

# About this Booklet

## How to Print:

This booklet will print best on card stock (110 lb. paper), but can also be printed on regular (20 lb.) paper.

**Do not print Page 1** (these instructions).

First, have your printer **print Page 2**.

Then load that same page back into your printer to be printed on the other side and **print Page 3**.

When you load the page back into your printer, be sure that the top and bottom of the pages are oriented correctly.

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To contact the creator of this booklet, please go to the “contact” page at [www.AncientChess.com](http://www.AncientChess.com)

## Playing the Game

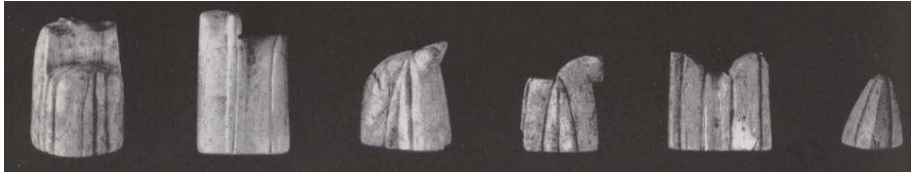
A coin may be tossed to decide who goes first, and the players take turns moving one piece in each turn.

If a player's King is threatened with capture, "**check**" (Persian: "Shah") is declared, and the player must move so that his King is no longer threatened. If there is no possible move to relieve the King of the threat, he is in "**checkmate**" (Persian: "shahmat," meaning, "the king is at a loss"). And the game is over. Even if the King is not in immediate threat, but any possible move would subject him to capture (stalemate), he has lost the game.

Also, if one side is reduced to a king alone with no other men, he loses as a "**bare king**," unless he can reduce the other player to a bare king on the very next move, in which case the game is a draw.

Finally, if it can be demonstrated that neither side has enough power on the board to force a win by checkmate, stalemate or bare king, the game is drawn.

Persia, mid 9th century



Catalonia (N.E. Spain), 10th century

Scandinavia, 11th century

### Background

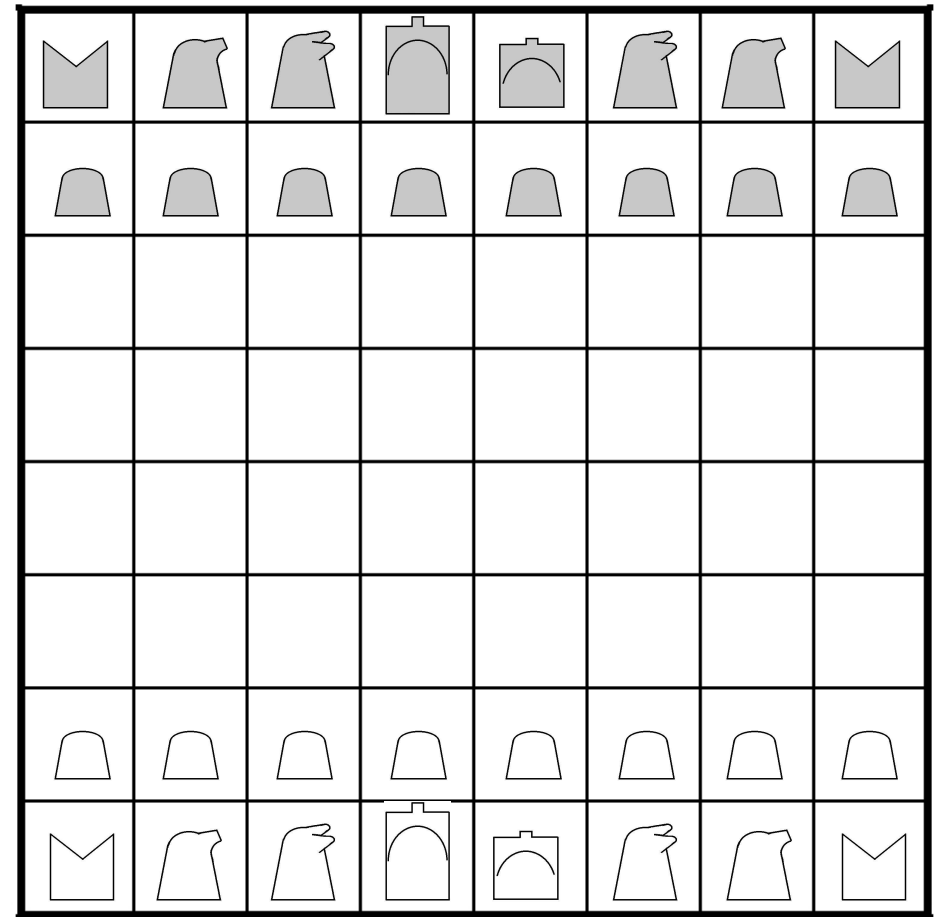
This pamphlet was compiled with the help of H. J. R. Murray's *A History of Chess* (1913); Richard Eales's *Chess: The History of a Game* (1995); and John Gollon's *Chess Variations: Ancient, Regional and Modern* (1968)

### Further information

For more information about ancient chess, and related games, visit this web site: [www.ancientchess.com](http://www.ancientchess.com)

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# Ancient Chess



Also known as

*Chatrang, Shatranj*  
or  
*Medieval Chess*

For information about Chess Variants throughout the world and free copies of this booklet, visit [www.AncientChess.com](http://www.AncientChess.com)

## Ancient Chess

The form of chess we play today is just over 500 years old. And our conventional design of chess pieces, the Staunton style, has only been around for about a century and a half. But before our modern chess spread across Europe, an older chess existed, lasting almost a thousand years, with its own rules and with its own conventional playing pieces. This older form existed in Persia before the 7th century Muslim conquest. It then spread across the Arab world, through northern Africa, and into Europe — all the while maintaining the same set of rules and the same style of chessmen.

Although some minor variations of rules did occur, the basic game remained the same, lasting centuries and spanning continents.

The rules given here are the best available account of how the game of chess, (Persian *chatrang*; Arabic *shatranj*), was played in Persia, probably as long ago as the 6th century A.D.

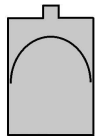
### Arrangement

The pieces are set up, as shown on the front of this pamphlet, much as they are in our modern chess. The White side has his King (the larger piece) on the left, and the Black side has the King on his right, so that the two face each other.

### The Pieces

The conventional shapes of the ancient chess pieces are rather mysterious. Generally speaking, they are simplified abstractions based on familiar carvings of the pieces they represent: The King (on elephant back), his Counselor (also riding an elephant) an Elephant warrior (the tusks are apparent), a Horse (the protruding nose identifies this piece), a Chariot (a V-shaped groove somehow indicates a chariot).

Here are the pieces, their Persian names, and modern equivalents:



Shah  
King  
(King)



Pil  
Elephant  
(Bishop)



Rukh  
Chariot  
(Rook)



Farzin  
Counselor  
(Queen)



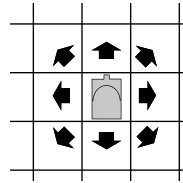
Asp  
Horse  
(Knight)



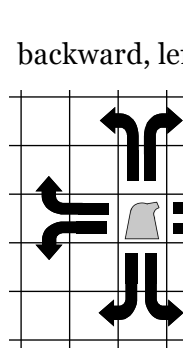
Pujada  
Foot Soldier  
(Pawn)

## The Moves

As in modern chess, each piece has a characteristic move — and many of these moves are familiar to a modern chess player.

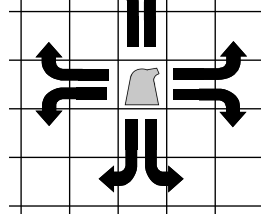


The **King**, for instance, moves one square in any direction. He has no power of castling.



The **Chariot** (which retains its Persian name in English as “Rook”) moves as many squares as it wishes, forward,

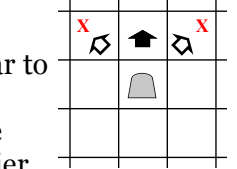
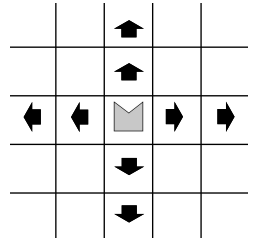
backward, left or right, until it reaches another piece, or the end of the board. Exactly like the modern Rook.



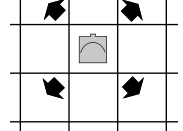
The **Horse** (Knight) moves in a peculiar L-shape: two spaces forward, backward, right or left, plus one square at a right angle. It can not be blocked by another piece. This move also is exactly like its modern counterpart.

The **Foot Soldier's** move is similar to

that of the modern pawn. It moves one square forward when not capturing, but captures by moving one square forward/diagonally. Unlike the modern pawn, this soldier had no option of moving two squares on its first move. When it reaches the far end of the board it **promotes**, but only to a Counselor — a rather weak piece.

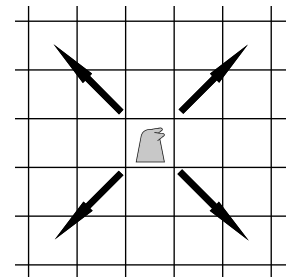


Now, let's consider some moves that are a little bit different:



The **Counselor** (which became the Queen of modern chess) moves only one square diagonally.

The **Elephant** (our Bishop) has the peculiar move of exactly two spaces diagonally. A move which allows it to reach only eight squares on the entire board. Like the Horse, the Elephant can jump over any piece that stands in its way. Just why an elephant is associated with this leaping, diagonal move is an interesting mystery.



All pieces **capture** by landing on the square of an opposing piece, and removing that piece from the board. Only the pawn has a special move for capturing. All others capture just as they move normally.