

The Bolognese Contribution to Early Literature of Italian Draughts

Franco Pratesi

In a previous issue of this journal the Florentine contribution to the early literature of Italian draughts was emphasized. Now, out of justice, something should be added about the fundamental Bolognese contribution.

First of all, it must be recalled that the first detailed report of the rules of Italian draughts comes from Bologna. It was written in Latin at the end of the 16th century and its author was Ulisse Aldrovandi, a scientist active in several domains of natural and medical sciences. He left a big collection of handwritten books, among them a treatise devoted to games. In most parts of it, Aldrovandi follows already printed sources, such as Garzoni's book. Sometimes, however, he adds his own observations, and fortunately draughts is among these cases. See A.Chicco, "Dama e letteratura" *ARCIDAMA-SCACCHI* no. 1, 1978, pages 10-11.

The rules still show some uncertainties. For Instance, after stating that the play occurs on the white squares of the board, it is recommended that the squares used initially, either white or black, have to be maintained for the play. An original way is suggested for determining the right of the first move: a man is thrown on the board and the colour of the square where it comes to rest indicates which player has to move first. The king is already called "dama" and has the known properties, except that it can be taken by two men if both men can attack it together. Besides the usual mark for the king of a stack of two men, two men placed together are used in play with broad beans or similar legumes.

In 1753 a book of game rules was printed in Bologna, the first one which was to become widely known in Italy: *Il giuoco pratico o sieno capitoli diversi che servono di regola ad una raccolta dl giuochi più praticati nelle Conversazioni d'Italia*. It is assumed that the author was Raffaele Bisteghi. Many editions were to follow in Bologna (1760, 1774, 1785, 1820), Milan (1819, 1868) and – for some parts – elsewhere. Already the first edition contains a chapter on draughts, which was reprinted without changes in every successive edition and which

was also inserted into other books on games. There are 16 paragraphs dealing with draughts in about four pages of text. Two paragraphs concern the priorities in taking. From a technical point of view, the text is in some parts not clear enough, and the examples of the rules are sometimes wrong. For instance, while a limit of 30 moves is stated in paragraph 16 for endgames of three kings against one, in paragraph 13 a draw is sometimes admitted for two kings against one.

A further item to be considered is a collection of game rules, a forgotten text which is kept in the Ambrosiana library in Milan, SOD.VIII.107. It is a small booklet, 11 x 9 cm, titled: *Capitoli /per li giuochi / del tresette / delle bocchie / e / dama*. No editorial note appears, but at the end it bears the Imprint of 17th July 1786 by Aloysius Maria Ceruti, in Bologna. Rather unexpectedly, the pages bear numbers starting from 53 and ending with 63, with a last unnumbered page. It is not surprising to encounter a total number of 64 pages, which can easily be obtained by folding printed folios; however, it has as yet been impossible to find out what the first 52 pages could have contained.

Since the booklet comes from the same town and same time as the Bisteghi editions, a pirate edition could have been suspected. However, the text and the style are different and - if possible - more popular. The chapter on draughts, *Capitoli sopra il Giuoco di Dama da osservarsi inviolabilmente da chi giocarà*, occupies the two final pages, 62 and 63. There are 12 paragraphs in all and about half of these exemplify those priorities in exchanging, which we are now simply accustomed to summarize as “il più col più”, something as “to take the most enemy pieces with the most valuable of our own”.

Let us examine this chapter:

1. A move cannot be taken back – or the man is huffed.
2. A wrong move is answered by huffing.
3. If an enemy piece is moved, the player has the choice.
4. If any piece is subject to capture, it must be taken.
5. Captured pieces have to be taken away at once, otherwise huffing.
6. Huffing occurs before any other move.
7. Every piece to be taken has to be passed before stopping, otherwise huff.
8. If either a king or a man can take a man, the king has to take.
9. If a man can take three men and a king can take two men or kings, the man has to capture.

10. A king having the choice of taking either two kings or three men must take three men or it is huffed.
11. A king having the choice of taking either two kings or a king and a man must take the two kings or it is huffed.
12. If a man has the choice of taking two or three men the three men must be taken or it is huffed.

The style and the contents are not particularly impressive. We have to recall, however, that written documents on Italian draughts – as well as on draughts in general, with only some fortunate exceptions – are neither old nor detailed. Therefore, the recorded Bolognese documents as a whole represent a significant contribution to the Italian literature on draughts, probably the most extensive one in printed form during the 18th century for the whole country. Among other things, it may thus become less surprising that the Bolognese codex – the best handwritten treatise on Italian draughts handed down from the 18th century – comes from Modena, only 40 km far from Bologna.

Franco Pratesi in HND (Redactioneel) Hier volgt een overzicht van de bijdragen die de schrijver tot nu toe in HND publiceerde.

– *On the early diffusion of draughts - HND 1986, pagina 45.*

Omdat er geen harde bewijzen zijn voor het bestaan van damspel in Spanje en Italië vóór de 16e eeuw, wordt het bestaan van middeleeuws damspel betwijfeld en wordt het ontstaan daarvan in de Provence, in de 12e eeuw, dus onwaarschijnlijk geacht.

– *On the earliest literary evidence about Italian draughts - HND 1987, pagina 40/41.*

De twee oudste referenties aan Italiaans dammen dateren van het eind van de 16e eeuw. De ene kan men vinden in een manuscript van de hand van Aldrovandi, dat over allelei spelen handelt en dateert van het eind van de 16e eeuw. De andere is gevonden in een Italiaans-Engels woordenboek van Florio, uitgegeven in 1598. De schrijver concludeert opnieuw dat het Italiaans dammen vermoedelijk veel minder oud is dan tot nu toe werd aangenomen.

– *On playing draughts at odds - FIND 1988, pagina 63.*

Over Italiaans dammen met voorgift.

– *The first printed description of Italian draughts. HND 1989, pagina 45/46.*

In een Latijns gedicht, geschreven door Buganza, en in 1786 te Florence uitgegeven, wordt een beschrijving van het Italiaans dammen gegeven. De schrijver geeft niet alleen de originele tekst, maar ook een Engelse vertaling.

– *The Bolognese contribution to early literature of Italian draughts. HND 1990, pagina 38/39.*

Een klein boekje, In 1786 te Bologna uitgegeven, bevat op de pagina's 62 en 63 de spelregels van het Italiaans dammen. Deze pagina's worden hier op 80 % van de ware grootte gereproduceerd.

