and law to the gentile authorities, on the other hand encouraging Jews to abandon 'those habits and practices which limited reasonable human freedom and particularly freedom of thought.'⁴¹

³⁹ See Dukes in *Ben Chananja*, 7 (1864), p. 636.

However, Montaigne had already said the same thing about chess; see Steinschneider, p. 193.

⁴⁰ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (London, 1987), p. 300-1.

⁴¹ Johnson, p. 301.

According to Graetz,⁴² it was Isaac Hess, a keen chessplayer, who first brought Mendelssohn and Lessing together at the chessboard in 1754.

One story of Mendelssohn as a chessplayer is related in a letter of Zelter to Goethe:

I can remember a Jew called Michel from my younger days. He appeared mad in all respects except two: when he spoke French no inelegant word crossed his lips, and he played impeccable chess. So this mad Michel (as he was called) came to old Mendelssohn, who was sitting playing chess with the old arithmetic teacher Abram. Michel watched the game. Eventually Abram made a movement with his right hand in order to knock over the pieces, treating the game as lost, and received a clout which knocked off his wig. Abram quietly picked up his wig and said, 'but my dear Michel, what move should I have made?'⁴³

It happens that this incident was utilized by Lessing⁴⁴ in his drama *Nathan the Wise* (1779). The following extracts⁴⁵ begin in Act 2, Scene 1.

⁴² Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol.11 (Leipzig, 1870), p. 9. However, Graetz gives no definite source, and his assertion is not corroborated by M.Kayserling, *Moses Mendelssohn* (Leipzig, 1862), p. 34.

⁴³ Correspondence between Goethe and Zelter, edited by Fr. W. Riemer, Part IV (Berlin, 1834), p. 137.

⁴⁴ Lessing's *Kollektaneen zur Literatur* (2 vols, Berlin 1790) includes a bibliography of chess in vol. 2, pp. 332-9. Lessing was the translator of Juan Huarte, *Prüfung der Köpfe zu den Wissenschaften* (Wittenberg and Zerbst, 1785), which has allusions to chess on pp. 208, 360 and 380. Huarte, a Jewish *converso*, was the author of *Essame de gl'Ingengni de gl'Huomini* [translated from Spanish by Camillo Camilli] (Venice, 1590). This book refers to psychology and chess, taking up a theme first developed by Suhrl of Tabaristan in the 9th century: chess is restful and concentrates the mind. It was translated from Spanish into French by Gabriel Chappuis and published as *Examen des Esprits Propres et Naiz aux Sciences* (Paris, 1633).

⁴⁵ I Quote from *Nathan the Wise*, tr. Bayard, Quincy Morgan, Frederick Ungar Pub. Co. (New York, 1983).

(The Sultan's palace. Saladin and Sittah [his sister] are at chess.)

SITTAH: Where are you Saladin? And how you play!

SALADIN: Not well? I thought.

SITTAH: Quite well for me, perhaps.

Take back that move.

SALADIN: What for?

SITTAH: That leaves your knight

Uncovered.

SALADIN: True. Try that!

SITTAH: I take it with my pawn.

SALADIN: That's true again -- Then check!

SITTAH: What good

is that? I shield my king, like this: and you

Are as you were.

SALADIN: This is a squeeze, I see,

From which I can't escape without some loss.

Oh well! Then take the knight.

SITTAH: I'd rather not.

I'll pass him by.

10

SALADIN: You give me nothing, find

Your plan of greater value than my knight.

SITTAH: May be.

SALADIN: But reckon not without your host.

For, look! This move you hardly could foresee?

SITTAH: Not I indeed. Could I foresee that you

Would be so weary of your queen?

SALADIN: My queen!

SITTAH: It's plain to see: today I win my thousand

Dinars, and not a farthing more.

SALADIN: How so?

SITTAH: You ask? - Because you're simply bent on losing.

Let's set aside the fact that such a game

Is not the most enjoyable to play:

20

Did I not always win the most with you

When I was loser? Did you ever fail

To pay the stake twofold, to comfort me

For losing it?

SALADIN: Well. well! So, I suppose,

you lost on purpose when you lost, my sister?

SITTAH: At least this may be said: your open hand

prevents me from improving on my game.

SALADIN: But we forget our playing. Make an end!

SITTAH: You will it so? Well check! and double
check!

SALADIN: Ah ha, that second check I did not see, 30
Which at the same time overthrows my queen.

SITTAH: Could that have been averted? Let me see.

SALADIN: No; no; just take the queen. I never was
Too lucky with that piece.

SITTAH: The playing-piece
Alone?

SALADIN: Away with it! - That does no harm.
For now again my cover is complete.

SITTAH: My brother has instructed me too well (*She
leaves the queen.*)

How courteously one should behave with queens.

SALADIN: Take it or not! For now I have no queen.

SITTAH: Why should I take it? Check! and check! 40

SALADIN: Keep on.

SITTAH: Not quite;
You move the knight between; or what you will.
All one!

SALADIN: Quite right! - For you have won; and now

Al-Hafi pays - Bid him be summoned! quick! -

You were no so mistaken, Sittah; I

Was absent-minded, lost track of the game.

And then: who'll always give us neutral pieces

Which nought recall and nothing designate?⁴⁶

And was it with the Imam I was playing? -

Oh pshaw! A loss demands excuse. Not just 50

The shapeless pieces, Sittah, can account

For my defeat; your calm and rapid glance,

Your skill . . .

SITTAH: Even so your only purpose is
To blunt the sting of loss. Enough, you were
Distracted, more than I.

SALADIN: Than you? What should
Distract your mind?

SITTAH: Not your distractions, truly!-
When shall we play so zealously again?!

SALADIN: Why, then we'll play so much the lustier! -

⁴⁶ Compare the distinction between ornate and plain figures as reported by Hyde on p. 10 above; the Imam insists on the latter type.

In medieval Arab chess, the piece that is here called the queen (*Konigin*) was actually regarded as a counsellor (see e.g. page 74 above.) According to E.M. Batley, this anachronistic usage by Lessing is deliberate. See 'Ambivalence and Anachronism in Lessing's use of Chess Terminology', in *Lessing Yearbook*, V (Munich, 1973), pp. 61-81).

SCENE 2

AL-HAFI: No, no; I'll play no more
This masquerade. For he must soon or late
Be told the truth.

SALADIN: Who must? and what?

SITTAH: Al-Hafi!
Is this your promise? Thus you keep your word?

AL- HAFI: How could I think that it would go so far?

SALADIN: Shall I learn nothing, then? 40

SITTAH: I beg, Al-Hafi,
Be modest.

SALADIN: This is strange! What could my Sittah
So solemnly, so warmly of a stranger,
Yes, of a dervish, rather than of me,
Her brother, ask in secrecy? It's time
I should command, Al-Hafi - Dervish, speak!

SITTAH: My brother, do not let a trifling thing
Come closer to your thought than it is worth.
You know that several times, in chess, I've won
The selfsame sum from you. And since I need
No money now; and since in Hafi's fund 50
The money's not too plentiful; why then
These items were not cashed. But have no fear!
You shall not have them, brother, nor Al-Hafi,
Nor yet the treasury.

AL-HAFI: If that were all!

SITTAH: More of the same - That too I have let stand

If in this episode Al-Hafi displays the superior chess insight of the 'mad' Michel, his character as a whole is modelled not on Michel but on the same Abram who resigned the game on dubious grounds. This is mentioned in Zelter's letter that I have already quoted. Zelter continues:

He [Abram] was considered to be the greatest of arithmeticians and eccentrics. He gave lessons for a few pennies or free of charge and lived in a room in Mendelssohn's house, also free of charge. Lessing thought highly of him because of his piety and innate cynicism.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Goethe/Zelter correspondence, loc. cit. For more information on this Abram (also called Abraham Wolf or 'Abraham Rechenmeister'), a friend of Euler and a celebrated mathematician, see Kayserling, *Moses Mendelssohn*, pp. 333-5, where Abram is called a keen chessplayer and Michel an excellent one.

**Zevi Uri Rubinstein: LIMUDEI HA-INYUNAI VE-HAMA-
ASEH BEDARCHEI HASCHOK HANIKRA SCHACHSPIEL**

למודי || העיוני והמעשי || בדרכי השחק || הנקרא (שלשיל) || טעארעטיש
אונד פראקטיש || לעהרן || צום שאכשפיל || נעתק ללשון העברי || ומתורגם
בל' [לשון] אשכנזי || מאת המדפיס || לעמבערג || געדרוקט מיט רובינשטיין'ס
שריפטן || 1809 ||

A Hebrew chess treatise published in Lemberg (Lwow) in 1809 may be regarded as a prelude to the era of intense interest in chess among Eastern European Jewish communities -- centred in Lithuania, Latvia and the territories on the borders of the Russian and Austrian Empires -- which was to continue until the advent

Steinschneider (p. 192) comments on the fact that 'at various times, especially in the last few centuries, high-ranking people often played chess with Jews, who used this as an innocent means of ingratiating themselves.' In this connection, he relates an anecdote of Mendelssohn's sovereign, Frederick the Great: 'Frederick frequently played chess with a Jew, in the presence of other people too, and lost repeatedly. "I shall win the next game, I hope!", the king called out in annoyance to his opponent. As is known, he was not of a gentle disposition. The opponent was so clumsy or so vain that he did not take the hint. He kept on making the king lose and was angrily asked to leave, never again to enjoy high honour.'

Steinschneider explains: 'I was informed of this anecdote by Dr F. Lebrecht, my colleague at the Veitel Heine Ephraim Academy for the Science of Judaism. Whether it applies to Frederick or to someone else, it automatically calls to mind the same behaviour on the part of the Caliphs Welid and Ma'mun towards their chess opponents who, however, out of politeness, let their exalted opponents win and thus allowed their vanity to remain intact.' (For the last-mentioned episodes, see Forbes, pp. 169, 179.)

However, Steinschneider also mentions Dieudonne Thiebault, *Frédéric-le-Grand*, 4th edition (Paris, 1827), vol. 2, p. 304, where Frederick is reported as saying that he did not play any sort of game and did not know chess at all.

Graetz, in *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 11, p. 617, quotes a report by a Dr Formstecher about Wolf Breidenbach (born in the village of the same name near Cassel in 1751; died in Offenbach in 1829), the best chessplayer in Frankfurt am Main. As Breidenbach was purchasing Philidor's *Analyse des Echecs* (first published 1749), he made the acquaintance of a titled gentleman. Through the recommendation of this gentleman he rose so high that he was later able to secure the abolition of the Jewish Poll Tax.

of the Holocaust.

The treatise was written (or translated) and printed by the famous bibliographer Zevi Uri Rubinstein. The title ('Theoretical and Practical Chess Lessons') appears in Hebrew (as above), and German: *Theoretische und practische Lehren zum Schachspiel*. The primary text is in Hebrew; in somewhat smaller type, in the bottom half of the page, there is a transcription in 'Judeo-German', that is German in Hebrew script. The work was published in the same volume⁴⁸ as an abridged reprint of a textbook on mathematics and astronomy by Elijah ben Abraham Mizrachi, entitled *Malecheth Hamispar* (first printed in Constantinople in 1534).

The chess book has an opening section which partly consists of moral reflections and historical speculations of the kind familiar to us from *The Delight of Kings* and other sources:

Chess is one of the oldest games in existence. In fact it is so old that nobody really knows who invented it and where it first appeared. Those who write about its history and origins disagree; first they endorse one person's claim to having invented it, then someone denies this claim and asserts a different one. . . . Now this wisdom has spread to all parts of the world, and each person has assimilated it into his own language and it is constantly praised. . . . In order not to behave foolishly in one's leisure time, or to be involved in empty things without purpose, from which one's spirits would not rejoice, it was thought that this pastime would succeed in satisfying the intellectual soul of those who experience its charm and practise its devices and ideas.

With all the practical wisdom available such as mathematical skills and properties *et alia* which have been brought from all languages and translated into the Hebrew language, this kind of wisdom (or anything like it) has not been seen or heard of, from when chess appeared to this very day, . . .

If it is surprising that Rubinstein should be oblivious of the precedents of his work, we shall nonetheless see that he explains the technicalities of chess in more detail than previous Hebrew writers. He states his purpose as follows:

⁴⁸ See Zedner, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Books in the Library of the British Museum*, No. 225 (p. 663).

An alternative edition (also 1809) of Rubinstein's treatise was bound together with the book *Bechinat Olam* with a Yiddish translation by Eliezer Pavir [1805]; *Chochmat Shlomo* [1805]; *Sefer Ha-Yashar* attributed to rabbenu Tam [1798].

Thus I translated how the game is best played and tactics that will be very useful to both young and old to accustom their minds to this kind of study and to learn to see beneath the surface: thus they will come to understand one thing from another through learning about this game. . . . And if you see it played in front of you every day at a fixed time, and you set your mind to its study, allotting to it the required time each day, you will come to understand its workings.

Yet before proceeding to describe the game, he retells the 'corn story' that we have encountered before (see page 133). In this version (where the king is named as Bahuv), the story is amalgamated with another legend -- the 'warning' to the despotic monarch, which in *The Delight of Kings* was delivered by a 'Persian Sage' (see page 134 above).

The scribes of Persia, according to Saba, claim that the game of chess already existed in the year 530. The following is written in Arabic about the origins of the game. Bahuv, a young king of Turkey, reigned over his subjects with force, and his people were oppressed. Many had integrity and tried to rebuke him for the evil of his ways. Some of these he imprisoned, and some he put to death, . . . However, there was a wise man called Nassir who could no longer stand by and watch the evil being meted out to his people; and he took it upon himself to find a ruse to bring the king round to his opinion and attenuate the oppressive situation. He discovered the game of chess, in which the king stands protected by his servants and pawns who run here and there to save him from the evil of his enemies. In this game even the common pieces of little worth are valuable in the fight if they are played wisely and the player enjoys good fortune; and if one of them falls, the king can succumb to checkmate. When the king heard about this game, he very much wanted to learn how to play it, and he sent for Nassir ben Daharam to teach him. While he learned the game he came to understand the wisdom of its pieces and their movements. He also came to learn how to rule wisely and understood the evil of his treatment of his people. And he took its teachings to heart and changed his style of behaviour with his people and ruled them with kindness, and they came to love him very much; and when he saw the right thing to do, and that his people loved him and only wanted his wellbeing, he asked this wise man what he wanted as a reward for his good deed. -- 'Ask for up to half my kingdom, and it will be yours.' And the wise man fell on his face and said, 'Please, my lord the King, look at this chess board; on it there are sixty-four squares. If the King pleases he will place a grain of wheat on the first square and double it on the next square, quadruple it on the next square; thus each square will contain double that

of the previous square and this will be my reward.' The king became very angry for he felt that he was being mocked, and he said to him: 'Have you lost your mind? Why didn't you ask for something bigger than this?' But he insisted and the king said it would be done. And the Lord of the Treasury came before the King and said, 'I cannot understand the enormity of your kindness in this case. The value of this gift is greater than the hairs on my head, and all your wealth and the wealth of your country is not enough to meet this request; if this were multiplied one more time you would have no country left.' And he called the sage mentioned above, and he kissed him and embraced him and treated him like a brother. And the Persian culture spread to the West from one person to another.

The next section of the book explains the basic rules of the game. Two points are worth noting; they involve the promotion of pawns, and castling. According to the modern rules of chess, a player whose pawn reaches the opposite end of the board is wholly free to promote it to whatever piece he chooses (normally a queen), but in the practice of Rubinstein's day the player's choice was subject to the possibility of physically replacing the pawn by a piece previously captured:

When the pawn goes ahead and reaches the far side of the board, it can become a high-ranking piece and it will be known by the name of the piece its holder will choose, depending on the way the piece was taken and whether or not it is still in the game.

And if, as sometimes happens, no high-ranking pieces are missing, even though it has come far across the board, the pawn which has reached the other side will remain a pawn.

The rules governing castling are set out in detail (in contrast to the brief description we are given, say, in *The Delight of Kings*):

Castling:

When the king decides to castle the three following moves must be carried out at the same time: the king moves to the right or the left (whichever is better for him), depending on his position within the area of the first line; he will stand next to one of the two castles and this castle will be taken and moved to the other side of the king.

There are five conditions which prevent the king from carrying out this move:

1. If another piece is standing between the king and the castle.
2. If the king or the castle have already moved from their original

places.

3. If the king is threatened by check at that time, he cannot avail himself of this move to hide.
4. Castling is prohibited if one of the enemy pieces is on the destination square or within the area of the move which the king wishes to make.
5. This move may only be made once by each side in the whole game.

Having explained the rules, Rubinstein gives a glossary of some of the technical terms of chess:

Advantage of the move:

This is the name given to the right of one of the players to make the first move of the game.

Position (Logi):

The camps of the two sides, with strong and weak pieces.

Doubled pawns:

This is the situation when a pawn stands in a row with another pawn in front of it or behind it.

Connected pawn:

A pawn which is supported by another friendly pawn.

Isolated pawn:

The same pawn, standing alone, without support.

Passed pawn:

The name given to a pawn which has no enemy pawns in front of it, and may continue advancing until stopped by a piece.

Sacrifice:

This is the situation when a player allows his opponent to take a piece for nothing in order to clear a path in front of him or to strengthen his own position.

Castling:

What is understood by this is that the king moves in the way discussed above, i.e. two steps in one go.

Open file:

This is a column of squares which does not hold pieces of either side.

King's Gambit:

This is the name given to the sequence of opening moves which arises when the player who made the initial move of the game uses his second move to advance his king's bishop's pawn two spaces according to the rules, thereby intentionally placing it in the hands of his opponent.

Check:

This is a warning from one player to the other that his king is threatened by one of the pieces round about.

Discovered check:

What is understood by this is the following: between the king and the piece that threatens him is a third piece. If this intermediate piece is removed this would be dangerous to the king and put him in check.

Perpetual check:

This happens if one player can keep his enemy's king in check all the time and his opponent is unable to stop him.

Sudden checkmate:

This is a mate that occurs without either of the players realizing, thus it occurs without the usual warning of check (which must always be used in advance from one player to the other).

Stalemate:

This happens in positions with a bare king, i.e. a king left without any other pieces, or if the pieces are blocked and cannot move. In such a case, the king himself must fend off his enemy's pieces. Stalemate means that he will find himself in check if he moves from his place, but is not in check at present.

Thunder (agreed draw):

This happens when neither side is able, either through a lack of high-ranking pieces, or through a lack of pawns, to do anything much to the opponent.

Checkmate:

This happens when the king is caught: when the king is under attack and is not protected or hidden by his pieces, and he has no power to move from his place.

Next, Rubinstein introduces some principles of chess strategy. The following passage discusses the development of the pieces in the early stage of the game, and the preservation of a harmonious pawn structure:

It is not a good idea to begin with tactical tricks straight away, and only those who are foolish will start a game by running here and there with the queen and knights. They thus give the enemy sufficient time to set up all the evil devices he wishes, to bring out his high-ranking pieces and his pawns as he wishes, and some time will be lost which the player will not be able to regain. Therefore make sure that your first moves are not aimed at traps or captures, but at bringing your pieces out well, to allow you mobility; and arrange your position so that you will be able to carry out your task using all your high-ranking pieces to advantage: then the attainer can attain and the saviour can save.

How to carry this out:

1. Try always to keep your pawns together; they should stay together and not separate into individual units. -- Pawns like these are very valuable in defence, for they are most successful at preventing the high-ranking pieces of the enemy from penetrating our ranks and gaining a foothold within our borders.
2. Bring the bishops and knights out of their places immediately and position them behind pawns which have also moved out. Ensure that they are positioned with a clear path in front of them and that they do not block each other.
3. Choose a position for the queen and give her support nearby to help her succeed in disguise and deliverance.
4. Consider which side would be preferable for castling.
5. Sometimes it is a good thing not to castle early, to confuse your enemy so that he directs his strategies at the wrong side.

Advantage can be gained by making it difficult for the opponent to castle:

It is also very good to test your own strength, and the strength of your army, by preventing your opponent from availing himself of the possibility of castling, by putting him under threat of check. He will then have to move his king or put another piece in front of it, in which case that piece will be immobilized. . . .

Rubinstein cautions against wasting time in the following ways:

- a) By moving your piece forward in a way that will allow your opponent to come to meet you with one of his pawns and chase your piece back to where it came from.
- b) By going after one of your opponent's pieces which he himself wishes to move from its position and place in a better one.
- c) By threatening him with check for no reason. We have already taught you that this should only be carried out when you can gain one of two advantages from it.
- d) By exchanging one piece for another when this increases the opponent's mobility. . . .

After this advice in general terms, Rubinstein lays down principles for the use of each piece:

Of the king:

- 1. Be very careful not to put the king (or the queen, for that matter) in a position of danger, i.e. where they might fall prey to the threat of a fork or discovered check.
- 2. Even if your opponent's queen is no longer in the game, it is very dangerous to separate the king from his surrounding pawns, and to leave him without bodyguards or even to bring him into the heart of the battle. Therefore:
- 3. It is good strategy always to keep pawns at the king's side . . . so that the army can go out to the battle leaving the king guarded by the pawns.
- 4. The king himself is always very highly regarded and a more precious piece than all the rest. He comes to the battlefield only in the endgame, for only then is it fitting that he should fight with his enemies.

Of the queen:

- 1. Her best position is standing in the second row among her pawns to guard them from any enemy attack, but she should not be in a position that blocks the movements of other pieces.
- 2. Also be very careful not to capture your opponent's pawn or any other piece with the queen if by capturing with her you remove her from the battle; then you will not succeed either in capturing pieces or in defence. . . .

Of bishops:

1. The bishops are very useful in conjunction with pawns on the opposite colour of squares.
2. You should always place your bishops on the side opposite to where your opponent's king castled. . . . This is useful in attack.

Of knights:

1. The knights should not disconnect themselves from their initial position until the two bishop's pawns have moved two steps forwards.
2. The knights will prove useful to you in carrying out a fork, i.e. in attacking two pieces in one go. . . .
5. Try to post a knight inside enemy territory, protected by your own pawn, in a place where enemy pawns will not be able to dislodge it. This piece is good and useful for the purpose of winning the war.
6. Also, if the opponent advances his pawns to harass you, you must stop them in their tracks. Knights are better for this purpose than bishops.

Of the rooks:

1. Make sure that the rooks have an open space to move freely at all times so that they can provide assistance to whoever needs it. Also make sure that they always stand in an empty column with nothing blocking their path.
2. See to it that they are the first to penetrate your opponent's camp. . .
4. Although it seems clear to all that the rook is stronger and better than the knight or bishop, nevertheless it sometimes happens that a rook proves inferior to a knight.

Of the pawns:

1. Knowing how to move pawns wisely will contribute greatly to winning the war.
2. Make sure always to capture your opponent's king's pawn. . . .
4. If the king's and queen's pawns are placed on the fourth row by moving them two paces, they should not move further forwards unless the enemy attacks them and forces them to move.
5. Even a pawn that is doubled (see above) will not fall into enemy hands easily if another pawn stands next to it to support it.
6. Even a pawn on its own (an isolated pawn) should be carefully preserved if it is a passed pawn. . . .

Next, we are given some rules concerning the general conduct of the players. The regulations applying when the starting position has been set up wrongly are now antiquated. We notice, however, that if a player touches a piece, he is obliged (then as now) to move or capture it if possible (see paragraphs 5-6 below). An interesting point arises in paragraph 10. According to the modern Laws of Chess, stalemate counts as a draw, but in Rubinstein's time it was not covered by a universal ruling; whether the stalemated player was judged to have drawn or lost (or won!) depended on what the players had agreed in advance.⁴⁹

RULES TO BE OBSERVED IN THE GAME:

1

The chessboard should always be positioned in such a way that the white square at the edge should be to the right of each of the players. If, however, the players do not notice and have not reached the fourth move they should start again. If the fourth move has been played, the game does not have to start again unless the two players agree to do so.

2

Similarly if the pieces are illegally placed, i.e. not in their correct places, the rule is as above.

3

If the game has begun and it becomes apparent that one of the high-ranking pieces or pawns is missing, the entire game should be abandoned whether or not they have already played four moves. . . .

5

If a player touches a piece he is obliged to move it; having moved it to another position he is not allowed to change his mind.

6

If a player touches an enemy piece he can be forced to take it and remove it from its place, unless he has no piece which *can* take it.

7

And if a player moves his piece in the wrong way -- an illegal move -- he must move it back unless his opponent agrees that he should leave his

⁴⁹ The rule that a player giving stalemate lost the game was a feature of English chess in the 17th and 18th centuries; see Muray, pp. 389-91, 466, 833, 874.

piece in this position. . . .

8

There is no obligation to warn, tell or remind one's opponent of check against the queen or rook. This must only be done in the case of the king.

9

If your opponent falsely announces check and you try to move with your king or another free piece, you can take your move back and continue as though nothing had happened.

10

If in the end the king does not fall prey to checkmate, but to stalemate, there is no hard and fast rule as to the outcome. Whether or not he loses really depends on what the players have agreed between themselves. When a player is stalemated this may count as a draw, although in England he will win if his opponent's queen participates in the stalemate.

The remainder of Rubinstein's treatise presents specific games of chess by way of illustrations for the beginner, and does not warrant quotation. Some of the points I have quoted will be encountered again when we examine Jacob Eichenbaum's poem 'The Struggle'.

Léon Hollænderski: *Délices Royales*

The treatise *The Delight of Kings* formed the basis of a chess book compiled by Léon Hollænderski and published in Paris in 1864 with the overall title of *Délices Royales*.⁵⁰ This book, which I have listed in the introductory chapter (see page 19 above), comprises a reprint of Hyde's triad of Hebrew texts together with their translations into French and some supplementary material which I shall now examine.

The book is dedicated to Albert Cohn, the well-known Jewish chess book dealer and collector. (To this day his bibliography of chess books and his chess book lists remain authoritative and treasured reference works.)

A Monsieur Albert Cohn, à Paris.

⁵⁰ Pages in this edition are indicated by bracketed numbers in my text.

Monsieur,

Le livre des DELICES ROYALES, écrit en hébreu par nos illustres docteurs du moyen âge, donne des notions de morale et de science en même temps que les règles d'un jeu qui s'adresse spécialement à la plus haute classe de la société.

C'est à vous, Monsieur le Docteur, qui à tant d'autres vertus savez allier celles dont le jeu d'Echecs est l'emblème, que ce livre devait être dédié.

Veuillez donc, je vous prie, accepter la Dédicace de la traduction française que j'ai faite de cet ouvrage, approuvée par M. Ulmann, grand rabbin du Consistoire central de France.

Agréez, Monsieur le Docteur, l'assurance de mes sentiments entièrement dévoués.

L.Hollænderski

Paris, le 6 avril 1864

In his preface, Hollænderski tells us that he so enjoyed the Hebrew works that he felt impelled to translate them to enable many others to share his enjoyment. He liberally praises the qualities of intelligence associated with chess:

Of all games based solely on mental skill, the most complicated, the most erudite, the richest in ingenious combinations and intriguing problems, is indisputably *the game of chess*. Accordingly, it has at all times been the game favoured by serious minds and the favourite recreation of nearly all great men.

Distinguished men of learning, among others Leibniz and Euler, have had recourse to mathematics to solve various problems which this game presents. Struck by the beauty and variety of its combinations, they had no reservations about calling it a science. . . .

Nowadays, this noble game is well known in the highest society. The broadest intellects, the most eminent minds, even crowned heads, apply themselves to it zealously in their rare moments of respite from the care of public affairs and the grave preoccupations of government.

Knowledge of chess is, so to speak, the complement of a good education and a sign of a high level of learning. (3-4)

Hollænderski has this to say about the Hebrew texts of which he

is offering a translation:

It is not for us here to vaunt the pure, elegant, indeed eloquent style of this curious work which is scarcely known except to a few bibliophiles. Unfortunately we cannot flatter ourselves with having preserved in our own language the grace and poetic naivety of the original. The extreme concision of the Hebrew, the energetic brevity of the biblical idiom, are so many reefs against which the efforts and goodwill of the translator are dashed. However, nothing has been spared on our part, for we have devoted ourselves to the task of rendering each sentence as faithfully as possible.

. . . (6-7)

May this modest work be received with favour; we will think ourselves well rewarded for our efforts. (8)

At the end of his preface, before proceeding to the Hebrew writings, Hollænderski prints an anonymous poem in French (9-14), of which I here give an English version:

THE GAME OF CHESS

Chess, the Royal Game, has its origins
In the most distant time;
Some say it was in China.

Before this pastime of assembled calculations,
The sage himself bows.

For one sole result, what diverse means!
What ingenious art! -- cards and green baize,
What are you beside a game outstandingly noble,
Which, far from decreasing it, feeds the intelligencel

What general has ever seen
On a field the size of a hand,
Such a battle being waged,
Skill triumphing and the unforeseen intervening?

II

Two camps are drawn up. -- As if in the lists,
Three heralds preside in the dual encampment:
Impartiality, honour and justice.
Between each soldier and each regiment,
All is equal: discipline, training, valour;
And so as to complete this judicious balance,
Lest in the melee a fateful error
Should strike down a friend mistaken for a foe --
Though the same uniform has seemed necessary,
Its colours have been prudently contrasted.

III

Black and white, here then are the two sides face to face.
-- We almost always see, as the opening shot,
A dwarf warrior leap, cold-bloodedly bold,
Marked out by his valour and very small size:
It is the *pawn* ... Gentlemen, cry 'Hurrah for the Rank!'
Never was a brave more modest, more dignified;
And yet the action could not commence
Without him... were it not for the daring horseman.
The pawn marches straight, but his blows are oblique.
To the right, to the left, he strikes, and his firm and slow step
Paves the chessboard with great, magnificent feats:
He alone never kills by a backward move.
Should he cross the limits of the rival camp,
He dies, but as a hero. This glorious death
Redeems a fighter, an elite prisoner:
The blood of this martyr is the most precious.

IV

When the knight, who advances by leaps,
Harries the enemy, the latter trembles and yields.
With his implacable spirit and many bounds,
He dismays the strongest and bravest;
And without any need of ruse or feint,
He lands in places which none can reach.

V

-- Hail charming *Fooll*... Young, active and light,
He is an aide-de-camp of elegant mould.
Laughing yet attentive, at the signal he sallies forth,

And lives up to his name, which must not be changed,
With sudden spurts by which distance is mocked.
This proud officer, full of wit, naive,
Moves at a slant to arrive all the sooner.

VI

Now, admire this old giant, this arch...
It is the *tower* [rook], a Titan, a marching catapult.
Sombre, majestic, and calm in triumph,
Sometimes it mounts on an elephant's back.
All-powerful battering ram, formidable *ballista*,
The chessboard has placed you first in the row.
You go swiftly when needed, but always squarely,
As a noble monument should.

VII

Make way!... Make way!... Here comes the *queen!* -- Her power
Is more greatly famed than even her proud beauty.
Her heart is on a plane with her lofty birth,
And her courage alone would have made her majesty.
The queen in chess is not that mistress
of a voluptuous king languid with love;
She has not the appealing softness of *Wanda*,
She is *Joan*, counselling and acting by turns.
Her royal privilege is raised still more by honour;
Free to go everywhere, to move in all directions,
Now she fights, now she protects,
And the retreat is made before her powerful blows.
Disdainful at first -- as soon as the charge is sounded,
Her brilliant person is seen in every place.
Who will ever tell us how many warriors this delicate arm
Will overthrow in the burning arena?
-- Sometimes even, this cry resounds: 'Companion!
Save yourself! It is done! Take care!... It is the Queen!'

VIII

Hats off!... It is the *king!* -- From the height of that grandeur
Which once held a hero on the shore,
The master, with a cold eye, contemplates the carnage.
Impassive witness of ruin and horror,
He remains without motion, and if, by mischance,
He is slightly exposed, calamity breaks forth.

Soldiers, take heed!... The king is attacked...
Saved!... Thanks to the rook; for behold, he castles [*le voilà qui roque*].
The word may at first appear quaint,
But the move is useful and of very sound value.
Measuring the slowness of his imposing gait,
The king takes one step only, but to any side.
Woe to the imprudent one who appears before him!
He is soon punished for his temerity.
The fear, the respect, which the master inspires in all,
Shields him at all times from a traitor's snares;
And if he is seen to be threatened with danger,
-- 'Check to the king!' -- this protective cry rings out.

Each righter, whether commoner or of rank,
Has but one aim in the game, to defend the monarch:
Is he captured?... Is he checkmated?... The fierce combat
Is by this fact suspended, brought to an end;
And the opposite party, elated by its glory,
Is master of the field conquered by the victory.
-- Take note that if, most ineptly,
By means of a poorly aimed and ludicrous blow,
They have merely stalemated the king,
The battle in this event would be lost, or a draw.

IX

O game which charms the leisure
Of kings, of heroes and sages,
Source of virtuous pleasure,
Allow a passing poet
To conclude thus his powerless eulogy:

'Never have your fierce combats, images of our wars,
Reddened with the blood of murderous fights
Your innocent battlefield....'

Stanza VIII recalls a point we noticed earlier in Rubinstein's treatise: the poem evidently assumes that stalemate can be either a draw or a *win* for the player stalemated, depending on the version of the rules agreed between the opponents.

The French poem is followed by Hollænderski's rendering of

the works by Ibn Ezra and Ibn Yechia and of the anonymous *Delight of Kings*.

After this comes a short section offering 'general advice' to the chessplayer (61-3). Much of this advice is reminiscent of Rubinstein. Avoid placing a piece where it can be attacked by an enemy pawn and driven back with loss of time.⁵¹ Beware of allowing a *discovered check*, or a 'discovered' attack on the queen.⁵² Beware of removing the queen from the scene of action for the sake of 'pawn hunting' ⁵³ -- your opponent's queen will then be unopposed, and may be able to frustrate your winning attempt by giving *perpetual check*. Hollænderski also points to the device known in English as a *pin*, though his formulation is somewhat confused: 'You should not capture a pawn with a bishop or other piece opposite your own king, because your opponent would take the opportunity to replace it with his rook or queen, and you could not withdraw your piece without losing it, seeing that it would not be permissible to expose your king.'

The part of the book written in French concludes with a résumé of the rules of chess (65-8). It may be noted that here, in contrast to the poem quoted above, stalemate is unequivocally designated as a draw ('Le roi est quelquefois *pat*, ce qui fait partie nulle ou remise'). The promotion of pawns is subject to the same convention as that described by Rubinstein, though there would appear to be some scope for deviation by mutual consent: 'Ordinarily, with most players, the pawn is only replaced with one of the pieces previously lost. If the player has all his pieces, the pawn on the eighth rank remains inactive until a piece *is* lost.'

The section of the book which reads from the back contains the original Hebrew texts. In his preface Hollænderski claims that, viewing them together with the translation, 'hebraists can appreciate the conscientious work that we have put into it.' Steinschneider, we know, was unimpressed, but Chief Rabbi S.Ulmann, to whom Hollænderski submitted the work, judges differently. In a letter reproduced in the book (1-2), he states:

⁵¹ Cf. page 173 above.

⁵² Cf. page 171 above.

⁵³ Cf. page 174 above.

To M. Hollænderski, Paris

Dear Sir,

I have read your French translation of the book about the game of chess, entitled *Délices royales*, by Ibn Ezra and Ibn Yechia. Having also read the Hebrew text, I can imagine the difficulties you must have encountered; and I have all the more admiration for your work, which gives a faithful, clear and elegant reproduction of the style of these illustrious Rabbis of the Middle Ages.

Seeing that you intend to publish this book in the original and translation, I hope that the public will give your work the reception which your efforts deserve -- efforts that were aimed at bringing to light the merit of our old masters who were able to turn their talents to all kinds of subjects with equal success. Lovers of Hebrew literature in particular will be grateful for the reprint of a most intriguing and extremely rare text. I myself share that gratitude in a high degree; please be assured of this, Sir, and of my very best wishes.

S.Ulmann, Chief Rabbi of the Central Consistory

Paris, 11 November 1863

Jacob Eichenbaum: *The Struggle*

We conclude our collection of documents with what is perhaps the finest romantic description of a chess game written in the Hebrew language. This is the poem entitled *Hakrav* ('The Struggle'),⁵⁴ by Jacob Eichenbaum of Odessa and Zhitomir.⁵⁵ It was published in 1840. It is written in seventy-eight rhyming stanzas in classical Hebrew verse which combines elegance with dramatic power.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ London: J.Wertheimer & Co., 1840. See Zedner, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Books in the Library of the British Museum*, p. 42. The dedication to Solomon Horwitz of Odessa, dated 24 Elul 599 (i.e. 3 September 1839), was translated in *Palamède*, 6 (1846), p. 372, and in *Schachzeitung*, 3 (1848), p. 66.

The poem was translated into Russian by Joseph Ossip Rabbincicz (2nd edition, Odessa 1974). My translation is the first in English.

⁵⁵ Eichenbaum died in Zhitomir on 7 December 1861; see Steinschneider, p. 184.

⁵⁶ See 'Ein modernes Gedicht über das Schachspiel', in *Litteraturblatt des Orients*, I, p.

In the Klau Library of the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati, Ohio, the publication is designated as follows:

ס' 18249

שירה

איכנבויס, יעקב

"הקרב, שיר מאת יעקב איכנבויס". 42 דף.

פינסינסי 293 אדעסא, חקצ"ס, אלב' כרו'

שיר על שחמט. - כתוב בעמודי א בלבד. - בראשו:

"לכבוד... מוהר"ר זלמן הורוויץ נ"ו כקציני

הוכבי אדעסא מנהר כזכרת מאת המהבר, אדעסא,

כ"ד אלול - קצ"ה. - בראש כה"י: בספרי "ישראל

בן נחמן שלמה
"Israel Solomons

My translation of the poem now follows. Unlike other chess poems I have quoted, 'The Struggle' provides a complete move-by-move description of a specific game.⁵⁷ It is also unique in placing the game in a realistic setting. My translation of the poem now follows. The opening stanzas introduce the players and spectators) and describe them setting up the chessboard and pieces and casting lots for the first move. In the process, the laws of the game are described in circumstantial detail....

142, where the date of publication is given (incorrectly, in Steinschneider's view) as 1839.

⁵⁷ The game described in *Hakrav* has been specially constructed so that the position reached after the first player's 29th move is identical with position number 29 in Philip Stamma's collection of chess problems; see *Schachzeitung*, 3 (1848), p. 66-8.

Philip Stamma, a native of Aleppo in Syria, was among the players who frequented Slaughter's Coffee House in St Martin's Lane, 'the headquarters of English chess from 1700 to 1770'. His *Essai sur le Jeu des Echecs*, published in Paris at a time when his financial resources were very low, contains a collection of 100 end-games on which his reputation rests, though when he brought out the revised edition in London in 1745 he added a collection of 74 openings. 'Many editions were printed between 1740 and 1856 in French, English, German, Dutch and Italian. His end-games revived the dying interest in the problem, and by re-introducing to Europe the Muslim conception of the problems which had long been forgotten, they set the fashion for the remainder of the 18th century, and made possible the whole development of the "modern problem"' (Murray, p. 849). In the same place, Murray quotes J.W.Allen, 'Notes on the Development of the Chess Problem', *British Chess Magazine* (1903), p. 185: 'The problem as conceived by Stamma was a position such as might plausibly be supposed to have occurred in actual play, and in which a direct mate could be forced in a given number of moves by an ingenious and surprising process'

The chess writings of Stamma and Gioachino Greco (born c. 1600) were adapted by Moses Hirschel and published as *Das Schach des Herrn Gioachino Greco Calabrois und die Schachspiel-Geheimnisse des Arabers Philipp Stamma, verbessert, und nach einer ganz neuen Methode zur Erleichterung der Spielenden umgearbeitet* (Breslau, 1784).

HAKRAV

For by wise counsels you shall wage your war
(Proverbs 24:6)

To a certain pleasure garden, delightful to the eye,
In the month of Aviv, at noon,
Two parties came, approaching from different sides,
These led by Heber, those with Korah at their head,
The one a man of understanding, the other wonderful in counsel,
And both men's fame extended far and wide.

They assembled in that place and on that day,
Where they had agreed to meet and fight each other.
They also brought their friends with them.
It was not a war of vengeance, wrath and ire
But a contest of intelligence, good sense and discretion;
They disputed together who had the greater skill.

True, each had an army at his command,
Foot-soldiers, horsemen, princes and a king
Facing each other on the battlefield,
But in none of them was there the breath of life,
They were merely creatures of lacquered wood,
And only by the hand of man could they be lifted up and move.

The keepers of the garden had done as they were bid;
They had prepared the table and its equipment as the law required
and set two chairs for the antagonists,
Who sat down at the table opposite each other.
The others who had come there stood around
Anxious to see what would take place.

A square board was placed before them
Chequered with coloured squares, eight by eight,
Alternately white and black.
This, the field of battle, was laid between them,
Both having a white square at their right-hand corner,
For that has been the law for them from early times in India until the
present day.

For this war with its many laws,
The plan of its battlefield and the numbers in its armies,
Was fathered by an Indian sage.
It made its way from there to all corners of the earth
And became a pastime for old and young
Because, through it, they learned ruses and stratagems.

They drew the carved soldiers from a box
And arranged them on the squares of the board,
In two rows on each side,
The army of the one entirely like the army of his fellow
Save only that their colour differed;
Korah chose black and Heber white.

At the farthest corners of the field
Each one stationed his two captains [*shalishim*].
These could move straight along the length and breadth of the field;
They could advance or retreat,
Draw near or venture far,
Provided that the road they trod was clear.

Pairs of horsemen stood next to them;
They could turn aside from the straight path which they travelled,
And pass over one of the squares
But they changed the colour of their station when they moved.
Should friend or foe obstruct their path,
They had the power to overleap their heads.

Twin archers were positioned at their side;
They could step straight across the corners [of the squares]
[i.e. they could move diagonally].
To any side and any distance they could shoot their arrow
But had not the audacity to pass over anyone's head.
Neither could ever change the colour on which he stood,
Or traverse the whole field, but only half of it.

The general, in the middle on the edge of the board
Chose to rest on a place of his own colour.
He was very powerful, a mighty soldier.
He could tread the same paths as the captain and the archer,
But could not turn aside like the horseman,
Or leap like a deer over any obstacle.

But his nearest neighbour,
Dwelling to his right or to his left,
Has more majesty and dignity than all the army.
All are concerned for him, they guard him like the apple of their eye,
For, should he perish, they too perish and become as nought.
He is called King, and wears a crown.

By single steps, whichever way he will,
He may move slowly from his place of rest.
There is one other path which he may also traverse:
He may turn his steps towards one of his captains,
Taking two paces at once to left or right,
But only if no enemy stands between them.

The captain, too, then leaves his post,
Crosses past his king and stands beside him;
And all these movements are accounted one.
But this they may not do while an enemy pursues them
Or watches them on the path on which they move
Or they have left the places where they stood at first.

This movement is called 'protection' [*mishmeret*],
For by it the wearer of the crown is protected
From any sudden fear which might alarm him.
No wise contestant will delay to do it,
For there is no better refuge for the king,
And, without it, terror may overtake him.

In the second row, from side to side,
Stood foot-soldiers, each hard by his friend.
One step at a time, and only forward, could they go;
They could never make their way back again.
But they could take a double step
If they had not yet left their first position.

Thus from each side's camp
Sixteen men went up to war,
Half of them were called officers, the foot-soldiers known as servants.
Most distinguished of all was the king;
After him the general, and next came the captain,
While the horseman and the archer were of equal worth.

None of those who went to war, wherever he might move,
Could come [to rest] on the same spot as a friend or foe,
He must only proceed to places where there was no one;
But if his enemy stood in his way
He could thrust him out of the camp
And the stricken man's place would be his to inherit.

However, the foot-soldier could not do this;
He could not strike any foe he met face to face
But only butt forward towards him with his horns.
And if an enemy foot-soldier moved beside him,
As he passed him, he might lay him low,
And turn aside to the corner where his enemy had trodden.

Having deployed their armies according to the law,
The two protagonists cast lots
To settle from whose army the first man would run his course,
For in every campaign only one soldier at a time
Is sent forth by the two leaders, each in turn;
And Black was drawn, which was Korah's camp.

We notice how exactly the rules governing castling, and even *en passant* captures, are presented. Three chess pieces have unusual names: general (for queen), captain (for rook), archer (for bishop). According to the modern convention, of course, the player with the right of the first move plays with the white pieces, but in Eichenbaum's time the game could just as well be commenced by Black.

We recall from the treatises of Rubinstein and Hollænderski that in the nineteenth century certain practices which today are subject to standardized rules were regulated by mutual agreement between the players. In the present case, the player Korah invokes the 'touch-move' rule with a proviso which today is antiquated: if the piece touched cannot be moved, the king must move instead....

Now he said to Heber: 'Before I proceed
Let us first determine between us
The rules which are to be observed.
Those which I follow I will tell you now;
If you have others, proclaim them too
In the presence of our brethren, so that they may be borne in mind.

'Each of us, if we send out one of our men
Or put forth our hand and merely touch him,
May no longer change, but must go on
But if the man is shut in
So that he can take no step in any direction
Then the king must move from his place

'Or if one of us touches one of the enemy army
He cannot repent his action and draw back
But must strike [i.e.take] the one he touched
Unless in error he has taken hold of him
When no one in his force can strike him down.
For this fault, too, the king must move.'

As the discussion proceeds, we recognize further points from Rubinstein and Hollænderski, notably concerning the promotion of pawns. It is obligatory to announce check and checkmate orally. Stalemate is counted as a draw....

'If a foot-soldier breaks through to his enemy's camp
And in safety reaches the end of the field,
He becomes another being, he is accounted an officer.
He therefore chooses for himself, among the slain of his camp,
Whoever seems best to him, to arise in his stead,
And so restores him from the dead.

'If Death has not yet passed among his officers
Or, in his eyes, all those who dwell in the shadow of death are of too small account,
He may remain ready at his entrance
Until calamity comes to his camp
And one of the elect falls to the ground.
Then he may breathe back into him the breath of life.

'Although I know that there are other rules
I cannot recall them, at present they elude me,
And also I am anxious to begin my fight with you.
Now, therefore, please, my friend, set out before us the remaining rules.'
And Heber answered: 'I shall do as you have asked.

'If the king falls, his army goes into captivity
And the leader of his opponents is given strength and glory.

But he may not be struck a sudden blow, all unawares.
Therefore the enemy pursuing him
Must call out "King!" to give him warning.
And in default of this, no man may touch him.

'When he is overtaken by complete disaster,
No hiding-place is left, his refuge lost,
Then must his pursuer say to him: "O king, you die!"
If he does not declare this to him
He must let him be and must not bring him low,
And if there is still some haven for the oppressed man, he may yet be
saved.

'If the king's enemies beset him on all sides
So that he cannot stir no matter where he turns
And the remnant of his army is shut in or has fallen,
Then all strife ceases and the war is at an end,
But neither of the warring sides can claim greatness,
Neither has gained the advantage over his fellow.

'To these rules, which you have so attentively heard,
Nothing may be added, nor may anything be taken from them.
Make haste, my friend Korah, arise and make your move.
But all you others, offer no advice at all,
Let no stranger's voice be heard among us.'

Those whom it had pleased to come and watch the battle
Rejoiced now that the recital of the rules was ended,
For they had found them very wearisome.
And, silent as any stone, they held their peace,
Only turning their eyes to the battlefield
To see which of Korah's force would first advance.

The game now begins, and the poet invites the reader to
follow the moves on his own chess set:

Now, my harp, make ready your strings,
Rise up on the wings of your many songs
To sing to us of all the manoeuvres of the army.
Pray declare every move, every pause,
Every display of strength, every disaster, show of cowardice or courage,
From start to end hide none of them from us.

Be not afraid lest some angry tongue
May carp at [your story of] this war,
Alleging that it contains an error or distorts the truth,
For your words will certainly please the man of understanding
If you can describe the war as it was waged a thousand years ago.

You, too, my readers, why should you look for faults?
It is better that you should take pleasure and delight in beauty,
In wisdom [or cunning] and understanding, if such you find here.
But place the board before you
And set up the camps of the army upon it
So that you may fully understand what you read.

The foot-soldier who stood before the king
Was first to move, with doubled stride.
Everyone who is skilled in combat starts out thus,
For in this way a path is opened up
For most of the officers of greatest worth.
In the same way his enemy's foot-soldier advanced against him.

Korah next sent out of his camp
The foot-soldier who stood in front of his general.
This one, too, stepped off with a double stride,
But his enemy did not allow him to remain there,
But with his lofty horns thrust him away
And he poured out his life-blood on the ground like water.

The general, girding himself with fury,
Then took vengeance for the death of his servant,
Smiting and destroying the assassin.
Now the horseman on the right of Heber set out.
He stood courageously facing his enemy's general;
He laughed at his arrows; he leaned on his servant.

From his white position the archer went forward,
Choosing to stand shoulder to shoulder with his general.

The game may be recorded in chess notation. (For this purpose we will keep to the modern convention of numbering the ranks from 1 to 8 starting from the White end, and designating the files

by the letters a-h reading from White's left.⁵⁸ However, to a modern player the game score will have a bizarre appearance, since Black is moving first and his moves are therefore in the left column.) The moves so far described are as follows:

	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
1	e7-e5	e2-e4
2	d7-d5	e4xd5
3	Qd8xd5	Ng1-f3
4	Bc8-e6	

For the next phase of the game we will not quote the description in full, but merely give the moves in notation:

4	...	c2-c4
5	Qd5-c6	g2-g3
6	Be6xc4	d2-d3
7	Bc4-e6	Bf1-g2
8	Nb8-a6	0 - 0
9	0 - 0 - 0	Nf3xe5
10	Qc6-b6	Nb1-a3
11	Bf8xa3	b2xa3
12	Qb6-b5	d3-d4
13	c7-c5	Ne4-f3
14	c5xd4	Nf3xd4
15	Qb5-a5	Bc1-d2
16	Qa5xa3	Nd4-b3
17	Kc8-b8	Nb3-a5
18	Be6-c8	Na5-c4
19	Qa3-e7	Qd1-b3
20	f7-f5	h2-h3
21	h7-h6	h3-h4
22	g7-g5	h4xg5
23	h6xg5	Rf1-c1
24	Qe7-g7	a2-a4
25	Ng8-h6	Ra1-a3
26	Qg7-g6	a4-a5

⁵⁸ Stamma, incidentally (see note 57 above), was one of the first chess writers in Europe to employ an 'algebraic' form of chess notation anticipating the modern method. See Murray, pp. 230, 848-9, and Van der Linde, *Geschichte und Literatur des Schachspiels*, vol. 2, p. 233.

27	Qg6-h5	Bg2-f1
28	Na6-c5	Qb3-e3
29	Nh6-g4	

With this move, the crisis in the game is reached.⁵⁹ White is simultaneously threatened with checkmate and the loss of his queen.

The second horseman goes forth like a lion;
He falls upon the general like a wolf on a kid.
The king, too, is threatened with disaster,
But you have not yet heard the end of the matter;
We shall see the faces of those who stand there,
And learn what befalls them, too, in this situation.

If, from a cloudless sky, there were now to fall
Hailstones mingled with thunderbolts
Shattering the eternal hills on the earth below,
No living thing, no mortal flesh would quake
As greatly as do Heber's friends
On seeing the pit open wide to swallow their great leader.

And just as voyagers over unknown seas,
On hearing a sailor call from the crow's-nest
That land is in sight on the horizon,
Rejoice over the coast they are nearing,
So do the company of Korah garb themselves in a mantle of joy,
For sevenfold strength is prepared for the prince.

Who, then, could make known
All the pride which shines from his brow,
Or all the joy which surges within him?
He had already turned his eyes away from the combat,
Thinking that there was no longer any help for his companion
And had arisen from his throne, willing to leave.

Surprisingly, however, it is White who is able to force checkmate here. He begins by sacrificing his queen, and mates within a maximum of eleven moves:

⁵⁹ For the position, see (e.g.) *Stamma's hundert Endspiele. Nach der zweiten verbesserten Ausgabe von 1745 bearbeitet von L. Bledow und O. v. Oppen* (Berlin, 1856), diagram 29 on p. 56 -- where, however, the white queen's rook is on the back rank.

But his companion, calm and confident,
Stealthily stretches out his hand towards the field of battle,
While both friend and foe look on with wonder.
His general reaches the enemy's servant,
Opens his mouth and calls 'King!' [check]
Thereupon all are filled with amazement.

(2 9 . . . Qe3-f4+)

Scarce has the word issued from his mouth
When the servant thrusts at him remorselessly.
At the sound of his fall all spirits are in turmoil.
Swiftly the archer emerges from his place,
Dispatches the killer to the grave,
And calls: 'O King, beware of the sword!'

(3 0 g5xf4 Bd2xf4+)

The king turns towards the corner
To find rest under the shadow of his servants.
He hopes no foe will find him there.
But the horseman, reckless of his own life
And unpredictable as a stormwind, is enraged at him,
And from where he stands he calls towards him 'King!'

(3 1 Kb8-a8 Nc4-b6+)

While his anger is yet hot and his words not yet at an end,
Behold, the foot-soldier treads him down like clay
And the pangs of death encircle him like a garment.
But the ire of the white servant is aroused;
His anger burns to destroy the killer,
And 'King!' cries the captain from some way off.

(3 2 a7xb6 a5xb6+)

When the horseman hears this shout
He girds himself with strength and leaves his place
To defend the king and shelter him.
Then Heber sends forth the second captain,
Who carries off the enemy archer like a plague
And utters a warning cry of 'King!'

(3 3 Nc5-a6 R c1xc8+)

The captain shouts like a mighty warrior
And by his great strength subdues the enemy,
Casting him down to the grave to dwell among the shades.
The white captain, in great wrath,
Rends the horseman like a desert wolf,
And in a voice like thunder calls: 'Plague descends on you, O King!'

(3 4 Rd8xc8 Ra3xa6+)

Scarce has he raised his voice
When the foot-soldier reaches him
And fells him with a blow to his cheek.
Then, from the left of the king, the archer moves forward,
Shoots his arrow at his enemies' master,
And cries 'O King! Save yourself from destruction!'

(3 4 b7xa6 Bf1-g2+)

The captain stands in his way
And entreats him on bended knee:
'Kill me, I pray you, and do not harm my King!'
While yet he pleads with bitter cry,
The archer cleaves his entrails with his arrow,
And calls out: 'O King, you die!'

(3 5 Rc8-c6 Bg2xc6 mate)

All who stand there are rooted to the spot,
Bereft of speech, they can utter no word,
But gaze in silent horror at each other.
The heart of Korah, too, sinks like a stone,
For he has seen and understood what none had ever told.
Yet he summons up all the strength to speak:

'Your wisdom, my friend, is beyond measure;
In vain do I desire, useless my effort,
To tell one thousandth part of all your glory.
I do not think it shame if you defeat me
For no one else knows what you know;
Deep as is the ocean, it is no deeper than your thoughts!'

Then those who stand there also raise their voice
And, with a joyous shout, ringing like thunder, all cry:
'Long live the mighty Heber!'
But the chiefs arose without delay

Hastening to leave together with their comrades
So as to return home before nightfall.

All of them gathered at Korah's home
Where he had graciously prepared a banquet for them.
He also invited his other friends to his tent,
Some of whom were men of eloquence.
They wrote down the story of the war
So that it should never be forgotten by future generations.

As Van der Linde points out,⁶⁰ Black could have postponed the mate by three moves by playing 31 Ng4-e5 Bf4xe5+ 32 Rd8-d6, and later interposing his queen at f3.

⁶⁰ See Steinschneider, p. 184.

LANDMARKS OF CHESS LITERATURE

The quantity and date of early references to chess in these pages may be measured against the following list of major chess books.

c. 1300

Jacobus de Cessolis, *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium*

1497

Luis de Lucena, *Repeticion de Amores e arte de axedrez* (Salamanca)

1512

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1527

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1561

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1590

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1597

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1604

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1614

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1616

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1633

Juan Huarte, *Examen des Esprits Propres et Naiz aux Sciences* (Paris)

1669

Gioachino Greco, *Le Jeu des Eschets, traduit de l'Italien* (Paris)

1694

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1737

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הקרב

שיר מלחמה

יעקב אייכנבוים

HAKRAB

Die Schlacht

ל' כ' ב' ג' ד'

המשיכיל ונבון דעתו, יקל דוח וכלי אבב

הנשיה הנכבד והנעלה

מורה ר' מר

אל מן הנדון י"א

נ"א

מקצני השפוי אהרעסא

מנחת מנכרת

מאת

המחבר

עמם ושפחה יחד חברים ונשיא
פזרתי ושיבתי אלא למה חיה פזרתי
אך אים יפגזי מפני ישיא ורצתי
על בדרתה תכתיב חתום ושיפחה
אשר ישיא ונשיא פזרתי ישיא ורצתי
אשר ישיא ונשיא פזרתי ישיא ורצתי
אשר ישיא ונשיא פזרתי ישיא ורצתי
אשר ישיא ונשיא פזרתי ישיא ורצתי
אשר ישיא ונשיא פזרתי ישיא ורצתי

הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

[illegible][illegible]

לראות בה יעשה נפשו ויבטח
ועלה המים והצבא
ואת כל הארץ ואת
המלכות ואת כל
הארץ ואת כל

[illegible]

Handwritten text in Arabic script, likely a religious or historical document, featuring several lines of text written vertically.

[illegible]

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת הַקּוֹל
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת הַקּוֹל
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת הַקּוֹל
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וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת הַקּוֹל

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וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת הַקּוֹל
וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת הַקּוֹל

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ וְיִשְׁמַע
 אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ וְיִשְׁמַע
 אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע
 אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע
 אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע
 אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת-כָּל-קוֹלְךָ

אשר יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים

אשר יצאנו ממצרים
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ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים

אשר יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים

אשר יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים
ביום הזה יצאנו ממצרים

אֶלְעִיָּהּ יִשְׁמַר תְּהַקְדֵּב עֲדָרֶיהָ לֹא יִשְׁחָלֶהָ

כִּי תִמְנֶה בְּהַקְדִּיךָ עֲתִידָהּ יִגְדֹּל

כִּי הִיא לְבַר אִיִּךְ עֲלֵיהֶם לְפָנֶיךָ

וְכִמְנָה אֶבְרָם בְּיָמָיו הַשְׁתַּדְּרָה יִשְׁקֶינָהּ

מִלְּפָנֶיהָ עֲוֵי־הַיָּדָיִם זִמְיָהּ יִשְׁמָהּ

וְכִי יִשְׁמָהּ בְּהַקְדֵּב עֲדָרֶיהָ לֹא יִשְׁחָלֶהָ

עליון מן המלכות והוא
עליון מן המלכות והוא
עליון מן המלכות והוא
עליון מן המלכות והוא
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עליון מן המלכות והוא
עליון מן המלכות והוא

אָרעם ווערן אים און אונזערע קינדער

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

און אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

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און אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

און אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

און אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

און אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

און אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

און אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

פֿאַר אַלע זייערע פֿאַרשפּאַרעטע

שְׁמִי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 וְשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי
 יִשְׂרָאֵל
 וְשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי
 יִשְׂרָאֵל
 וְשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי
 יִשְׂרָאֵל

מִשְׁכָּנֶיךָ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּיָמֶיךָ
וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּיָמֶיךָ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ
בְּיָמֶיךָ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּיָמֶיךָ
וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּיָמֶיךָ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ
בְּיָמֶיךָ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּיָמֶיךָ
וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּיָמֶיךָ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ
בְּיָמֶיךָ וְיִשְׁכְּנוּ בְּיָמֶיךָ

[illegible][illegible]

הַפְּשִׁיטָה אֶל הַשְׂמֵמָה לְיָמִים פְּנִימִי
 יִרְבֶּה לְפָרִישׁ יִתְצַב לְפָנֶיהֶם
 אֶחָד פְּרִיָּה בְּשִׁלְיָה פְּתֹעַ מִזֶּל
 מִפְּרִיָּה בְּשִׁלְיָה בְּיָד פְּרִיָּה
 יִשָּׁב הַעֲבֹד לְקִיָּה פְּתֹעַ
 פִּי קוֹל מִלְחָמָה מִרְחֹק שׁוֹמֵעַ

הַפְּרִישׁ אֶל יָמִים עֲלֵה לֵאמֹר הַפְּרִישׁ
 הַפְּרִישׁ אֶל פְּרִיָּה אֶל לְבָב יִתְצַב
 הַפְּשִׁיטָה אֶל הַפְּרִיָּה הַקֹּל עֲבֹדָה
 הַפְּרִישׁ אֶל פְּרִיָּה יִתְצַב הַפְּרִישׁ
 אֶחָד עֲבֹד יִתְצַב לְבָב יִתְצַב
 יִתְצַב עֲבֹד יִתְצַב פְּתֹעַ

אֶל עֲבֹד פְּתֹעַ הַפְּשִׁיטָה מִזֶּל
 מִזֶּל עֲבֹד אֶחָד עֲבֹד
 מִזֶּל עֲבֹד אֶחָד עֲבֹד
 יִתְצַב עֲבֹד יִתְצַב
 יִתְצַב עֲבֹד יִתְצַב
 יִתְצַב עֲבֹד יִתְצַב

יִתְצַב הַפְּשִׁיטָה אֶל מִזֶּל עֲבֹד
 לְבָב פְּרִישׁ קָם עֲבֹד הַפְּשִׁיטָה
 פְּתֹעַ קָם מִזֶּל עֲבֹד יִתְצַב לְבָב
 וְעַתָּה הַפְּשִׁיטָה מִזֶּל עֲבֹד
 וְעַתָּה הַפְּשִׁיטָה מִזֶּל עֲבֹד
 מִזֶּל עֲבֹד יִתְצַב מִזֶּל עֲבֹד

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וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ וְיִשְׁכַּח
 אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ כִּי-יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ
 וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
 וְיִשְׁכַּח אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ וְיִשְׁכַּח
 אֶת-עֲוֹנוֹתָיִךְ כִּי יִשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלְךָ
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וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמַח בְּיְהוָה
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וְהָיָה לְךָ אֶתְּחִילָה
וְהָיָה לְךָ אֶתְחִילָה
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וְהָיָה לְךָ אֶתְחִילָה

R. ABRAHAM ABEN-EZRÆ

HISTORIA SHAHILUDII.

חרוזים על שחוק שהימת להרב
אברהם אבן עזרא ול

*Carmina-Rhythmica de Ludo Sháb-
mát, R. Abraham Abben-Ezra,
beatæ memoriæ.*

אשורר שיר ומלחמה ערוכה
קדומה מן ימי קדם נטובה
ערוכה מתי שכל ובינה
קבעה עלי טורים שמונה
ועל כל-טור וטור בהם חקוקות
עלי לוח שמונה מחלקות
והטורים מרבעים רצופים
ושני המחנות עומדים צפופים
מלכים נצבו עם מחניהם
להלחם יהיא בין שניהם

CANAM Canticum præliumque in-
(structum,
Antiquum, à diebus antiquitatis in-
(stitutum.
Instruxerunt illud viri prudentiæ & intelligen-
(tiz,
Qui constituerunt illud octo ordinibus.
Et ad singulos ordines inibi exarantur
Super Tabella octo partitiones.
Hi autem ordines sunt quadrati conlstrati,
Et duo castra stant pressim.
Reges collocantur cum castris suis,
Ad gerendum bellum quod futurum est inter
(iplos.

* Ratio hujus Metri in primo loco postulat Shevatam literam, & post eam tres Syllabas longas; tunc aliam Shevatam literam cum tribus itidem Syllabis longis; denique tertiam Shevatam literam cum duabus Syllabis longis. (Vid. Buxtorfii Thesaur. Grammat. p. 647.) Hâc ratione ab Editore positâ, promptius erit hoc Carmen in sequentibus locis, ubi Metro minùs consultum fuit, emendare. Nempe, — versu 8. pro ושני lege שני. Paginâ proximâ, ver. 4, pro מלחמת l. לחמת. Ibid. ver. 11,

פני כלם להלחם נכונים
 והמה נוסעים תמיד והונים
 ואין שולפים במלחמתם חרבות
 ומלחמתם מלהמת מחשבות
 ונכרים בסימנים ואותות
 בפגריהם רשומות וחתוכות
 ואדם יחזה אותם רגושים
 ירמה כי אדומים הם וכושים
 וכושים בקרב פשטו ידיהם
 אדומים יצאו אל אהריהם
 והרוגלים יבואו בתחלה
 למלחמה לנוכת המסלה
 והרגל יהי הולך לגדו
 ואת-איובו יהי נוטה ללכו
 ולא יטה בעת לכת אשוריו
 ולא ישים בעמיו אחריו
 ואם ירצה ירלג בתחלה
 לכל-עבר שלשה במסלה
 ואם ירחק ויגד סובלו
 ועד טור השמיני יעלה לו
 כמו פך לכל-פנים יהי שב
 ומלחמתו כמלחמתו תחשב
 והפך יהיה מניח פסעיו
 ופסעיו לארבעת רבעיו

והפיל בקרב הולך וקרב
 והוא נצב עלי הצד באורב
 כמו פך הליכתו אבל יש
 לזה יתרון למה שהוא משלש
 והסוס בקרב רגלו מאוד קל
 ויתחלק על דרך מעקל
 עקלקלות דרכיו לא מלולות
 בתוך בתים שלשה לו גבולות
 והרוח יהלוק מישור בדרכו
 ובשרה עלי רחבו וארכו
 ודרכי עקשים לא יבקש
 נתיבו מבלי נפחל ועקש
 והמלך מהלך על צדדיו
 לכל-רוחות ויעזר את-עבריו
 ויזהר בעת שבתו וצאתו
 להלחם ובמקום תחנונו
 ואם איובו באימה יעלה לו
 ויגער בו ויברח ממקומו
 ואם הרוח באימה יתרכו
 ויש עתים אשר ברח לפניו
 ועתים יש לכתר לו המוני
 וכלם הורגים אלה לאלה
 וזה את זה ברוב חמה מכלה
 וגבורי שני המלכים

חללים מבלי דמים שבוכים
 ועתים יגברו כושים עליהם
 ויגומו אדומים מפניהם
 ועתים כי אדום יגבר וכושים
 ומלכם בקרב הם נחלשים
 ואם מלך יהי נתפש בשחתם
 בלי חמלה וילכד ברשתם
 ואין מנוס להנצל ומפלט
 ואין מברח לעיר מצור ומקלט
 ועל-יד-צר יהי נשפט ונשמת
 ואין מציל ולחרג יהי מט
 וחילו בעדו כלם ימיתון
 ואת-נפשם פדות נפשו ישיתון
 ותבארתם כבר נסע ואינם
 בשורם שכבר נגף אדומם
 ויוסיפו להלחם שנייה
 ויש עוד להרוגיהם תחיה

תם

R. BONS. ABEN-JACHIAE

HISTORIA SHAHILUDII.

עוד מליצה צחה על צחוק השאק
חברה תפארת המליצים ר' בן
שיניור אבן יחיא זל

*Sequitur Oratio elegans de Luda
Scaque, quam composuit Gloria
Oratorum Bonsenior Abben-Ja-
chia, beatæ memoriæ.*

בראשית ממלכת החילים
העומדים לפניך מלך ביופי תחזיקה
עיניך הנו נצב בראש כל צבאיו
יריע אף יצריח יתגבר על שגאיו
בעוזם ידו וגבורתו ישען על ביתו
בית רביעי מכון לשבתו ותהי
ראשית ממלכתו בצבה שגל לימני
ויתן חנו ולפניהם שני פרשים
וכונים סוסים מויתים ושני פילים
מימיניה ומשמאילים ושני רוקים
משני עבריהם המה נסיכיהם

IN principio Regni exercituum
stantium coram te, Regem in
pulchritudine suâ videbunt oculi tui.
Ecce enim collocatur in capite om-
nium copiarum suarum: ovabit at-
que exclamabit, prævalebit contra
osores suos, per robur manus suæ &
potentiam suam: innitetur super
domum suam, viz. domus quarta
est locus mansionis ejus. Et initio
regni ejus collocata est Conjux ad
dextram ipsius, cui ille exhibet fa-
vorem suum. Et juxta illos sunt
duo Equites parati cum Equis cata-
phractis, & duo Elephantes, dex-
trorsum & sinistrorsum: & duo Ru-
chi ad utraque latera eorum. Hi

ושריהם אשר כח בהם ולפני אלה
שנים אחרים מקומם לא נעלם
המה הנפורים אשר מעולם אלה
הם מושבותם ודגלי מחנותם
למשפחותם לבית אבותם:

ועתה נחור דודים ונתתי לה
מהלכים בין העומדים אשים לה
כסע החיל הזה ודברי בשפה
ברורה משיב מלחמה שעה:

המלה ללכת כביר לבית
ממלכת אחת היא דתו בין
באלכסון בין ישר במרוצה כל
אשר חפץ עשה ולא ירום לבנו
להרחיב צעדיו במלחמה בן ימות
במלחמה:

ובתי הפילים אשר בהם הולכים
כלי מעד שלשה המה מיטבי צער
ולולי בשלשה בתים דרך עקלתון
להם לא ירעו ולא ישחיתו הגה
אלה נסעו מזה ומלאכתם
נגמרה:

והפרשים שות שות השערה כל-
אחד חגור כלי מלחמה הוד נחרו
אימה בית אחד באלכסון בקומו
ובית שני טרם יעמוד במקומו שם
ישר נוכח עמו:

ולפני הרקום מהלכם יכשר יש
דרך ישר תנועה אחת לארבעתם
לא יסופו בלכתם כל-הדרך אשר
לפניו ילה כל-אחד אם בפח יגבר
ואין דובר אליו דבר רק אם אחד
מן השרים ועבדי המלה יעמוד
לפניהם אין כח להם לעבור
עליהם לא מהמנם ולא מהמהם
מגבול אשר עדן ילה כל-אחד
מלברו ואף-גם-זאת כסה גדול
כחו כי לפעמים אחד מן צעירי
החיל יקחנו בשלום שמד יבואנו:

והמלה בעל מלחמתם אין שזה
לעמוד בקצה הדרך לעמתם
וללכת שם לא ינסה לא יראה
ולא ימצא וולתי להיות לפניו אחד
העם למגן ולמחסה וגויה מגבר
יכסה ואם יקום ויתחלה בחוץ
על משענתו אחרי הראותו והמלה
קם בחמתו ילה ויסתתר אחרי
הגדר והמחצה וינס ויצא החוצה:

הגה נא ערכתי לפניך אמרי
שפר להרריה ולהופיע מקום אשר
דבר המלה ודתו מגיע ובאנשים

אלה הנגשים הלא כתבתי לה
שלישים והרבתיה בעומק השחוק
אישו ורבו וכל אשר לכן בו ולא
נפקר בהם עד אחד אשר לא
כתבנו:

כי אם אשה עצורה לנו יען כי
בשבתה בראש מרומים עלי קרת
הומיה היא וסודרת ללכת תחגור
מעון מתערה בביתה לא ישכנו
רגליה הולכת בתים בכל-עבר ופנה
סביבותיה גראו שלשה המה נפלאו
ואחרי כי הרבתה למלאות
בראשונה מאוייה כמה נאות
בסיעותיה מבית לבית באלכסון
הליכתה אשה אל אחותיה:

והמלה לבוש הבגדים השחורים
בבית הביעו לכן לקצת מזה זה
לעמת זה וזוג עומדת אצל משכאלו
בבית אפל נגש אל הערפל יען עינו
אליה לא יפקח כי אשה כושית לקח
ואין הפרש ביניהם כבואם לקראתה
בדרך אחר יצאו אליה בהלוק
אחד ומסע אחד בבות זה בן מות

זה משמן בשרם ירדה רק השחור
 יגדל בהיות לפניו עם גדול ורב
 נמדין הולכים בעצרים עליו ארץ
 נוסעים חבלות חבלות ויעפילו
 לעלות מדלגים מבית לבית
 בגבורה ורגליהם רגל ישרה ואם
 לשלול שלל ולבזבז בו להם חפץ
 ורצון ילכו בית אחד באלכסון:

ויש בהם ירבה אונים ויוסף
 חיל אז יחלג כאיל וחלף אל מחו
 חפצו ובא עד קצו שם יקל מנשרי
 שמים ואין ברגלים ועשה כאשר
 נפשו חפצה כל-מלאכות שהאשה
 עושה:

ושניהם המלכים עושים כובים
 להרוג מטם מלך אסור ברהטים
 ובשבת המלך על מושבו ויצוהו
 אחד מעבדי אויבו לצאת מגבולו
 אל כל-עבר פן יפגענו בדבר ואם
 לצאת מביתו ומקום תחנונותו רצה
 נחפש ולא מצא כי אנשי החיר

ללכדו נצבים עליו שלח רשת
 לרגלו או נהפך למשחית כבודו
 הוי אדון והוי הודו ועמו נשאר
 אחריי לאפס ותוהו כי במה נחשב
 הוא ויש פגע אחד בו ישח רום
 אנשים וישפל ירכה ישוח ונפל
 עת מלך ריבו אותו מגדלתו הוריד
 עד בלתי השאיר לו שריד או
 ממצבו ויקרו נהדף ונכחד איכר
 ירהוף אחד זה נשאר בכבוד
 ושררה וזה ימות בגנש מרה כן
 יאבדו כל-אויבי הגביר דורשי
 רעתו ואוהביו כצאת השמש
 בגבורתו:

תם ונשלם

WITH SOURCES EVEN

SHOSHAN CONCORDANCE

DELICIÆ REGIS

Dicta

HISTORIA SHAHILUDII.

כר חיונה זוטרי לגברי השתנה
דקשישנא לדודק

Cum essemus parvi, pro viris habebamur: nunc facti seniores, habebimur ut pueri? Bava-kama 92. 2.

CP. Ps. 143, 5

אוברה ימים מקדם זה לי

Job 29, 4

שלשים שנה בימי חרתי מקדמוני

CP. Prov. 8, 34

בהיותי שוקד על דלתי הלמוד

Isaiah 8, 20

לתורה ולתעודה ללמוד וללמד

Liturgy (morning service, Sh'mon)

וכל ימי גדלתי בין החכמים ושלמתי

Sam. 7, 12

חלקי. מיושבי בית המדרש ועד

Zechariah 3, 7

הנה עמרני אדוני זמן לי מהלכים

בין העומדים האלה עמדי העולם

אשר הבית בית ישראל גבון עליהם

RECOLAM dies antiquos: jam sunt triginta anni in diebus juventutis meæ ab incunabulis meis, cum essem assiduus ad valvas studii pro Lege & Testimonio, ad discendum & docendum. Omnibus diebus meis educatus sum inter doctos, & posui portionem meam inter sedentes in Scholis: & huc usque me juvit Dominus meus, & dedit mihi ambulacra inter astantes istos, columnas Mundi, in quibus Domus, Domus, inquam, Israelis sta-

להורות

Exodus 18, 20

cf. Avoc. 6, 4

cf. Ps. 19, 8

Eccles. (Kohélet) 7, 23

Job 28, 28

Eccles. 2, 20

cf. Eccles. 11, 9, 12, 1

cf. Eccles. 1, 13, 3, 11

cf. Psalm 66, 10

Eccles. 1, 2

Prov. 26, 23

Lam. 4, 2

cf. Eccles. 9, 12, Prov. 7, 23

Psalm 10, 7

cf. Eccles. 2, 2

Amos 6, 13

Prov. 14, 13

1 Kings 3, 9

cf. Lev. 10, 10, and Exod. 42, 20

Gen. 14, 4

Isaiah 7, 16

להורות לבני עמי את הדרך ילכו
בה ו היא דרכה של תורה ו תורת
אדוני המיטה מחכימת פתי וכל
זה נסתי מחכמה כי הן יראת
אדוני היא חכמה וסוד מרע
פניה

וספתי אני בימי בחורתי לתור
ולדרוש את מסבות הזמן מראש
לעד סוף ובהנחלים פכוד הגחילה

בחינת עולם באבן פוחן וצרפתים
בצרוף את הכסף ומצאתים הבל
הכלים שאין בו ממש כסף סינים
מצפה על הרשעים לנבלי הרשע
בהם יקשים בני אדם כמחר צמוד
אל פח ו העלתי על ספר כתוב עלי
אדמל התפולות ומצבות העולם

השפל הזה כי מדינות חזקה ונחלת
לשונו בהומדי חרפת הזמן ופכוד
לשחוק אמרתי מחלל חלילה
וחולין הוא לה ולשמחת השמחים
ללא דבר אחריותה שמחה תונה
ושמתי מגמתי להבין בין טוב לרע
ולחבול בין קדש לחול למען ידע
הנער והזקן כל העם מקצה מאוס

Isaiah 7, 16

cf. Psalm 110, 3

Deut. 32, 2

Psalm 18, 31

cf. Psalm 21, 3 and Isaiah 32, 4

Gen. 49, 21

cf. Psalm 8, 6

Gen. 27, 2

Play upon 1 Sam. 15, 14

1 Job 33, 8

4 Daniel 7, 8

Ezek. 28, 12

cf. Malachi 2, 7

1 Sam. 10, 6

cf. Daniel 10, 8

cf. Job 19, 15

Prov. 23, 8

Play on Gen. 21, 6

cf. Jerusalem Talmud, eg Shevi'it, III, 34a

ברע ובחור בטוב גם תמה יתחר
בדרכי התורה והלמוד וישמעו
רחוקים את אשר עשתי מרחם
משחר לי טל ילדותי ליל כפר
אמרתי אמרת אדוני צרופה ואדוני
אלהים נתן לי לשון למודים
ובארשת שפתי כל מנעתי לדבר
צחות וכל דאנשים הדואים את
תפארת הספר נתן אמרי שפר
המה יראו כן יתמרו על אשר
לעת כזאת אשר יקנתי לא ידעתי
יום מותי באתי לכתוב ולתבר
ספר ללמד חכמת הצחוק ולספר
בשכחו ומה קול חסאן באוני
וקול מלך אשמע ופום ממלך
דברך אתה הוא חותם תבנית
כליל יופי אשר ישבת במושב
אלהים לדין עמי עם בני ישראל
ותורה יבקשו ספיק איה נחשבת
לאיש אחר והורה גופך עליך
נחשבת לנכרי שנתגבר מעשי
ושחת דבריך הנעימים משמחים
אלהים ואנשים בכתבך על הצחוק
כתבת קעקע וכל השומע יצחק
ונצוד אמו דרבלי העולם ונמצאת
מכשיל את חרבים

Daniel 4, 2

Ecclesiastes 18, 19
and 22, 8

■

Jeremiah 23, 28

Psalms 24, 9

■ i Isaiah 44, 5

Isaiah 9, 16

■ Sanherib 17a

cf. J. 6, 52, 7

■

Deut. 4, 10, 15, 16

Play on Deut.
31, 11

cf. 1 Kings
11, 30

cf. Deut. 18, 20

Deut. 24, 13

■

cf. Daniel 10, 9

Gen. 14, 22

■
cf. Jeremiah
29, 23

cf. Psalms 89, 38

■

ואני ביטתי בספרים ועד האלהים
הבאתי דבר שניהם והוכחתי
בניהם לא ראי זה כראי זה אין
פירותם רמון ושזי רק כרחוק
מורה ממערב מה לתבן את-הפר
זה כלו אומר קדוש זה כל אש
בתוכו יטמא זה יכתוב ידו לאדוני
זה כלו חנה ומרע את-אשר
טמאת ואסרת בנערותה טהרת
והתרת בקצותה כמטהר את
השרץ אמרתי יסם ידברו ורוח
שנים יביאו חכמה ולא בקני עם
הארץ כל-זמן שמקנים דעתם
מטרתם מהם ושתה אבי תן
כבוד לאלדו העבאות וביים הקהל
בבוא כל-ישראל להתפלל אל
אדוני תקרע את-הספר הזה גר
כל-העם לעניהם לשנים עשר
קרעים ואינם מאחים לעולם כי אם
בליל לאשים ובערת הירע מקרב
ישראל ואלה תהיה צדקה לפני
אדוני אלהיך

נאמן בשחק אם במרד ואם במעל
עשיתי כדבר הזה אל יושעני
אדוני כי הוא יודע מעלומות לב
וישראל הוא ידע את-אשר הלכתי
באמת ובלב שלם ולא הלכתי
בסוד משחקים כי אם בתם-לכבי
ובנקיון כפי עשיתי זאת ולמען
דעת כל-עמי ולהיות נקי מאדוני
ומישראל ולכן התעוררתי ועז
התאזרתי והיה צדק אזור כתי
והאמונה אזור הלצי ובשפתי
אספר הסבה ועלה ראשונה
ותכלית על מה ועל מה כתבתי
זה הספר השני למען תהיה לי
לעדה לדור אחרון כי זה אני בלי
פשע ואתה קורא נעים שמענה
ואתה דע לה ויהי אית אחר
מיוחד ומיוחד שדורו אית תם
וישר הולך בדרכי התורה והמצוה
לשמור ולעשות אהוב למעלה
ומכבד למטה אשר השימוהו
לראש לכל-דבר שבקדושה בתוך
קהל ועדה ולו שני בנים בשתי
שתילי זיתים אחים נכבדים
ונאחזים משכילים בכל-חכמה
וידעני דעת וכיני בינה אף למעט

- וַיֵּשֶׁם גְּבוּלָה שְׁלוֹם נִקְרָא לְנַעֲרִים
 וַנִּשְׁאַלְהָ אֶל־פִּיהֶם עַל־מֶה חָרִי
 הָאֵף הַגָּדוֹל הַקְּנָאָה וְהַשְׁנָאָה
 וְהַתַּחְרוּת וְאֲנִי בְּכָל־כְּחִי אֶתְאַמֵּץ
 וְאֶשְׁתַּדֵּל לְתֵן שְׁלוֹם בֵּינֵיהֶם
 וְאֶשְׁלַח וְאֶקְרָא אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים וְעַתָּה
 יוֹמָן נִתְּנִי לָהֶם וְלֹא יִשְׁנֶה אֶת־
 תַּפְקִידָם וְהִמָּה בָּאוּ וַיִּתְּצוּ לִפְנֵי
 וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו פָּנִים שֶׁל
 זֶעַם וְאוֹמֵר אֲלֵיהֶם גִּשְׁרָנָא אֵלַי
 אֲחִים יְדִידִים בְּחוּדִים כְּאֲרִיִּם
 גִּשְׁעֵי אֲדוֹנִי גַם לְכֻלְכֶּם נָתַן חֲכָמָה
 וְדַעַת מִדּוּעַ תִּבְגְּדוּ אִישׁ בְּאָחִיו
 לְהַפֵּר הָאֲחוּהָ וְתִשְׁנָאוּ זֶה אֶת־זֶה
 חֲנֹם וְעִמָּה הִגִּידוּ לִי וְאֶדְעָה בְּשֵׁל
 מִי הִרְעָה הַזֹּאת לָכֵם וְאֲנִי טָרִם
 אֲכַלֶּה לְדַבֵּר וְהַגִּיד הַגָּדוֹל הַחֹל
 בְּרָנָה וְכִדִּי בִּזְיוֹן וְקִצְף שִׁפְךָ כְּאֵשׁ
 חֲמָתוֹ וּבִקּוֹל מִן שָׁמַיִם הִרְעִים
 לַעֲמֹת אֲחִיו הַקָּטָן וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־
 לֹא אָחִי כִי הוּא לֹא אָחִי כִי אִם
 אֶחָ לְצִדָּה יִלְךְ הַיּוֹמִים הָרַאשׁוֹנִים
 כִּלּוֹ וְהַיּוֹמָן חָלַף עֵבֶר כְּאִשְׁרֵי הָיָה
 אֲמָנָה אֲחִי כָרַע בָּאֵחַ לִי יִחְדָּיו
 מִתִּיק סוֹר יִסֹּד אֲדוֹנִי לִירְאָה
- אֶת־הַקָּטָן אֲשֶׁר בְּצִחוֹק דָּבַק
 לְאַהֲבָה וְהָיָה דְּרָכּוֹ לְצִחוֹק בְּקִלְפִּים
 כְּמוֹ חֲצִי שָׂעָה אַחֵר כָּל־סַעֲדָה
 וְסַעֲדָה לְנִתְּת רֹחַ וְאֵף כִּי אָחִיו
 חָדָל הוֹכִיחוֹ בְּתוֹכָהּ אֲהַבָּה
 וְהָיָה כְּדַבְּרוֹ אֵלָיו יוֹם וְלֹא שָׁמַע
 אֵלָיו וַיִּרְבַּ עִמּוֹ וַיִּקְלָלְהוּ וַיִּכְדּוּ וְלֹא
 שָׁת לָבוֹ גַּם לָזֹאת וַיִּשְׁנָאוּהוּ אֲחִיו
 שְׁנָאָה גְּדוּלָּה וְלֹא יָכוֹל דְּבַר
 לְשָׁלוֹם וְהָיָה כְּשִׁמּוֹעַ אֲבִיהֶם אֶת
 הַדְּבָר הַרַע הָיָה וַיִּתְּעַצֵּב אֶל־לְבוֹ
 וַיָּבֹא אֵלַי סֵר חֶמֶף וַיִּסְפֹּר לִי אֶת־
 כָּל־הִדְרָעָה אֲשֶׁר מִצְּאֵתָהּ וַיִּבֶן
 וַיִּתְּחַן לִי לְהַסִּיר רַעַת הַשְׁנָאָה
 תַּעֲזוֹר מִדְּנִים בֵּין שְׁנֵי הָאֲחִים
 וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לִי אֱלֹהִים
 בְּרַחֲמֵי וּבְרֹכַב חֲסִדֵּיו בָּנִים גְּדֻלָּתִי
 בִּירְאָת אֲדוֹנִי לְמַעַן אֲשַׁכֵּל גַּם
 שְׁנֵיהֶם יוֹם אֶחָד וְאֶרֶץ עַל בְּנֵי
 אֲבִל שְׁאוֹלֶת הַבִּיטָה וְרָאָה הָיָה
 מִבְּאֹב כְּמִכְאוּבִי וְאֶעֱן וְאוֹמֵר צֵר
 לִי עָלֶיךָ אָחִי כִי גְדוֹל כֵּיִם שִׁבְדֶּךָ
 וְאֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁלַח דְּבָרוֹ וַיִּרְפָּאֵךְ
 וְעִמָּה לָךְ אִיעֲצָךְ וְהָיָה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ
- Cf. Psalm 147, 14
 Cf. Gen. 24, 57
 Deut. 29, 23
 Cf. Gen. 39, 10
 Exodus 7, 23
 Gen. 37, 14
 Cf. Prayer Book, Blessing of the Moon
 Exodus 25, 20
 Cf. Num. 24, 6
 Cf. Jonah 1, 7
 Esther 1, 18
 Cf. Hosea 1, 9
 Prov. 17, 17
 Cf. Esther 2, 20
 Psalm 55, 15
 Psalm 25, 14

בְּלִמְדֵנוּ סֵפֶר תּוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים

(Cf. Deut. 25, 13
etc.)

(Cf. Jeremiah
31, 2

"Avot 5, 16

Cf. Gen. 44, 30

Misuse of 2 Sam. 15, 12

וּמִצְוֹתָיו לְשִׁמּוֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת אֲהַבֵּת

עוֹלָם אֲהַבְתִּיהוּ אֲהַבָה שְׁאִינִיה

תְּלִיחַ בְּדִבְרֵי וְנִשְׁמַי קְשׁוּרָה בְּנִשְׁשׁוֹ

בְּקִשְׁרֵי אֲמִיץ וְעֵתָה כִּי הִשְׁחַח

(Cf. Gen. 6, 12

"Cf. Ex. 32, 8

וְהַשְׁחִיחַ אֶת־דִּרְכֵי וְשֶׁר סִהַר מִן

הַדֶּרֶךְ דֶּרֶךְ הַטּוֹבָה וְהַיּוֹשֵׁר אֲשֶׁר

לְקַבֵּדוֹ אֲבֹתָיו וְלֹא עָמַד בְּתַמְתּוֹ

Cf. Job 2, 3

כִּי אִם וְאֵלֶּךְ לְתַבְרָה אֶת־פְּתוּעֵי

(Cf. Job 34, 9

Numbers 16, 26

אֶן וְהַגִּישִׁים הַרְשָׁעִים הָאֵלֶּה

בְּנִשְׁאֲתָם לְדֹהַרְעֵלָל עַל־לֹוֹת

Psalms 141, 4

"Cf. Ex. 32, 6

בְּרִשְׁעֵי וְאָכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיִּקְוּ לְצַחֵק

Cf. Job 1, 5

בְּכֶה יַעֲשֶׂה בְּלִי־חַיִּים בְּקִלְפִים

Mishnah
Tahorat 1, 5 etc.

וּבְקִבּוּיָאוֹת וּבְמִלֵּי סַעֲי תַחֲחֹק אֲב

אֲבִי הַטְּמְאוֹת וְאֵלֶּה הֵן תִּלְדוּתֵי

Hosea 4, 2

אֱלֹהִים וְכַחֵשׁ וְרַצָּח וְגִזְבֹּל אֲנִי לָהֶם

Baba B. Met. 75a

לְצֹוֹתֵיהֶם בַּיָּשָׁח אֲנִי לֹחֵם לְאוֹתֵיהֶם

"Cf. Isaiah 22, 18

"Cf. Psalm 139, 22

כְּלִמָּה קָלֵן לְבִירַת אֲבִי תִכְלִי־וֹת

שְׁנֵאנָה שְׁנֵאנָה

Job 1, 16

"Cf. Gen. 45, 2

1 Sam. 28, 20

עוֹד וְחַ מְדַבֵּר וְחַ לָּהֶן אֶת־קִלְוֹ

בְּכִי וַיִּפְּרֹל מֵלֹא קוֹמְתוֹ אֲרֻצָּה

Gen. 41, 8

בָּשָׂר וּנְפִלָם וְתַמְעָם רִחוֹ בְּקִרְבּוֹ

וּנְבִדְלוּ רַעֲיוֹנָיו וְאֲנִי כְּרֹאוֹתִי אוֹתוֹ

מִתְחַיֵּשׁ וְחַמָּם וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה בְּאֵלִים

לֹא וְתַחֵחַ מִי נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמֵי עָלָיו

וְהַעֲרוֹתִיהוּ בְּצִדֵּק וְאִמְרֵי אֱלֹהִים

יְקוֹסִלֶךְ בְּנֵי לִפְהֵה זֶה אֶתָּה נֹסֶל

עַל סִנִּיךָ וְאִי אִמְנֵם שְׁנִית וְחִטָּאת

אִם חִיטִּיב חִיטִּיב אֶת־דֶּרֶכְךָ לְאֹהֲנִי

אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַרְחִמִים וְהַסְלִיחוֹת וַיִּמְנֵנוּ

מִשְׁאֲסֵהוּ לְקַבֵּל סָבִים וְשַׁעֲרֵי

תְּשׁוּבָה לֹא נִנְעֵלוּ לְעוֹלָם וְגַם כִּי

יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתֶךָ יֵעַן נִמְצָא

כֶּה רִבֵּר טוֹב אֶת־אֹהֲנִי אֱלֹהֶיךָ

הַמִּדָּה הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בָּהּ יִתְפָּאֲרוּ

גַּחֲלֵי הַדּוֹד וְנִקְרָאוּ בְּיִשְׁתִּים בְּנֵי

בְּיִשְׁתִּים הִיא הַמִּדָּה הַמְבִיָּאֶת

אֶת הָאָדָם לִידֵי וְרֹאֵת חֶסֶד

צְנִיעוּת וּפְרִישׁוֹת וְקְדוּשָׁה אֲשֶׁר

בָּלֵם בְּאֲבֵנֵי תְּבֻשֶׁת חוֹסֵד יִסְדֹּתָם

וְאֶתָּה וּפְתַח סִיךְ וְיִאֲחִיז רִבְרִיךְ

דִּבְרֵי כִי חֲסִמְתִּי צִדִּיקֶךָ וְיִדְּוִי

בְּכִלּוֹתֵי לְדִבְרֵי וְתַחֲחֹק תִּגְשֶׁר וַיַּעֲמֹד

עַל רִגְלָיו וְכֵן אִמְרֵי אִמְצָא חֵן

בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲרוֹנִי כִי נִתְמַתְנִי וְכִי דִבַּרְתָּ

עַל לֵב עֲבָדְךָ אֲנִי עַל כֵּן רִאֲיוֹתִי

סִנִּיךָ כְּרֹאֵת בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים וְתִרְשָׁנִי

לְדִבְרֵי לְסִנִּיךָ אֲרִבְרֹחַ וְיִרְחַח לִי

וְעֵתָה אֲבִי רִכְבִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפְרִישׁוֹ

רֹאֶה גַם רֹאֶה כִי הִגִּדְתָּ אֲחִי

כִּכְנֵן וְנִקְשׁוּ אֲמִי מִבְּקֵשׁ יִרְעִיתִי

הרעת ואחרי תפילתי לאל ארוני
הרומא לשבורי לב ומחבש
לעצבותם ישלח דברו וירפאני
ויוסר מעלי רק את המות הזה
דרשתי גם את הרופאים כמאמר
התורה ורפוא ירפא מבאן שנתנה
רשות לרופא לרפאות ואיש את
עצמו הודיעני במועצות דעת וכן
אמרו לי הן רפאות תעלה תעלה
לה וארוכתה מהרה תצמח אם
תסיר בעם מלכה ויהיה אף שמה
וטוב לב לשון ושמה ימצא בך
ונסו יגון ואנחה ואם אתה הדבר
הזה תעשה ובכל יום ויום יתן
מעניים לגמשה בתת עת וזמן
לכל חסן אשר תשא לה נפשה
עת לרקוד ועת לשחוק הטיב נגן
חרבי שיר שיר ידירות ובכל מיני
שמחה תעלונה כליותי בני לב
שמה ייטיב גהרה ואז יטת לה
וייטבו בעיני דבריהם ואשר במעם
במעם השבתי אחי דרך אבחד
מהם וסוף סוף בדרתי אהי
השחוק כי יש בו מעט אכזר חזק
ובקשתי לי חבר אהוב ונאמן
אשר יצחק עמי בכל יום כמו

ירדמני חלב וסוכר על לשוני
הגה עי שקר העי שקר ענה
באחי באמרו עלי דברים אשר
לא כן ויאמר דלוא מצחק אני
כל היום וכל הלילה ומאבד
ומני בדברי הכל והתורה והלמוד
וכל מעשים טובים השלכתי אחרי
נוי חתן את עברה בך בליעל
באחד העבדים בשראלי העובדים
אורחות ישר ללכת בדרך
חושך ותלקח ותגיד בשמים
עדי ושחדי במחמים וגם ידע
כל אשר עמי משערי ציון המצוינים
בתלכת המס יבוא ויגידו צדקתי
כי כל ימי לא מנעתי עצמי אפלו
שעה אחת מבית המדרש אף
אלה אוכרה ואשפכו עלי נפשי
אוי לי על שברי נחלה מבתי כי
יסוד יחדי זה החולי דוח אלהים
רשד ובעצבת לב אשר במעם
במעם מבעתני זה חולי ואשאנו
מלדד ומבטן ואלה מר בחמת
רוחי לחות חמדת השחורד
הגוברת עלי ולא תתני חשב
רוחי ללמוד ולתתסלל בשוב

Deut. 19, 18
cf. 2 Kings
17, 9

Psalm 147, 3
cf. Psalm 107, 20
Ex. 10, 17

Play on
Isaiah 38, 17
cf. Isaiah, 16
2 Sam. 13, 13

Ex. 21, 19
benches 60
Prov. 22, 20
Jer. 30, 13

Prov. 2, 13
and
cf. Psalm
35, 6.
" John 16, 19
Ruth 3, 11

Isaiah 58, 8
Eccles. 11, 10
" Deut. 16, 15
" 1 Sam. 5, 9
" Isaiah 37, 3
and 35, 10

Psalm 42, 5
Jer. 10, 19
Psalm 118, 15
" 2 Sam. 16, 15

cf. Prov.
29, 17
cf. Eccles.
3, 1 and 3, 4
Isaiah 23, 16
Isaiah 45, 1
cf. Prov. 23, 16
" Prov. 17, 22
cf. Job 3, 13

Eccles. 3, 14

חצי שעה וגם מצאתי לי זמן הגן
וראוי שלא ליבטל הרבה מלמודי
והוא אחר האכילה יען בי מיד
ותבא אחר האוכל טרם התעכל
המזון במעים קשה לעין ולמוד
ואמרתי זה עת לשחוק ואחר
אדוני בשפתי ספרתי וגם בפי
הודיתי את כל הדברים מתחלה
ועד סוף כחיתם ממש ואם יש
בזה יען אשר חסא תלמודי
רבינו ואבחר מור מחיים ולא
אחשא עוד

Isaiah 119, 13

Hosea 12, 9

cf. Jer. 8, 3

ויחי כמלכות תצער לדבר אר
דבריו החזקתי בו ואחבקו
ואנשקו ואמרתי ברוך אתה
לאחוני בני השבת לדבר ולהתודות
על האמת ומודה ועוב ירחם
מן השמים ואל אחיו הגדול
אמרתי אל תבול את רוחך
לבעש כי הפעם מסלק את הדעת
אמת כי ליסר את הפן מצוה היא
וחובה בתוכחת מגלה ואהבה
נסתרת ולכן אל תשלך ידך אל
הצער לרחמו בשתי ידים ולאחזק
לא תשיג בחזון אף רק לפי

1 Sam. 15, 13

Prov. 28, 13

cf. Eccl. 7, 9

cf. Prov. 19, 15
and 29, 17

cf. Prov. 27, 5

cf. Gen. 22, 12

see esp. f
next page

ממש השנים והעשית מעונותי ואל
אפוא מה אעשה בני ידעתי בני
ידעתי את אשר לבקש שלם אר
ה אלהיך וכונתך לשם שמים אה
ורק דוד תודע כי על כלפנים
יש אידה צד אסור בשחוק
ואקוביא את וחקלים פי המצחקים
בהם אף על פי שאין זאת
אומנותם כן הוא כתו על זה
הצחק שמעון הענין שחבלו חסא
ונדון על שם סופו אמנם כי חכמי
הדעה אמרו כי מן השכל הוא
לבחור דוד במעשיו לכן לכדנא
אנענה אשה ותעוב שחוק וקלסים
והקוביא את ואר אחיה תבול
לשלוש ושנים תלמוד שחוק
הקריא אסקו ובתנאי שלא
תצחק במליוס יותר מלבר חצי
שעור בקצת מלכא ושמ דאברה
ופורים וחול המער כי זה הצחק
יש בו חכמה וחריצות יען מצאנו
אנשי בנה ויהי כאשר שמע
האדם ידעים את דברו ויתבון
ונשקו איש את אחיו כי גדולה
היתה אהבתם ואת היתה הפכה
זו לזה כללי הצחק היה יען כי

Pliny 27, 16
Gen. 27, 37

Gen. 48, 14

cf. 1 Kings
8, 61cf. Isaiah
5, 18

cf. Numb. 14

מלכים ושרים להם לבדם נתגור

CF. Gen. 10, 10

קראתי שם הספר הזה מעדני

Gen. 44, 20

מלך

Gen. 13, 13

ואלה הדברים אשר כללתי בזה

CF. Deut. 1, 1

הספר הזה אמר שם ואף אם

Gen. 49, 21

הוא קצת הכמות הקורא בו ימצא

מעדנים לנפשו

ראשונה הבאתי מעלת הצחוק

Isaiah 30, 7

הזה והוא דיותר מעלה מכל מיני

הצחוק והתעליות הבאות לאדם

CF. Psalm 10, 7

מפני

שנית חקרתי ודרשתי מי היה

Prov. 10, 12

מציא אמן מציאותו

שלישית באיתי לשמותיו כי

שמות רבות יש לו ונתתי טעם

לכל אחד ואחד

רביעית ערבתי וצירתי לפניך

Gen. 1, 1

הזה אשה עזרה הצחוק וסר

חמשת בארץ חלקי וכסה הם

מיני השמות וצורתם וגם

סדנותם כפי סדרתם

Isaiah 12, 3

ששית לפדתי כפי יכולתי דתי

דתי הצחוק הזה

Prov. 20, 5

מן אלה כלליה ופרטיה הרבה

ששית ידאור השורא בו ב

Gen. 23, 6

וחת החלי לעצת

אמנם ידעתי כי כן ולא יעלה

מפני כי כל מיני השחוק הם רעים

וכל העוסקים בהם הם אנשים רעים

וחטאים ליהוה מאוד ונמסלים

לעדות משם גולגים שהם גולים

בפרהסיא ונוטלים ממון אחרים

שלא כדן ושלא ברצונם ומפני

שמאכרים זמנם בדברי הבל וריק

ואינם מתעסקים בישועו של עולם

ומרמות ותוך תחת לשונם

וסתרותא דשקרא רמאה הוא והם

בוטחים על עישק וגל חאת היא

סבת השנאה תשור מרגים

קטנות ומרבות בין האחים

והחברים גם לרבות השחוק הזה

שחוק האסקקי בכל מיני מעלה ושבה

כי בהר הוא בשחוקים צחוק צדיק

תמים ואין בו נפתל ועקש ולא אחד

מאלו הדברים המביאים את האדם

לידי עברה כי בוניו כללו חסיו

בחכמה ובמסר ובינה משל לעם

ומדינה ועיר שחברה לה יחדיו עיר

ויושבי בה המשעבדים תחת מלך

ושרים מלך יושב על כסא דין דין

אמת שופט צדק ואמת נשוא

Cf. Mishnah
Hagigah 3,3
Lev. 16, 21, 10
Cf. Lev. 16, 21, 12
Psalm 132, 18
Lev. 8, 9

Esther 1, 14
Gen. 41, 43

Cf. Esther 1, 14

Cf. 1 Kings 4, 5

Jech 12, 13

Cf. 1 Sam. 20, 2

Genesis 41, 40

Cf. 2 Sam. 16, 23

Ecc. 10, 10

Cf. 1 Sam. 25, 25

Isaiah 55, 12

Cf. Isaiah 55, 12

Cf. Isaiah 55, 12

Cf. Isaiah 55, 12

Cf. Isaiah 55, 12

Cf. Isaiah 55, 12

Cf. Isaiah 55, 12

Cf. Isaiah 55, 12

Cf. Isaiah 55, 12

אלהים אשר אין על גביו אלא יהוה
אלהיו והפדן הגדול מאחיו כי גם
הוא למלך הוכן כי נור שמן משחת
אלהיו עליו יצוץ נור ציץ והדב
נור הקודש והוא הראשון לכל הדבר
שעבודו וסודי המלך המפקדים
תחת ידו וישיבים ראשונת במלכות
משדו. והוכב במרכבת המשנה
אשר לו חואה פני המלך והוא כמו
יעשה למלך והשני יועץ המלך חכם
ונבוא לו עצד ותכונה כי לא
יעשה המלך דבר גדול או קטן כי
אם יקח עצד ממנו ועל פיו ישק
כל עמו ועצתו כאשר ישאל איש
בדבר האלהים והשלישי שד צבאו
איש מלחמה גבור החיל והחילום
תפר ויצא ונלחם פגיוס כי
מלחמות יהוה הוא נלחם וחפץ
יהוה מיד יצליח תם ממעים כהן
אחר להחיות לפדן הגדול כמו
משנת למלך הוא הבין המשנה
הנקרא מן או ממנה שמה ליוסן
כהן גדול חסד והוא משמש
תחתו בשאדע לו אחה ועזר ספל
וכל שאר הכהנים תחת יד הפלן

ועוד משחים כהן אחד
בעת קרבם להלחם עם אויביהם
ידבר אל העם כלשון הקדש כי
בראותם סוס ורכב עם רב מהם
לא ייראו ולא יחפזו ולא יערצו
מפניהם אלא ישימו באלהים
כסלם וקוי יהוה יחליפו כח וסוס
מובן ליום מלחמה וליתה חתשועה
כי אין עמו לעזר פק רב לאין כח
בדברים האלה היה מדבר אליהם
הבין לחזק ולאמץ את לבם
וכח לחם למלחמה והוא הנקרא
כהן משוח למלחמה ויען היותו
נמשח אשר יוצק על ראשו שמן
משחת קדש הוא קודם לכל
הכהנים תחת הסגן והשלישי הוא
אמרכלא אשר מפתחות העזרה
ביריו ומתח ואין סוגר וסוגר ואין
פותח והוא הממנה על כל דבר
הבית לנצח על כל מלאכת בית
אדוני ונקרא אמרכל כי הוא
אמר ומצוה הכל ומרכל כי הוא
אדון במצוה על כלם ואין
משיבים על הכהן אלה השרים
אשר למלך ישי. הקדש ושד
האלהים על העיר והקודש הם

Cf. Deut. 20, 1
and Deut. 20, 3

Psalm 78, 7

Isaiah 40, 31

Prov. 21, 31

Cf. 2 Chron. 14, 10

Ex. 30, 25

Cf. 1 Chron. 24, 3

לחיות בנזעים המלך ולבנות
בהכלו מלכד שרי הגזבים שרי
המדינות וערי המבצר שרי אלפים
ושרי מאות שרי חמשים ושרי
עשרות שופטים ושופרים בכל עיר
ועיר כהנה ועם הארץ איש איש
על עבודתו ועל משאוליה בכה וזה
בכה על המזיזה ועל הצללה ויצא
אדם למעלה ומתפרנסים זה מזה
והאלהים ברחמי משרים קרש
משגיח עליהם בעין חסדו לברך
את כל מעשי ידיהם :
ואשר המשל הזה חזקה למשל
בכל דבריו עוד תשוב תראה
כאשר נעזק לפניה כל עניני
השחוק המעלה הזה כי כלל הוא
בהדח וכאשר הגדלה המדינות
האלהות מסדת על ארצי הצדק
והוא חקם ומשפטים צדיקים
אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי
בהם גם כן השחוק הזה שומר
סדר הגדלה המדינות על קו
הוא שומר במשפטים ישרים כללים
עשויים באמת וישר חוק ולא
יעבור בחכמת דעת ועל כן

cf. Psalms 27, 4
1 King. 5, 3
Ex. 18, 21
Deut. 16, 18
cf. Kings 22, 26
cf. Psalms 102, 20
Ezek. 8, 6
Deut. 1, 9
Leviticus 19, 15
cf. Psalms 102, 20

משכילי עם יבינו לשחוק השחוק
הזה אשר כלו שלאנו ושלל ואין
מנמת פני המשתקים לחמוד או
לגזול ממון אחרים אלא לחדד
את שכלם כי כל אחד מהם
משתדל בכל ענין לנצח את חברו
ולמנצח משכיל התפארת והנצח
וההוד ונכנסים בשלום ויוצאים
בשלום ולא כן שחוק הקוביאות
והקלפים הדולכים בחמת קר
כמקרה הבסיל והכל תלוי בהרמת
הקוביאות או בחלקת הקלפים
ולא חלק להם בבניה אף חכמים
חסד לחזק אשר בשלכות
הקוביאות משליך עליו בצדקה
ובחלקת הקלפים יסית למי
חליפות כי כל נפשות לחונות
ולרשות איש את דעתו והוא ספת
השנאה ביניהם :
והנה הדעתיה כמה מעלות
טובות לה הצחוק על האחרים
ועתה אשים לפניה קצת מן
התועליגות הבאות לאדם כן
השחוק הזה : וכי תאמר בלבבך
מה יסבון גבר ומה נועיל כי נגע
מים הגידו לך שאי אפשר לאדם

cf. Daniel 11, 33
Job 21, 23
Play on title of Psalm 52
111 Chron. 29, 11
A Firm Year Kippur Mussaf service
cf. Leviticus 26, 28
(wind-pipe)
Ecc. 2, 15
Jer. 4, 22
cf. Psalms 72, 3
Answer Hagigah
Deut. 7, 17
cf. Psalms 102, 20

מכלם ויש לו כח להציל ולעזר
את-עמו אבל אין שריו ועבדיו
מנצחים אותו לצאת כי הוא כמוהם
עשירה אגלים ובמותו יקח הכל
המלך אויבו ויהיה קץ המלחמה ומן
האנשים אשר הלכו עמו למלחמה
המלכה קודמת לכל-אדם כי
דרכיה דרכי נועם ויש לה בח
וגבורה לעשות חיל יותר מכל
השרים אשר אתה: ואחריה יצא
הרוח כי לו יד ושם על הגבורים
ושולח עוזו מארבע רוחות המזנה
לשמור את אנשיו ולהשמד ולהרוג
באויביו: הפיל חסוב במעלה ושבח
על הפרש אף אמנם לפי שהפיל
הולך באלכסון על בתי צבע אחד
ואינו יכול ללכת אנה ואנה ואין לו
דרכים כמו הפרש לעזור למלך
על האויב חסים על הפרש יותר
מהפיל:

גם לרבות את הרגל איש רגלי
אשר אם בכחו וגבורתו פנה דרך
מנו ויטע אהלו במדבר האחרון אשר
המלך אויבו ושריו חזנים עליו או
אדוניו ומליכדו תחת המלכה אף
ייד בחיים חיתת יחיה לראות

ולשר צבא תחת אחר הגהרג
במלחמה ויהיה שכרו: אנשי הצבא
הורגים בכל-שונאיהם רק אל
המלך אף כי בעל מלחמתם אין
באים עליו בפתע פתאום אלא
חולקים לו כבוד כי כאשר המלך
נרחף לצאת מפני לוחציו ודוחקת
אומרים לו שה כלומר המלך
השמר לך ושמור נפשה מאור ואף
כי אין מדרכו לצאת וללכת כי אם
מבית לבית יכול בשעת הדחק
אם המקום פגוי בינו ובין רוחו או
רוח המלכה ללכת אל בית אחר
בהם והרוח יעמוד סמוך לו לחזקת
נחישת בצורה ואם בכל-אלה לא
יוכל להמלט מידם כי השיגו אויבו
עד אפס מקום למלך לנטות ימין
ושמאל מתירים בו התראה אחר
התראה באמרו אליו שהימרת
רוצה לומר המלך מת או המלך
מכה בשגעון ותכהון לבב וקרוב
הוא למיתה כי קל כהרה יבוא
אירו: ולכנצח היקר וחכבוד כי
גבר על אויביו:

סוף וקץ

Cf. Genesis
30, 32

Deut. 4, 9

Cf. Deut.
28, 29

Play on
Psalm 49, 18

Prov. 3, 17

Cf. Esder, 3, 1

Isaiah 56, 5

לחזות בנחם המלך ולבקר
 בדרכו מלכר שרי הנצבים שרי
 המדינות וערי המבצר שרי אלפים
 ושרי מאות שרי חמשים ושרי
 עשרות שופטים ושופרים בכל עיר
 ועיר בהנה ועם הארץ איש איש
 על עבודתו ועל משאוליה בכה וזה
 בכה על המחיה ועל הכלכלה ויצא
 אדם לפעול ומתפרנס זה מזה
 והאלהים ברחמי משרתם קדוש
 משגיח עליהם בעין חסדתו לבקר
 את כל מעשי ידיהם :

ואשר המשל הזה חסדו למשל
 בכל דבריו עד תשוב תראה
 כאשר נחזק לפניה כל עניני
 השחק המעלה הזה כי כליל הוא
 בחדו ובאשר הגדלה המדינות
 האלהות מסדת על ארצי הצדק
 והוא חק ומשפטים צדיקים
 אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי
 בהם גם כן השחק הזה שומר
 סדר הגדלה המדינות על קו
 הושר במשפטים ישרים כללים
 עשויים באמת וישר חוק ולא
 יעבור בחכמת ודעת ועל כן

משכילי עם יבינו לשחק השחק
 הזה אשר כלו שלאנו ושלל ואק
 מגמת פני המשתקים להסוד או
 לגורל מסון אחרים אלא לחדד
 את שכלם כי כל אחד מהם
 משתדל בכל ענין לנצח את חברו
 ולמנצח משכיל התפארת והנצח
 וההוד ונכנסים בשלום ויוצאים
 בשלום ולא כן שחק הקוביות
 והקלפים הדולכים בחמת קר
 כמקרה הבסל והכל תלוי בהרמת
 הקוביות או בחלקת הקלפים
 ולא חלק להם בפניה אף חכמים
 חסד לחזק אשר בשלכות
 הקוביות משליך עליו בצדקה
 ובחלקת הקלפים ישיר למי
 חליפות כי כל פגתם לחונות
 ולרשות איש את ידעו והוא ספת
 השנאה ביניהם :

והנה הודעתך כמה מעלות
 טובות לאה הצחק על האחרים
 וענה אישם לפניה קצת מן
 התועליגת הבאות לאדם מן
 השחק הזה : וכי תאמר בלבבך
 מה יסכן גבר ומה נועיל כי ננע
 כמים הגידו לך שאי אפשר לאדם

cf. Daniel
 11:33
 Job 21:23

Play on
 title of
 Psalm 52
 111 Chron.
 29:11
 A From Year
 Kings
 Manuscript source
 cf. Yoma 7,3f

cf. Levitic. 26,28
 (word-play)
 Eccl. 2:15

Jer. 4:22

cf. Psalms
 72:18

cf. Psalms
 112:10

Deut. 7:17

cf. Job 34:4

שֶׁבֶן וְשֶׁבֶן כְּחֶמְדָּה וְדָמָה
 עֵצֶב כִּי לְאָדָם נָתַן הָאֱלֹהִים
 חֶמְדָּה וְדָעַת וְשִׁמְחָה וְעַל כֵּן יַעֲצוּ
 שְׂפִיכֵי-רוּחַ וְיוֹם הַתְּלִמִּיד יִתְעַסֵּק
 מִעַתָּה בְּשִׁוּל אוֹ בְּשִׁחּוֹק כִּדּוּ שְׁלֵמוֹ
 מִעֲרֵב וְרוּחַ וְטֵב לֹא יִהְיֶה
 עָלָיו לִמְשָׁא כְּאִשּׁר רָאִינוּ הֶרְבֵּה
 אֲנָשִׁים בֵּן מְרוֹב לְמַדָּם וְעִיּוֹתָם
 נִסְדָּפָה דַּעְתָּם וּגְבוּרָתָם חֲכָמָתָם
 כִּי לֹא נָתַן הַשֵּׁב רוּחַם וְרוּחַ
 לֹא שָׁמַר בֵּן לְמַדָּם וְהִנֵּה
 הַדְּרָשִׁים חֲמֻלָּהִים לְהַמְשִׁיךְ לֵב
 שׁוֹמְעֵיהֶם הָיוּ מְבִיאִים בְּרָשׁוֹתֵיהֶם
 מְשָׁלִים וְאַחֲזִית כִּי הֵם הֵם
 הַדְּרָשִׁים הַמְשַׁמְחִים אֶת-הַלֵּב
 וּמְאִידִים עֵינֵי הַתְּלִמִּידִים וְיָמֵן כִּי
 הַצְחֹק הָיָה חֲפֻצּוֹ אֲנָשִׁי בְּתֵרָה
 וּמִדַּע-מִשָּׁל לְקַבֵּץ הַמִּדְּרָשִׁי בִּלְמַד
 אֶת-יֵשׁר וְזִכּוֹת לְדַעַת הַגִּתְרָה
 הָעִיר בְּכִלְלָהּ וּפְרִטָּהּ כִּי הָיָה
 חֶמְדָּה עֲמוּקָה עַד כִּי אֲנָשִׁים
 חֲכָמִים וְיָדוּעִים חֲפֻצּוֹ מִסְּרִים
 מִשְׁבָּתִים בָּהֶן הָעֵינָן וּמְסִרִים
 אַחֲרֵם יִלְמְדוּ כְּאִשּׁר תַּחֲזִיחַ עֵינֶיךָ
 בְּהַצִּיעַ לְפָנֶיךָ כֹּזֶת מִמְצִיאָתָהּ

Cf. 1 Sam. 16, 23
 Cf. Job 7, 20

Cf. Psal. 119, 9

וְכִאֲשֶׁר בָּאתִי לְחַקֹּר וּלְדַרְשׁ
 אַחֲרֵי מִמְצִיאי הַצְחֹק הָיָה זִמְנָה
 מִמְצִיאוֹתַי יִנְעָתִי וּמִצָּאתִי כָפִי וְכִלְתִּי
 וְהִשְׁגַּת יָדִי וְהִיָּיתִי בְּעֵינֵי כְּמַגִּלָּה
 עֲמוּקוֹת מִנִּי-חֶשֶׁךְ כִּי הִדְבֵּר הָיָה
 קִשְׁיָה לְהִלְמֹתִי מִצֵּד קִדְמֹתִי
 כִּי מִצָּאוֹתַי מִקֶּדֶם וּמִיָּמִי קֶדֶם
 קִדְמֹתִי הֵן מִצֵּד חֲסִדֵּי הַסְּפָרִים
 הַמְּדַבְּרִים בָּזֶה אֵךְ אֲנִי חֲסִידִי
 בְּמִצְפּוֹתַי סִפְרֵי הַקִּדְמוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר
 בָּאוּ לְיָדֵי הֵן יוֹנִיִּים רוֹמִיִּים עֲרָבִיִּים
 פָּרְסִיִּים וְשָׂאֵר הָאֲמֹרֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא
 מִכְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה וְאֲנִי לְקִדְמֹתִי
 וְאֶסְפְּתִי וְהִבִּיאוֹתִי לְפָנֶיךָ אֶת כָּל-
 אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרוּ כִּי דַעְתֵּיהֶם שׁוֹנוֹת
 יְהִי אוֹמֵר בְּכֹה וְיְהִי אוֹמֵר בְּכֹה
 וְאֲנִי אֶכְרִיעַ בִּינֵיהֶם וְאֶתְחַל בְּהִבְרִי
 הַחֲכָמִים הַגְּדוֹל רֹאשׁ הַסְּלֻסְמִים
 הוּא אֶפְלָטָן אֲשֶׁר כְּתֹב בְּכַפְּרוֹ
 כִּי בִימֵי מֶשֶׁה רִבִּינוּ עֲלֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם
 הָיָה חֶכֶם אַחֲרֵי מַחְכְּמֵי הַמִּצְרִיִּים
 וְשִׁמּוֹ מַעֲוֵת אֲשֶׁר שָׂדֵב חֶכְמָתוֹ
 מִצָּא וּלְמַד חֲכָמֹת הֶרְבֵּה לְאֲנָשִׁי
 דֹּרוֹ כְּמוֹ חֲכָמָה הַתְּבוּנָה
 וְהָאֲצִמְגִּינֹת הַכְּתָב וְהַמְּכַתֵּב עִם
 הָאוֹתִיוֹת וְגַם בְּדָא מִלְּבוֹ הַצְחֹק

Jeb 12, 22

Mich 5, 1
 Cf. Isaiah 23, 7

Cf. 1 Kings
 22, 20

Avv 5, 6

ידו על אלהיהם כי גם בדם
עשה זה שפטים על ידו קראו
את שמו טעות ועקר הנחת זה
חשם בלשון מצרים וכוותיים וגם
בלשון ארמית הוא אלהי נכר
הארץ:

ובספר אחד מצאתי כי פלאמדי
היוני אחד משרי אנשי המלחמה
אשר הלכו להלחם על טרויא
העיר הגדולה אשר היה במצור
ובמצוק עשר שנים והוא היה
חכם גדול והמצוא ליונים מקצת
אותיותיהם אשר חסרו להם מן
המכתב וגם למד קדרות השמש
והלכנה וחכמת עריכת המלחמה
איש על הגלגל לצבאותם ולסדה
לבני עמו וכדי לרחם ולהבנים
את החכמה הספאדה הזאת
הוציא לאור הצחוק הנכבד הזה
כשני מחנות יחז אללה נגר אללה
וגם כל חלקיו רומים שרי
המלחמה מקסון ועד גדול כאשר
אבאר אליה:

אחרים אמרים כי לך אני
הלוחים הוא ואחיו כאשר היו
במחנה עשופים פרעב ובחוסר כל

הנבחר הזה צחוק המסכים ומסני
המלגת ביתו ושכלו בני דורו
אסרו עליו אין זה בי אם איש
אלהים קדוש וסוד אלוה עליו אלה
המלמד להועיל לבני אדם ולסדם
ספר ולשון בשדים על בן קראו

Deut. 31, 16

את שמו הרמים כל בלשונם רוצה
לומר נביא שליח ואמצעי בין
האלהים ובני אדם ויש אמרים
כי זה משנה האיש אשר העלנו
מארץ מצרים כאשר היה מצעוריו
בדרכי פריעה מלך מצרים כי
בתיה בו אשר בגנה גדלתהו
בין חכמי יועצי פריעה וגם הוא
נתן לו האלהים שכל ובינה
לדחש ולתור בכל חכמה ותרב

Numbers 1, 52

חכמתו מחכמת כל בני קדם
ויחכם מכל האדם בחכמת
האלהים ועליו ורח זה וימלא
אותו רוח אלהים ובסתום חכמה
הודיעהו תעלומות חכמה ממני
צפתי כל ותחבטן במלאות אל
מסתיו ומשפטי פיהו ותגליא
לעשות בקרבם במלאות אשר לא
גבראו בכל הארץ ובכל דגוים
וען כי עמו עז ונבונה בו נבונה

Lev. 2, 19
Deut. 23, 48

Eccles. 29, 4

Eccles. 32, 1 with
altered meaning

CF. Eccles. 1, 13

1 Kings 5, 10

CF. Isaiah 66 -

Eccles. 35, 31

1 Chron. 1, 5

Play on Deut. 33, 14

Job 37, 14

1 Chron. 16, 12

CF. Judges 13, 19

Eccles. 32, 10

ויאמר אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך
המלך לתת את שאלתי הגה
ערכתי לפניך לוח הצחוק הזה
בני ומיסר על ששים וארבעה
בתים צורא את עבדיך הממנים
על אוצרות התבואה אשר ישמו
חטה אחת על הבית הראשון
ועל השני שתיים ועל השלישי
ארבע וכן על כל אחד ואחד
במלים מן חברי עד סוף כל הדבתי
והיה שכרי ויהי בשמוע המלך את
דברי החכם ויכעס עליו ויבו לו
בלבו לאמר כדבר אחד הנבליס
תדבר האמנם לא אוכל כדרך
במתנות גדולות כי שאלת ממני
מעט מזער כזה והיית לשופך בוז
על נדיבים מלך במני היום
הסכלית לשאול ויען הפילוסוף
ויאמר אל נא יחר אפק בעבדך
ואדברה אף הפעם אחת שאלתי
מאת אדוני אותה אבקש תנה
אותה לי כי היא ישרה בעיני
ואם קטון יהיה בעיניך ותוסיף לי
בהנה וכדנה וירא המלך כי לא
יכול לו ויצו את עבדו נגיד על
האוצרות לעשות לו ככל אשר
שאלה או הגבה למעלה עד חצי המלכות ותעש ויען הפילוסוף

ויאמר

מצאו מלאכת הצחוק מינים
ממינים שונים וביניהם צחוק
הפסססים הגה וגמרו אומר כי
יום אחד יעבדו בכל מיני הצחוק
וישכחו מאכל לחם ונשכח
הרעב בארץ ויום אחד היו אוכלים
ושותים למלאות נפשם כי ירעבו
וכן יעשו יום יום עד יעבור ועם
הרעב

אנשי ארץ הודו מתפארים
עצמם באמדם כי קבלה היא
בדם כי פילוסוף אחד מבני עמם
חכם גדול ובקיא בחכמת התבונה
והדגדגה צעה כן דאחר שמו
ברוב שכלו וברוח ביעתו חדש
ומצא הצחוק הפפאר הזה והקריבו
לפני בלהיב מלך הודו ואת צורת
הצחוק הזה ותכונתו ומצאו
ומבאיו נאות כל חקיות הודע
אותו ויחי כראות המלך את יקר
תפארת המלאכה ורוח גדל
שכל המסחר אמר לו הנה נא
ידעתי כי איש חכם אתה ראיתי
את מעשה ידך המעשים ועתה
ישאל מה אעשה לך העמק
חצי המלכות ותעש ויען הפילוסוף

cf. Isch. 5, 8

Gen. 30, 32

cf. 2 Sam. 6, 16

cf. Job 2, 10

Num. 22, 37

Isaiah 10, 40

cf. Gen. 31, 28

cf. Gen. 18, 32

cf. Psalm 27, 4

Isaiah 14, 3

2 Sam. 12, 8

cf. Gen. 32, 26

cf. Isaiah 26, 20

cf. Ezech. 43, 11

Isaiah 7, 11

Exodus 5, 3

Gen. 41, 49

Deut. 26, 13

Avot 2, 4, anaprot

Cf. Hos. 2, 1

Isa. 23, 22

Gen. 41, 49

Cf. 2, 1, 2, 3

Cf. 2, 1, 2, 3

שאל וכאשר בא האיש לעמוד על
מתכונת החטים אשר בקש
הפילוסוף כי עצמו מספר 'חדל'
לספור כי אין מספר ובהתנהלה
הלך אל המלך וכן אמר לו יחי
המלך אדונינו לעולם לעשות רצונך
חפצתי לא עברתי ממצותיך אף
ורק המלך צויתי דבר שאי אפשר
לשמוע יען וביען שאלתי בקציר
ואין בכל-ארץ מלכותך מסכנות
דגן יספיקו להכיל כל-החטים
אשר שאל ממך כי לא יספר ולא
ימד כי אם בחכמתו ערום יערים
ויהי כשמוע המלך את דברי
הממנה ויתמה על רוב חכמת
הפילוסוף וישלח ויקראהו אליו
ויחבקו וינשקו וכה דבר אליו
עתה ידעתי כי חכם אתה בחכמת
האלהים על פיה ישק כל-עמי
ואתה תהיה אוכל לחם על שלחני
ויחי עם המלך ויהי לו כרע באה
כל-ימי חייו:

ובספר ישן נושן מצאתי כי חכם
אחד מחכמי הפרסים חבר זה
הצחוק בעבור אדשיר מלך פרס
הוא אחשוורוש כי הוא שם נופל

לכל-מלכי פרס ואכזר הוא ומי
יעורנו מן המדה הרעה הזאת
על כן כון המלך במשל הצחוק
הזה ללמד סתום מן המפורש
על ידי תקון משלים ודמיונים
אגמרה בסימני ואסברה בהרמיא
ליה להוציא אליו בעניניה למען
תפוש אותו בלבו לבלתי התאכזר
על עמו וצאן מרעיתו רק יצדק
מלותיו כפי הראוי על פי התורה
ויתגלגלו רחמי עליהם וישכיל
וידע כי ברוב עם הדרת מלך
אוכלוסיו ושרי מלחמותיו המגנים
עליו ואם יכשל עוזר ונפל עוזר
וכח אין לו לעמוד לפני אויב ועל
כן ברא מלכו את הצחוק הזה כדי
שיהנה ממנו המלך עצו ותושיה
כי כאשר בצחוק הזה המצחק ראוי
לשים מגמתו לשמור ולהגן בעד
העם ולא יפקד מהם איש כי הם
עמוד אשר בית הצחוק תלוי עליו
ואם ימרתו אנשיו ישאר הוא לברו
והיה כל מוצאו יתגורר ועל כן
קרא שם הצחוק הזה שטרנג כי
בלשון פרסי רוצה לומר צער
המלך או תוכחה למלך כאשר
אבאר אלקי:

Cf. Job 41, 2
au
fu
quCf. Zevachim
p. 53ain
ti
d
inCf. Psalm
100, 3a
n
q
Cf. Prov.
14, 28Cf. Isaiah
31, 3

Cf. Prov. 8, 4

Cf. Prov. 31, 4

Cf. Gen. 41, 14

Isaiah 23:7

יש מתיחסים הצחוק הזה לכליון
אחד משבעה חכמי יון ויש לאחרים
ואין מכריע ואין ספק כי מימי קדם
קדמתה כי כן בא זכרוננו בספרים
קדמונים והיותר נראה בעיני כי
בני פרס המציאות יתן כי בכל
מקומות אשר הגיע אליהם דבר
זה הצחוק משתמשים בו בלשון
פרסים זה הוא אשר מצאתי על
ענן מציאותי:

להצחוק הזה יש שמות וכנויים
הרבה והן למי לשונות ובטוי
הנעת האמות והגויים אשר הגיע
עליהם זה הצחוק: יש קורין אותו
שטרנג והוא לשון פרסי כי כאשר
אמרנו למעלה ענינו צער או
תוכחת המלך ולפי דעת אחרים
שטרנג רוצה לומר שש מינים
ורזמו לשש הדברים כללים בזה
הצחוק המלך והמלכה המל
הפרש הרוח והדגל: יש שקורין
אותו שן אסקי ואסקקי והם
כלם מלות משתנות מן שיה כי
בלשון פרסי הוא המלך:

עתה באתי לבאר לפניך צורת
הלוח אשר מצחקים עליו: תבנה

Exodus 5:18

לוח ארז רבוע יהיה כארבו כן
רחבו ועליו תציר תכן לבנים
מרבעים ויהיו לבתים שמונה על
שמונה ותהי הלבנה לאבן משכית
אחת אדמה ואחת שחורה וגון
מגון שונה להבדיל בינותם זאת
תהיה צורת הלוח לוח ארז אף
כי מלכים ושרים זהב להם היו
עושים אותו מן כל-עץ יקר ונחמד
למראה ומאבנים טובות איש
מאשר תשיג ידו:

ואלה שמות חלקי הצחוק
הזה ותאריהם כפי מדרגותם
ומעלותיהם המלך הראשון במעלה
וגדלה ובלשון פרסי מכנה שיה
ועל שמו נקרא הצחוק שיה דרך
עליו ושבת:

והשני לו היא המלכה גברת
ממלכות והיא הנקראת בלשון
פרסי פרזאן ויש אומרים כי הנחת
זה השם מורה משנה למלך כי אין
מדרגי המלכות לצאת למלחמה
והוא יושב ראשונה במלכות
ונותנים עליו הוד מלכות וכל
אחד מאלו השנים יש להם שלשה
בעצה וגבורה למלחמה שם הראשון

2 K. 18, 20

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בלשון פרסי מיל וגמל בן בלשון
תכמנו נקרא גם כן מיל וידוע כי
בני קדם משתמשים במילים
לבנות עליהם מבצר בשדהו הולכים
למלחמה ואולי יצדחו בו השור
המכנה על המילים:

וחשני לו הוא בשם פרש והוא
השור אשר ראש הפרשים רוכבי
סוסים:

וחשלישי הוא המלכה רזן או
רוח בלשון פרסי ויש מהלוקות
בפירוש זה השם יש אומרים כי
הוא שם עוף גדול עד מאד
ונקרא גם כן אלענקא אחרים
מפרשים מעל עז וחזק וכל אחד
מאלו השורים נקראים בשם המלך
או המלכה ויש לחם איש אחד רגלי
עומד לפניהם נקרא רגל:

ואם באתי לפרש אליה דמות
תבנית צורות כל חלקי החזק
הזה יכלה הזמן והמה לא יכלו כי
אם כל אחד חולה אחרי יצר
מחשבות לפי ולב בני עיר ובעזוק
הזה תעשה שמים מערכות
שונות וי מא לא ראוי זה כראוי
זה אחד שחור ואחד אדום כעני
הבתים:

הנה בארתי לך תבנית תבנית
הלוח אשר כשדח הארץ יחשב
וכל חית ערת אבירים ישחקו שם
ונחלק חסדה לשמונה על שמונה
טורי בתים אחד אדום ואחד
שחור: תכין לך הלוח בדרך אשר
בית הראשון מן השור הראשון
לצר ימינה יהיה אדום ואז תקח
את מלך אדום והעמדת אותו על
כסא מלכותו בבית בבית הרביעי
שהוא שחור ואת המלכה תושב
בבית התמישי והוא אדום ואת
הכלל הזה תקח פירך כי לעולם
המלכה יושבת בבית ממין גונה
ופיל המלך בצד מלכו תשים בבית
השלישי ופיל המלכה סמוך לה
בבית הששי ומעמד פרש המלך
בבית השני יהיה ושל המלכה

בבית השביעי ויצא הרוח ויעמד
ואצל כל פנה יארח בבית הראשון
והשמיני ושמונה איש רגלי יעמדו
יתדיו על השור השני כל אחד
לפני ארוניו לשדתם ולהלחם
מלחמותם ובסדר הזה יערוף בעל
מלחמתה את אנשי צבאו מקצה
יד מקצה מזה וקרוב אחד מקצה מזה:

cf. Lev. 25, 31
Isaiah 68, 31

cf. 2 Kings 10, 9
cf. Gen. 7, 12

cf. 1 Sam. 17, 21

Gen. 6, 5

Num. 33, 2

Cf. Ex. 18, 16
Cf. Esther

1, 19

1 Chron. 24, 3

Gen. 11, 2

(meaning altered)

Ezek. 1, 7

Isaiah 10, 6

2 Sam. 20, 20

Ex. 14, 22

Prov. 4, 11

Cf. Ezek. 1, 12

Nahum 3, 3

Nahum 3, 2

ואלה מסעיהם למוצאיהם על פי
חקי הצחוק הזה ותורותיו בדת
פרס ומדי ולא יעבור איש ולא ישנה
את תפקידו לפקודתם בעבודתם
ויהי בנסעם מקדם הרגל הולכת
ראשונה ורגליהם רגל ישראל בית
אחת בית לעמתן לא תשובנה
בלכתן אף כי בתחלה יש להן
רשות ללכת שתי בתים ואם
לשלוש שלל ולבזבז כונתן כיונה
חצים צודה יורה מימנם
ומשמאלם: הנות הגוף במעגלי
יושר אל כל אשר יהיה חפץ הרוח
ללכת ולק אף אין דבר יהיה חוצץ
בין המקום אשר הוא שם למקום
אשר יבוא שמה: והפרש מעלה
על מרכבה מרקדה מדלג ומפסיע
פנים ואחור על ראשי האנשים
אנשי המלחמה ומקפץ על טור
אחד והולך לטור האחר לבית
אשר נגדו והופך לימן או לשמאל
ויושב בבית הסמוך לו משנה
בצבע מן הבית אשר יצא משם:
והפיל מפול אימה והולך לכל צד
שצדה באלכסון אם לא יהיה
שם מפסיע בןו למקום אשר יק
אליו ואינו משנה צבע לעולם

אך ורק המלכה כי עליה מוטלת
שמירת אדוניה הולכת בכחה
בכל אות נפשה והליכות כלם לה
מלבר אשר לא תשנה את צבע
ביתה בדרך הפרש ואינה מקפצת:
המלך יושב על כסא מלכותו ואינו
צועד כי אם מבית לבית ואינו
יוצא מפתח ביתו בכל עת רק
אם השעה צריכה לכה ואם אחד
מן העם במסעו לפי דתי המלחמה
הזאת יגיע אל מקום אויבו או
י"י לו כח לגרשו ממושבו ולשבת
תחתיו או אם אחד מן אנשיו יהיה
ברוח ובצער ובלכתו יכול לבוא
אל בית אחר להיות סמוך לו לעזור
לו ולהציל לו מרעתו אל ימנע טוב
מבעליו אף אל יבהל ברוחו לבעוס
נגד אויבו השמר פן ואל אם הכה
אותו יפתח לו את הדרך והאורכ
י"י ירעה לו מכל הרעה
אכן איש חכם הוא הרואה את הגולר
וכל מעגלותיו מפלס ושוקל בפלס
חשיבות ומדרגת כל השרים ומי
ומי הקודם לחברו לעזר ולהועיל
ולא תאבד נפש אחד מהם זאת
ואין צורך לומר עוד כי המלך גדול

Jonah 4, 6

Cf. Psalm

84, 12

Cf. Eccl. 7, 9

Cf. Talmud

Berach. 5, 21