

The Middle Persian Explanation of Chess and Invention of Backgammon

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The short Middle Persian prose text which bears the (modern) title *Wizārishn ī catrang ud nibishn ī nēw-ardashbīr* (*Explanation of Chess and Invention of Backgammon* [hereafter *EC*]) probably was written down in the ninth century A.D. Yet it may have flourished in essentially its present form, but as a courtly tale transmitted orally, from the reign of the Sasanian king Xusraw I (A.D. 531–79). The text depicts well the culture of Xusraw's time (see below), and its story is part of the lore of this period in the accounts of the Arab historian Tha'ālibī and of the Persian epic poet Firdausī.¹ *EC* may have been recorded in writing even during the Sasanian period—if not in the *Book of Kings* (*Xwadāy Nāmag*), then perhaps in the *Book of Manners* (*Ēwēn Nāmag*). The latter is mentioned in an appendix to *EC* (see the translation below, sections 37–38) and is the likely source of the precepts there added. The *Book of Manners*, a heterogeneous collection of didactic material, discussed various subjects with which a properly educated noble should be familiar,² and these included board games. The fact is illustrated by another didactic text set at Xusraw I's court, *Xusraw, Son of Kawād, and a Page* (*Xusraw Kawādān ud rēdag-ē*). A young page, in the course of describing his training, informs the king: "I am more advanced than my peers in playing chess, backgammon, and 'eight-foot'."³ One would expect that the *Book of Manners* did not merely give rules and precepts, but that it included entertaining illustrative narratives in the manner of New Persian instructional (*andarz*) literature.

1 H. Zotenberg, ed., *Histoire des rois des Perses par . . . al-Tha'ālibī* (Paris, 1900), 622–25; J. Mohl, ed., *Le livre des rois par Abou'l-kasim Firdousi* (Paris, 1868), 384–401.

2 See A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen, 1944), 62; A. Tafadžulī, "Ā'īnnāma," *Dānishnāma-yi Īrān u Islām* (Tehran, 1976), 266.

3 J. M. Jamsasp-Asana, *The Pahlavi Texts Contained in the Codex MK* (Bombay, 1897), 28, sec. 15; C. J. Brunner, "Selected Texts from Pre-Islamic Iran" (Special Supplement to *The Asia Society Grapevine* No. 2, New York, 1977), 7. 'Eight-foot' (*basht-pāy*) translates Sanskrit *aṣṭāpada*, the term for a board of 64 squares. Perhaps the Middle Persian term designates a variant of chess, e.g., dice chess with two or four players.

EC has drawn attention chiefly because it suggests a reasonable and fairly precise time for the dissemination of chess westward from India.⁴ The narrative may indeed contain this grain of truth, but in other respects it must be treated as legend exemplifying the familiar epic theme of a battle of wits between two rulers.⁵ The contact between Iranian and Indian courts described in *EC* may be a reminiscence of an actual exchange of embassies, and Xusraw's concern over the Hephthalite domination of the eastern provinces of his realm would have been sufficient motive to seek relations with Indian rulers.⁶ On the other hand, the Indian motifs in Arabic accounts of the Sasanian kings are usually quite legendary. For instance, Xusraw's eastern campaign is much exaggerated, and an Indian adventure is attributed to Wahrām V (A.D. 420–38).⁷ A more remarkable introduction of an Indian motif occurs in the Middle Persian *Book of Deeds of Ardashīr, Son of Pāpak* (*Kārnāmag ī Ardāshīr ī Pābagān*). In that text the first Sasanian dynasty (A.D. 224–41) is depicted as learning the future of his empire from "the soothsayer of the Indians."⁸ This episode may have been added to the original oral narrative under the influence of late Sasanian literary fashion.

One point in *EC* is surely legend—the pretension that backgammon was invented only in the sixth century. The hero's explanation of why that game is called *nēw-ardashīr* ("noble-(is)-Ardashīr") by no means suffices. The name could, as *EC* claims, commemorate Ardashīr I; but alternatives are Ardashīr II (A.D. 379–83) or even some noble (most probably in either of these reigns) who bore "Nēw-Ardashīr" as his honorific. In any case, the term may hint at an earlier story (itself probably legendary) telling how backgammon came to Iran, a story which *EC* supplanted.

Three features of *EC* relate it closely to the time of Xusraw I, even if they do not fully prove the date of composition: (1) In that reign the physician Burzōē undertook a mission to India; one result was that he translated into Middle Persian the collection of Sanskrit allegorical tales

4 See, e.g., A. A. Macdonell, "The Origin and Early History of Chess," *JRAS* 30 (1898), 128–29.

5 Middle Persian literature contains, besides numerous collections of aphorisms, two lively contests: (1) the *Text of Yōsbt of the Friyān* (*Mādiyān ī Yōsbt ī Friyān*), ed. and trans. in M. Haug and H. Jamsppi Asa, *The Book of Arda Viraf* (Bombay-London, 1872), 207–66; (2) the Iranian debate fable *The Babylonian Tree* (*Draxt ī asurīg*), ed. and trans. in M. Nawwābī, *Manzūma-yi drakht asurīg* (Tehran, 1967), and with additional commentary in C. J. Brunner, "The Fable of *The Babylonian Tree*," *JNES* (in press). Yet *EC* could reflect, in addition to Iranian wisdom traditions, a degree of Indian literary influence. See the examples of riddle solving in Indian literature collected in T. Benfey, "Die indischen Märchen von den klugen Räthsellösern und ihre Verbreitung über Asien und Europa (Ein Beitrag zu der Geschichte der Märchen)," *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin, 1892), 2:156–223.

6 His next major successor, Xusraw II (A.D. 591–628) may have exchanged gifts with Indian rulers through embassies; see texts implying contact with India cited in J. Markwart, *Ērānšahr nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorenac'i, Abb. der König. Ges. der Wiss. zu Göttingen*, phil.-hist. Kl., N.F. 3/2 (Berlin, 1901), 33.

7 On the problem of Xusraw I's eastern campaign, see G. Widengren, "Xosrau Anōšurvān, les Hephthalites et les peuples turcs," *Orientalia Suecana* 1 (1952), 69–94. The tale of Wahrām V occurs in Tha'alibī, *Histoire*, 560–64.

8 *Kēd ī hindugān*; E. K. Antia, ed., *Kārnāmak-i Artakhsbīr Pāpakān* (Bombay, 1900), chap. 16.

known as the *Pañcatantra*.⁹ The frame narrative of the original text features an Indian king named Devašarman. The versions which derive from the Middle Persian translation call him Dabsharm (Syriac) or Dabshalm (Arabic);¹⁰ and the Dēwisharm of *EC* apparently represents the same character. Thus at least this detail of *EC* should be later than Burzōē's translation, and the entire composition may have been motivated by a fashion in Indian wisdom literature at the Sasanian court which was stimulated by Burzōē.

(2) Xusraw I's reign was a period of diverse intellectual activity at the court, which included the study and advancement of the astral sciences of astronomy and astrology. One illustration is the revision at this time of the *Horoscope of the Sovereigns* (*Zayc ī Shabryārān*).¹¹ The Sasanians' concern for better tools of astrological prediction must have been motivated, in part, by the approach of the tenth century of the tenth millennium according to Zoroastrian cosmic chronology—a time when various celestial signs might be expected.¹² The more sophisticated techniques of Indian astral science found a warm reception at the Sasanian court and helped spur debate among the several schools of specialists.¹³ Both *EC* and the *Book of Deeds* display a keen awareness of astrology which seems appropriate to the sixth century. This awareness is also significant for consideration of the following point.

9 For Burzōē's autobiography, see T. Nöldeke, "Burzōēs Einleitung zum Buche Kalila waDimna," *Schriften der Wiss. Ges. in Strassburg* 12 (1912) offprint, 27 pp.

10 See T. Nöldeke, "Persische Studien," *Sb. Ak. Wiss. Wien*, phil.-hist. Kl. 126, Abh. 12 (1892), 23–24.

11 See S. H. Taqizadeh, "Some Chronological Data relating to the Sasanian Period," *BSOS* 9 (1937), 134. Cf. Abū Sahl b. Nawbakht's reference to scholarship at Xusraw's court, recorded in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (ed. G. Flügel [Leipzig, 1871], 239); see also B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm* (New York, 1970), 575.

12 For Iranians of the Sasanian period, the "present age" (the "millennium of Zardusht") was the time in which progress would begin toward the inevitable defeat of the demons; see the book of *Original Creation* (*Bundahishn*) 1.28 (ed. B. T. Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsīb. Iranian or Greater Bundahishn* [Bombay, 1956], 8f.; facs. ed. T. D. Anklesaria, *The Būndahishn* [Bombay, 1908], 7). The simple world-year of 12,000 years (defined in *Bundahishn* 5 B.15 and 36 [facs. ed., 58 and 238–40]) must have strongly reinforced older apocalyptic doctrines. The correlation of one millennium to each zodiacal sign would have rendered intelligible the mystery of "the period for the complete defeat of the Lie" (*Book of the Religion* [*Dēnkard*] 3.407 [D. M. Madan, ed., *The Complete Text of the Pahlavi Dinkard* (Bombay, 1911), 390; J. de Menasce, *Le troisième livre du Dēnkard* (Paris, 1973), 365]). On the millennia, see also E. S. Kennedy, "Ramifications of the World-Year Concept in Islamic Astrology," *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of the History of Science* (Paris, 1964), 1:37–38. For the signs of the tenth millennium, see *Dēnkard* 7.8.51–54 (ed. Madan, 666–67; M. Molé, *La légende de Zoroastre selon les textes pehlevi* [Paris, 1967], 88f.); and *Commentary on the Hymn to Wahman* (*Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, ed. B. T. Anklesaria [Bombay, 1957]) 4.64, 6.4, 7.6.

13 On the influence of Indian astronomy and astrology during the Sasanian period, see E. S. Kennedy and B. L. Van Der Waerden, "The World-Year of the Persians," *JAOS* 83 (1963), 326; D. Pingree, "Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran," *Isis* 54 (1963), 241–42. Use of Indian sources is attested in *Dēnkard* 4 (ed. Madan, 428; J. de Menasce, "Notes iraniennes," *JA* 237 [1949], 1–3). In the ninth century, the Zoroastrian priest Manucīhr refers to the problem of reconciling three systems of horoscopy: the *Zayc of the Sovereigns*, the *Indian Zayc*, and the *Zayc of Ptolemy* (B. N. Dhabhar, ed., *The Epistles of Manushchibar* [Bombay, 1912], 2. 2.9–11); and these were already familiar in the Sasanian period.

(3) The hero of *EC* is the alleged "vizier" of Xusraw I famous in literature, Wuzurg-Mihr (Arabic Buzurjmīhr, "Great-[is] -Mihr"). But it may be debated whether his presence proves that *EC* originated in that reign or, rather, that it belongs to the Islamic period. One theory has held that the wise minister belongs only to Iranian literary tradition and not to history; and his story seems indeed to echo vaguely that of the ancient sage Aḫīqar.¹⁴ A. Christensen argued for the identification of Wuzurg-Mihr with the historical personage Burzōē: "Burzōē," since it is a hypocoristic name,¹⁵ may represent a full name *Burz-Mihr ("Lofty-[is] -Mihr"). This form might have been corrupted by writers of the early Islamic period into "Buzurjmīhr," then translated back into Middle Persian as "Wuzurg-Mihr." But this supposition remains highly uncertain. While the wisdom of Burzōē and that of Wuzurg-Mihr inevitably share common features, the two figures are clearly distinguished in Islamic literature by name (including the latter's patronymic), profession, and intellectual training. It has been noted that Wuzurg-Mihr's name is absent from historical sources contemporary with the Sasanians; but this point is neither decisive nor surprising. The Middle Persian sayings attributed to Wuzurg-Mihr (see below) refer to him, not as vizier (*wuzurg-framadār*), but as "*administrator (*treasurer?) of the harem of the mighty empire, Xusraw's director at court."¹⁶

Wuzurg-Mihr, in sharp contrast to Burzōē, is consistently associated with the sciences of the heavens. Even his name can bear an astrological connotation, since the god Mihr, the watchful judge over the world, is lord of the heavenly bodies.¹⁷ He may be identified with the Buzurjmīhr who wrote a work titled *Selection[s]* (Middle Persian **Wizīdag*, according to the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm.¹⁸ The *Selection* was a commentary on the *Anthologiae* of the astrologer Vettius Valens (second century A.D.). The horoscopes collected by Buzurjmīhr in this work were undoubtedly added to regularly during the remainder of the Sasanian period.¹⁹ But his version of the "horoscope of the world" (*zayc ī gēhān*), of which a fragment survives, probably belongs to the original work; compare the intact Middle Persian version from the book of the *Original Creation* (*Bundabishn*).²⁰

14 See, e.g., Thaʿālibī, *Histoire*, 633–36; Masʿūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, ed. and trans. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille (Paris, 1863), 2:206–25. Buzurjmīhr is compared with Aḫīqar in T. Nöldeke, *Burzōēs Einleitung*, 104f. Cf. discussion in Brunner, *The Babylonian Tree*; and see the later Middle Eastern versions of the Aḫīqar story in F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and A. S. Lewis, *The Story of Aḫīqar* (London, 1898). For the argument which follows, see A. Christensen, "La légende du sage Buzurjmīhr," *Acta Orientalia* 8 (1929), 81–127.

15 It is attested, already in the early Sasanian period, on a small ring bezel; see C. J. Brunner, *Sasanian Stamp Seals in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1978), 140.

16 Jamasp-Asana, *Pahlavi Texts* (Bombay, 1913), 85.4–5: *winnārbed shabistān shahr ī ōstīgān xusraw darīgbed*.

17 See, e.g., Mary Boyce, "On Mithra's Part in Zoroastrianism" *BSOAS* 32 (1963), 21–30.

18 Ed. Flügel, 269; trans. Dodge, 641.

19 See Taqizadeh, *Chronological Data*, 137.

20 The fragment is studied in C. A. Nallino, "Tracce di Opera Greche giunte agli Arabi per Trafila Pehlevica," *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Browne* (Cambridge, 1922), 353. For *Bundabishn* 5 A (ed. B. T. Anklesaria, 51–54) see especially D. N. MacKenzie, "Zoroastrian astrology in the *Bundabishn*," *BSOAS* 27 (1964), 513f.

To this Wuzurg-Mihr is attributed a Middle Persian *Memoir* (*Ayādgār*), a collection of religious apothegms; and a rather different collection, in Persian, occurs in Firdausī's *Book of Kings*.²¹ Attributions of authorship for collections of Zoroastrian aphorisms are admittedly of quite doubtful validity. Yet, among these particular ponderings on dogma and ethics, one section deals pithily with the problem of reconciling astral determination with individual responsibility:

Do the things which come to people happen through fate (*baxt*) or by action (*kunishn*)? Fate and action together are just like body and soul. For the body without a soul is a useless shape, and the soul without a body is intangible air. When they are joined together, they are strong and very functional. What is fate and what is action? Fate is the reason (*cim*), action the cause (*wabānag*), for the things which come to people.²²

This concise defense of traditional Zoroastrian emphasis on "good thoughts, good words, good deeds"²³ and the fundamental rationality of a disturbed universe is especially appropriate to the astrologer sage. He is made to enunciate a position notably more complex than that expressed in a Middle Persian gloss to *Wīdēwdād* V. 9 of the Avesta: "Material things are by fate, immaterial things by action."²⁴ This saying perhaps represents the average believer's resolution of the question.

EC associates Wuzurg-Mihr not only with an elaborate astrological analogy but with the philosophical term *cim*, rendered above as 'reason' and below, in *EC*, as 'rationale'. The terms 'cause' and 'reason' in Wuzurg-Mihr's dictum must have undergone considerable discussion among Zoroastrian priest-philosophers, little of which is reflected in surviving literature. But the ninth-century apologist Mardān-Farrux uses the terms often in his *Doubt-Resolving Explanation* and attempts to establish their relationship:

The cause and reason of an action are prior to its necessity (*abāyast*). The necessity does not exist until the reason for the action's necessity occurs (*rasēd*). The reason for an action is [derived] from the cause which impels in one the necessity of that action. Necessity is the willing (*kāmistan*) of something on the basis of a cause (*wabānīg*).²⁵

Mardān-Farrux also cites a major example of 'reason' from Zoroastrian cosmogony:

21 Jamasp-Asana, *Pahlavi Texts*, 85–101; J. C. Tarapore, *Pahlavi Andarz-Nāmak* (Bombay, 1933), 38–57; Firdausī, *Livre des rois* VI, 264–93.

22 Jamasp-Asana, *Pahlavi Texts*, 94.1–8; cf. J. C. Tavadia, "Pahlavi passages on fate and free will," *ZII* 8 (1931), 126–27.

23 *Humat, buxt, huwarsbt*; see, e.g., K. M. Jamaspasa and Helmut Humbach, *Pursišnūhā. A Zoroastrian Catechism* (Wiesbaden, 1971), 44, no. 27.

24 Hoshang Jamasp, ed., *Vendidad I* (Bombay, 1907), 152.

25 J. de Menasce, ed., *Škand-Gumānīk Vičār. La solution décisive des doutes* (Fribourg en Suisse, 1945), 86, sec. 7.14–17.

The knowingness (*danishmā*) of the creator, by reason of the necessity for creatures [in order to defeat the Evil Spirit], through the action of means (*cārag-kunishnībā*), created creatures for activity (*kār*).²⁶

Since *cim* is a significant philosophical term, its translation in *EC* should be carefully determined. A rendering as 'symbol' represents an easy error.²⁷ For the text's conceit is that chess is a fully acted parallel to a battle. (The game's literary equivalent would be a parable.) Backgammon, similarly, parallels the structure and processes of the cosmos. Such equations in the games' surface structure as "chess elephant stands for royal bodyguard" are adequately described by the precise term *bangōshīdag* 'analogy' (used in section 31). *Cim* goes beyond this and refers to the games' underlying truth: their manifestation of the realities and dynamics of material existence. The term lends emphasis to the didactic nature of the text and renders the role in it of the wise astrologer and minister all the more appropriate.

It is perhaps surprising, in view of the distinct identities of chess and backgammon (reflected partly in their distinct terminologies; see the glossary, below) that *EC* does not strongly contrast them. Chess is given at least an implicit contrast with backgammon, which represents 'fate'; but it could have been explicitly extolled as exemplifying 'action', that is, the working of free will within the bounds of natural laws.²⁸

EC was first edited and rendered in Gujarati by P. B. Sanjana. Here the version of J. M. Jamasp-Asana is followed, with consultation of that of H. S. Nyberg.²⁹ Transcriptions and translations were published by C. Salemann and J. C. Tarapore before A. Pagliaro's more detailed study.³⁰

26 Ed. de Menasce, 108–10, 9.20–21.

27 Thus in J. C. Tavadia, *Die mittelpersische Sprache und Literatur der Zarathustrier* (Leipzig, 1956), 140.

28 Cf. the fragment of a Persian text on chess discussed in N. Bland, "On the Persian Game of Chess," *JRAS* 13 (1850), 7; and the description of backgammon in *EC* with the medieval "Ouranomachia or Game of the Astrologers" described by Thomas Hyde (reference in D. Forbes, *The History of Chess, from the time of the Early Invention of the Game in India, till the period of its Establishment in Western and Central Europe* [London, 1860], 138). Zoroastrian concern with the individual's moral initiative is expressed frequently, as in the *Selected Aphorisms of the Ancient Teachers*, sec. 58:

Doing good (the practice of noble action) is from exertion. Procreation is from creation; creation is from desire; desire is from consciousness; consciousness is from immaterial knowledge; knowledge is the tool which is, was, and will be (M. F. Kanga, ed., *Čītak Handarž i Pōryōtkēšān* [Bombay, 1960], 12).

29 P. B. Sanjana, *Ganjeshāyagān, Andarze Ātrepāt Mārāspandān, Mādīgāne Chatrang, and Andarze Khusroe Kavātān* (Bombay, 1885); Jamasp-Asana, *Pahlavi Texts* II, 115–120; Nyberg, *A Manual of Pahlavi I* (Wiesbaden, 1964), 118–21.

30 C. Salemann, "Mittelpersische Studien," *Bull. de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St.-Pétersbourg* 31 (1887), col. 419–50; J. C. Tarapore, *Vijārishn-Chatrang, Aīnīnak Nāmak Yak'tibūnishnīb, and Hīm va Kherat ī Farkhō Gabra* (Bombay, 1932); A. Pagliaro, "Il Testo Pahlavico sul Giuoco degli Scacchi," *Miscellanea Giovanni Galbiati* III (Milan, 1951), 91–110.

EC: A New Translation

(1) They say that, in the reign of Xusraw of Immortal Soul, a chess game (16 counters of emerald and 16 counters of red ruby) was sent by Dēwisharm, great ruler of the Indians, to test the intelligence and wisdom of the Iranians and to see to his own profit. (2) With the chess [game] were sent 1200 camel loads of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, and robes and 90 elephants and their things especially fashioned. Taxtrītūs, who was the pick among the Indians, was despatched. (3) In a letter had been written: "Since you are named as king of kings, as king of kings over us all, it is necessary that your wise men be wiser than ours. [It is so] if you explain the rationale of this chess; otherwise *you* send tribute [and] taxes!" (4) The king of kings asked for four days' time. There was no one of the wise men of the realm of Ērān who could explain the rationale of chess.

(5) On the third day Wuzurg-Mihr, son of Bōxtag, rose to his feet. (6) He said: "May you be immortal! Until today I have not explained the rationale of chess for this reason, that you and everyone who is in the realm of Ērān may know that I am the wisest man in the realm of Ērān. (7) I will easily explain the rationale of chess, and I will extract tribute and taxes from Dēwisharm. I will devise and send Dēwisharm something else, which he will not be able to explain; and I will take a second tribute from him. Be assured of this, that you are worthy to be king of kings and our wise men are wiser than Dēwisharm's."

(8) The king of kings said three times: "Fine Wuzurg-Mihr, our Taxtrītūs!" He ordered 12,000 *drabm* [drachmas] to be given to Wuzurg-Mihr. (9) The next day Wuzurg-Mihr summoned Taxtrītūs into his presence and said: "Dēwisharm has fashioned this chess like a battle in meaning: (10) He has made the kings like two princes, the chariots to left and right like the van, a general like the commander of the warriors, the elephants like the commander of the bodyguards, the horses like the commander of cavalry, the foot-soldiers like the very infantry at the front of the attack." (11) Then Taxtrītūs set up the chess [set] and played with Wuzurg-Mihr. Wuzurg-Mihr won three victories from Taxtrītūs, and on that account great joy came to the whole country. (12) Then Taxtrītūs rose to his feet. (13) He said: "May you be immortal! God has given you this miraculous power, glory, might, and victory. Be lord of Ērān and non-Ērān! (14) Some of the wise men of the Indians invented this chess game. It was assembled and constructed with much labor and toil. No one was able to explain it. (15) Your Wuzurg-Mihr, by his innate intelligence, explained it so easily and simply!" (16) He sent to the king's treasury all that property.

(17) The next day the king of kings summoned Wuzurg-Mihr into his presence. (18) He said to Wuzurg-Mihr: "Our Wuzurg-Mihr! What is that thing of which you said to me: 'I will fashion it and send it to Dēwisharm'?" (19) Wuzurg-Mihr said: "Of the rulers during this millennium, Ardāshīr was most effective and wise; I will name the game Noble-(is)-Ardāshīr in Ardāshīr's name. (20) I will make the board of Noble-(is)-Ardāshīr like Spandarmad, the Earth. (21) I will make 30 counters like the 30 nycthemera; I will make 15 white like day, and I will make 15 black like night. (22) I will make a single die, like the revolution of the constellations and the turning of the zodiac. (23) I will make a 'one' on the die, just as Ohrmazd is one; all well-being was created by him. (24) I will make a 'two', just like the material existence and the invisible. (25) I will make a 'three', just like good thought, good speech, good works and thought, words, deeds. (26) I will make a 'four', like the four material elements of which a person [consists] and the world's four directions—east, west, south, north. (27) I will make a

'five', like the five light-sources—sun, moon, stars, fire, and the lightning which comes from the sky. (28) I will make a 'six', like the creating of creatures during the six periods of the year-divisions. (29) I will make an arrangement of Noble-(is)-Ardashīr upon the board just like the lord Ohrmazd, when he created creatures in the world. (30) The revolving and turning of the counters according to the die is just like people in the world: Their bond has been tied to the invisible beings; they revolve and move according to the seven [planets] and 12 [zodiacal signs]. When they hit one [counter] against another and collect [the latter], it is just as people in the world smite one another. (31) When, by the turn of the die, they collect all [the counters], it is an analogy to people, who all pass out of the world. When they set them up again, it is an analogy to people, who will all come alive again at the resurrection."

(32) When he heard that speech, the king of kings was joyful. He ordered to be arrayed as splendidly as possible 12,000 Arab horses covered with gold and pearls; 12,000 young men, the pick of the realm of Ērān; 12,000 panoplies, [steel] seven [times] tempered [lit. 'rendered, made']; 12,000 Indian worked steel swords; 12,000 seven-eyed [studded] belts; and everything else which was necessary for 12,000 men and horses. (33) Wuzurg-Mihr, son of Bōxtag, was made commander over them. At the time destined, by good luck and the gods' help, he arrived among the Indians. (34) Dēwīsharm, the great sovereign of the Indians, when he saw them in such fashion, asked 40 days time from Wuzurg-Mihr. (35) There was no one of the wise men of the Indians who knew the rationale of Noble-(is)-Ardashīr. (36) So Wuzurg-Mihr a second time extracted just as much tribute and tax from Dēwīsharm. He returned to the realm of Ērān with good luck and great splendor.

(37) The explanation of the rationale of chess is this: What [is] potent [derives] from this, as the wise men have said: "To carry off the victory through wisdom, to know the principles of that unarmed battle." (38) Playing chess [is] this: observing, striving to protect one's own pieces, greater striving after how to be able to capture the other person's pieces, not moving badly [lit., 'a bad hand'] because of hope of being able to capture the other person's pieces, always keeping one piece on the attack and the others in defense, observing with complete mindfulness, and other [points], as they have been written in the *Book of Manners*.

Completed in health and happiness.

Glossary to the Translation

In the left-hand column are given the terms used in the translation. In the right-hand column are the Middle Persian terms, which are followed by a literal translation, where required, and the equivalent modern terms, where different.

arrangement [of pieces on the board]	<i>nibādag</i> 'placement'.
board	<i>taxtag</i> .
capture a piece	<i>abzār burdan</i> (for chess only) 'carry [off] an instrument'.
chariot	<i>raxw</i> = chess rook.
chess	<i>catrang</i> (Persian and Arabic <i>shatranj</i>), loanword from Sanskrit <i>caturāṅga</i> 'having four limbs'. The four-limbed army is <i>basty-aśva-ratha-padātām</i> 'having elephants, horses, chariots, and

	infantry'. ³¹
collect	<i>abar cīdan</i> (for backgammon only) = (1) to set back the opponent's men; (2) to bear one's own men off the board.
counter	<i>mubrag</i> , a gaming piece regarded simply as an object of cut stone. The Metropolitan Museum of Art holds a possible example of a backgammon man or chess pawn from the Sasanian period. ³²
die	<i>gardānāg</i> 'causing to move or turn'.
elephant	<i>pīl</i> = chess bishop.
foot-soldier	<i>payādag</i> = chess pawn.
game (i.e., set)	<i>ēw-yuxt</i> 'having one pair'. Apparently the reference is to games for two players which oppose two identical sets of counters. The term would thus exclude, for example, Indian four-man chess. The Middle Persian term for 'game' in the sense of 'play, fun' is <i>kādag</i> . ³³
general	<i>frazēn</i> 'protector' = chess queen.
hit	<i>zadan</i> (in backgammon only).
horse	<i>asp</i> = chess knight.
king	<i>shāb</i> = chess king.
move (n.)	<i>wāzishn</i> (in chess only), implying more or less linear motion, 'movement'.
Noble-(is)-Ardashīr	<i>nēw-ardashīr</i> = backgammon. The familiar New Persian and Arabic term <i>nard</i> represents the second stage of contraction of the Middle Persian name, the first stage being <i>n'ardashīr</i> . ³⁴
piece	<i>abzār</i> (in chess only) 'instrument'.
play (vb.)	<i>wāzīdan</i> , extended from its basic meaning 'cause to move'. For its verbal noun, see 'move'.
revolving	<i>wardishn</i> (in backgammon only), characterizing the overall elliptical movement of the backgammon men from point to point on the board. The term is also astronomical; see section 22 of the translation.
turning	<i>gardishn</i> , synonymous with 'revolving'.

31 For discussion of the term, see Macdonell, *Early History of Chess*, 118.

32 Accession no. 36.30.5, a find from Qaṣr-i Abū Naṣr; see further in Brunner, *Sasanian Stamp Seals*, 46.

33 Cf. Nyberg, *Manual II* (Wiesbaden, 1974), 228. The Indian four-man game is described in M. Ghosh, ed., *Śūlapāṇi's Caturaṅga-Dīpikā. A Manual of Four-banded Dice-Chess* (Calcutta, 1936). For *kādag*, see *Dēnkard* 7.3.32 (ed. Madan, 620.16-17; Molé, *Legende*, 32): "They saw Zardusht in the vicinity as he played (*kādag kard*) with the boys."

34 Nyberg, *Manual II*, 138.