

# THE SLOW WAY WEST: OR HOW BADUK TRAVELLED FROM CHINA TO EUROPE – CHAPTER 2

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## Introduction

In the previous instalment I said that baduk didn't travel over land and probably stopped on the borders of China. But maybe this not totally true.

## First steps?

The first traces of baduk in Europe are hazy and so vague indeed that they are maybe not traces at all. In Denmark's National Museum in Copenhagen some playing pieces were exhibited around 1980. The stones were made of black and white glass, around 50 of each, varying in size, but looking like baduk stones. They were found in a Danish grave on Zealand dated 200-400 AD.<sup>1</sup>

A find of similar baduk stones in a grave was recently published in South Korea. About 200 pieces of small black, white and grey stones, presumed to be used for playing baduk were found at the feet of a 5<sup>th</sup> century Silla princess in Gyeongju.<sup>3</sup>

In a bog at Wimose on the island of Funen, Denmark, a grave from the same period was unearthed, containing parts of a wooden playing board with 18 squares in a row.<sup>4</sup> If we assume this board was square, it could have been a baduk board.



Wimose board

Nothing is known of the games that were played with these Danish finds (if they are for playing at all). Is it possible that baduk was known in this period? The finds of Chinese objects from the same period prove that some contact, however indirect, existed.

Some experts think that these game materials were used to play the game of hnefatafl. Tafl games are a family of ancient Germanic board games



## Early South Korean baduk stones.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Blom, Jaap K. *What to see*, In: *The congress book: European go congress 1982, Copenhagen*, Berlin: Dietmar Hartung, 1983, p. 66-67.

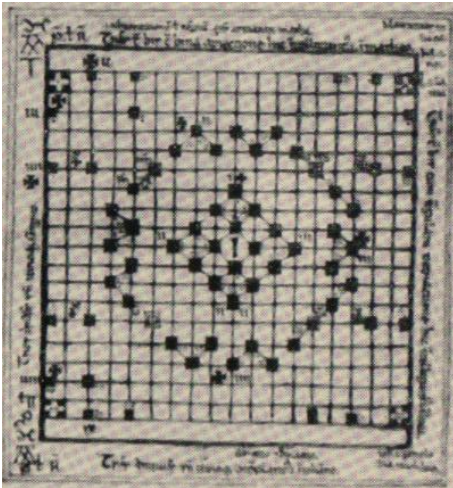
<sup>2</sup>Credit: Gyeongju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage

<sup>3</sup>[archaeologynewsnetwork.blogspot.com/2020/12/unearthed-ornaments-link-tomb-to-5th.html](http://archaeologynewsnetwork.blogspot.com/2020/12/unearthed-ornaments-link-tomb-to-5th.html).

<sup>4</sup>Murray, H.J.R. *A history of board-games other than chess*, Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 58.

played on a chequered board with two teams of uneven strength. Versions were played across much of Northern Europe from at least 400 AD until it was supplanted by chess during the Renaissance.

Hnefatafl is the name of a game frequently referred to in the Norse sagas. The rules of this game were never recorded, and only playing pieces and fragmentary boards are extant, so it is not known how the game was really played.<sup>5</sup> However an English manuscript from between 925-940 AD contains a diagram of the Saxon form of hnefatafl, which corresponds with the Wimose fragment. It shows, curiously enough, an unchequered 19 x 19 game board with pieces on the intersections.<sup>6</sup>



### Hnefatafl

Unchequered boards of this kind with play on the intersections are, as far as I know, not found elsewhere in Europe. Is it possible that the game equipment

came from China, but that the way to play the game got lost somewhere on the journey and that only the way the pieces were placed was remembered?

In that case the game travelled, but not the people who knew how to use it, so the Vikings used it to play hnefatafl. This of course is a highly speculative theory, that hopefully in the near future can be proved or falsified.

### Faint footsteps; from 1500-1875

If we ignore the vague traces from above, we can say that baduk didn't travel by land from China to Europe. When the Europeans started to discover the shores of Asia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they did so by sea. First the Portuguese and Spanish and later the Dutch and English roamed the oceans and reached East Asia. Did those new contacts with China and Japan bring us new significant information on baduk? In short: was the sea a better vehicle to transport baduk?

China was an isolated country in this period. After the famous journeys of admiral Zheng He to Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Western Asia, and East Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, China opted for isolation. Only inland and coastal seafaring were allowed; relations with foreigners from outside their sphere of influence were restricted.

The first Europeans to reach the Far East countries of Asia by sea were the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The circumnavigation of Africa offered the Portuguese an open way into the Indian and Pacific Oceans. They rapidly established many bases on the coasts of both Oceans. ▷

<sup>5</sup>From Wikipedia [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hnefatafl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hnefatafl).

<sup>6</sup>Bell, R.C. *Board and table games from many civilizations*, London etc.: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 80 and verso plate.

The Portuguese reached the Chinese coast in 1517, but were met by hostility from the local rulers. In 1577 the Portuguese finally got permission to found a settlement in Macao. Trade activity was restricted to the harbour of Macao. Periodically, they were allowed to visit Canton for trading purposes. Until the Opium Wars (1839-1842), trade with foreign countries and entrance for missionaries was severely limited.

In China only the Jesuit mission had some success. Matteo Ricci from Italy was the first to introduce Christianity to China. He tried to work with the ruling elite of scholars, the literati, in order to gain access to Chinese society. The Jesuits had to become familiar with local language, history, culture, and habits and they had to establish their value as scholars. To succeed, they had to become Chinese.

Chinese culture was well developed; in many aspects it could be considered the most advanced in the world. Ricci's greatest merit was that of establishing enduring contact with the Chinese ruling classes.

In Japan the Portuguese trade also depended on acceptance by local rulers. This was easier to obtain than in China, because the Portuguese guns were warmly welcomed by local rulers. The missionaries were very successful; in a short time a remarkable number of Japanese became Catholics.

The central authorities of the country, however, became very worried about the potential influence this could have on their power and in the next century they closed the country. Guns and foreign religions were forbidden. The

Portuguese had to leave the country. The only contact with the outside world for two centuries was through the small concession granted to the Dutch in Dejima, a small artificial island in the bay of Nagasaki.

On the basis of the limited cultural relations between Europe and the Far East of Asia, our expectations of finding new information about baduk are not very high. We can only hope for small contributions from merchants, missionaries, travellers and scientists.

### **First traces of baduk**

I present the most significant findings here in a more or less chronological order.<sup>7</sup>

Merchants needed information about the newly discovered countries; information about harbours, people and commodities that may be found for trading. The missionaries also needed this kind of knowledge. They needed knowledge of the local languages and habits in order to be better able to transfer the concepts of the "new" religion to natives.

The new middle classes in Europe developed a craving for illustrated stories about faraway countries, so it isn't surprising to find many books about 'strange' countries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and these are a valuable source for our search.

The first reason for the Portuguese to explore these distant places was trade. The Portuguese not only exchanged merchandise. They of course learnt some of the local habits, and vice versa; local populations had the opportunity to learn something from

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<sup>7</sup>Condensed from Pratesi, Franco *Eurogo* : vol. 1, Roma: Aracne, 2004, and Blom's articles in *The Go Player's Almanac*, 2001.

<sup>8</sup>Pratesi, op. cit., p. 13.

the Portuguese. For instance, several Japanese words concerning card games derive from Portuguese.<sup>8</sup>

What about baduk? We can find no explicit confirmation in the literature that the Portuguese played the game in Asia, or in Portugal. However, if any European people played the game very early on, it must be the Portuguese. In an early Japanese dictionary by Diego Collado<sup>9</sup>, a Spanish Dominican, probably one of the first Western references to baduk in Japan can be found. It is not a real description of the game, but just a mention of the concept of ladders, a reference to its metaphorical usage rather than Go, where the dictionary has the phrase *xichoni cacuru* (*shichou ni kakeru*).<sup>10</sup>



### Barbarians playing baduk

There are traces in Japanese paintings of Westerners playing baduk. One such document is reproduced on the cover page of an issue of *Go World*.<sup>11</sup>

### Matteo Ricci

We have already mentioned the importance of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). Ricci had access to the elite of China. He was a man well versed in science, which stood him in good stead as he could in that way help the Chinese with astronomy, physics and mechanics. He learned Chinese and could read the Classics. This meant that he was seen as one of the literati himself. He also was the first European to give a short, but incomplete, description of baduk. Most of the old game descriptions derive from a note on Chinese games in his Italian manuscript written in about 1609 in Peking.<sup>12</sup>

*'The Chinese have several games of this kind, but the one they take most seriously is played on a hollowed gaming board of more than three hundred spaces and played with two hundred black and white pieces. The purpose in this game is to dominate a greater number of spaces. The magistrates are very keen about this game and frequently use up the greater part of a day playing it. Sometimes it takes players an hour to play a single game. An expert at this particular play will always have a great following, and he is sure to be well known even though this may be his only accomplishment. In fact, some people select these experts as instructors and show them special favour in order*

<sup>9</sup>D. Collado, *Dictionarium siue thesauri linguae iaponicae*. Romae: Sacr. Congr. de Prop. Fide, 1632.

<sup>10</sup>See Fairbairn, J. and Hall, T.M. *The GoGoD Encyclopaedia*, [gogodonline.co.uk](http://gogodonline.co.uk).

<sup>11</sup>*Go world*, 1987-1988. - No. 50, Winter. On the cover a section of a six-panel painted folding screen is shown. The screen is a *nanban-byobu*, literally 'southern barbarians screen'. These screens give satirical portrayals of the Westerners who came to Japan to engage in trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. *From the collection of the Tenri Library*.

<sup>12</sup>Ricci, Matteo, *Della entrata della compagnia di Giesu e christianita nella Cina*, 1610. The manuscript can be found in the '*Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu*', p. 17v., in Rome (discovered by Jaap Blom).

to acquire an accurate knowledge of this intricate game.<sup>13</sup>

Ricci died in 1610 in Beijing, just after having finished his manuscript. This manuscript was taken to Europe by his companion, Trigault, who translated the text from Italian into Latin on his way back. It was first published in 1615 in Augsburg. Translations and reprints followed in quick succession. Versions of the Ricci–Trigault description of baduk can be found in many books of historians, travellers, and so on.<sup>14</sup>

To indicate how swiftly the information about the Far East was used by others, I give two examples.

In **Selenus'** book *Das Schach- oder König-Spiel*, published in 1616, he

describes chess in various countries. In the parts dedicated to chess in China and Japan he mentions baduk, for which he used Trigault's text.<sup>15</sup>

**Purchas** inserted the text on Chinese games, which Trigault had first published in 1615, in the 1617 reprint of *Purchas His Pilgrimage*. This tells us that he was very careful to keep his works up-to-date in every sector and this is the first reference to baduk in English. His version is:

*"They haue another play which makes the skilfull therein well esteemed, though he can doe nothing else, with two hundred men, some white, some black, on a table of three hundred diuisions. This is used by the Magistrates."*<sup>16</sup>

To be continued . . .

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<sup>13</sup>Ricci, Matteo *China in the sixteenth century: the journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610*; translated by Louis J. Gallagher; New York: Random House, p. 81, based on Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Iesu*, ex P. Matthæi Riccii : libri v, Nicolao Trigautio. Augustae (Augsburg), 1615.

<sup>14</sup>Blom, Jaap K. *Go in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century*, *Go World*, 1982, No. 27, Spring, p. 50-56. Reprinted in: *The Go Player's Almanac 2001*, p. 31-37.

<sup>15</sup>Selenus, Gustavus *Das Schach- oder König-Spiel*: Lipsiae: s.n., 1616, p 36-39.

<sup>16</sup>Purchas, Samuel *Purchas his pilgrimage*. Third enlarged edition, London: Henry Fetherstone, 1617. – p. 502.