

# Appendix I

## Two Stone Tibetan Go Boards Discovered

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The recent discovery of two stone go boards has attracted the interest of Tibetan scholars. While there are plenty of literary references, myths and other evidence of Tibetan go playing over the centuries, these are the first archeological finds related to the game.

The first board was discovered several years ago during repairs to a stone house in a village in the Yarlung Valley, south-east of Lhasa, near the site of the palace of Songtsen Gampo, (604-650 AD), Tibet's first powerful king.

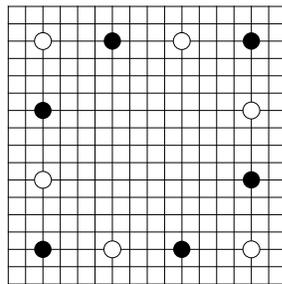
However, it is hard to say who might have made it or played on it, since its age is unknown and its 17x17 lines were just scratched out on a soft rock. It also had holes that were probably bored out, perhaps to hold stones. They may look too small for this purpose, but the 200 year-old set that is shown in a photo at the end of this Appendix used very small stones which would have fit. Or, perhaps the holes were cradles for portable bowls.



The more recent find is magnificent by comparison. It came from a field just north of Lhasa, near where Songtsen Gampo, after being flooded out of the Yarlong Valley, built a retreat while he finished the construction of his new palace. He put it on the site of the present-day Patola, and it was completed in 637.

On a flat, extremely hard type of granite building rock known as 'White Stone,' the 17x17 indented lines were carefully incised to better hold the stones in the intersections. Perhaps, even, it was designed to accommodate naturally found round pebbles.

There are no star points on the first stone board. On the second, however, the rock is dark on the inside, but is naturally coated with a quartz-like finish on the surface, so that by drilling down, the star points appear dark against the white.



Traditionally, Tibetan boards have this arrangement of pre-placed stones laid out before games begin. However, on the second board, there are eight extra star points in the center.





The purpose of the extra points is a mystery—they could be for pre-placing additional stones, perhaps to make more evident the 12 “houses” of Tibetan go board symbolism (see the main article for more information). On the other hand, they could be for pre-placed or handicap stones for 9x9 games (perhaps for children?), since the quadrants are so heavily incised.



Looking at the shape of the second board, it is more than likely that it was originally shaped in the same way as the first, but one side could have broken off at some point—perhaps in the collapse of a building during an earthquake. That edge is well worn, but so is the board that is carved into the stone—it could, after all, have been sitting out in the weather for nearly 1400 years.

Another curiosity is that the second board has two holes—one larger than the other—bored into the wide side, so perhaps the smaller one was meant to hold prisoners. If so, and if its age can be determined, it could join in the debate about whether Japanese or Chinese prisoner rules were in effect in China when go came to Tibet. From at least c. 1200 to c. 1700, the Chinese used territory rules counting prisoners, similar to modern Japanese customs. However, within the memories of traditional Tibetan go players, the Chinese method of not keeping prisoners has been used.

As for the first board, the lack of star points could indicate that it was used for go and/or the game mentioned on pages 5-6 in the main

article—or it could mean that it was made before star points were used in Tibetan go, if there was such a time. (Boards found in Chinese Han tombs [206 BC-220 AD] had star points like the ones on modern boards, but not in the Tibetan arrangement).

As to the size of the boards, the oldest literary record is the listing of a go set in the effects of Princess Wencheng, when she had to cross China to marry Songtsen Gampo in 641. It is not known if it was 17x17 or 19x19, and there are no other records of old Tibetan board sizes. Chinese boards became 19x19 in the Sui or Tang periods, c. 6-700 AD, but that will not provide much evidence about the boards' ages, since traditional Tibetan go remained at 17x17 (though I once saw a well-played-on, quite old, 15x15 cloth board).

In any case, dating the boards is not likely to happen very soon. Neither site has provided any archeological clues. The first one was part of a house foundation, which means it could even have come from somewhere else. The field where the second turned up has a magnificent view overlooking what are now the suburbs of eastern Lhasa, but there are only scattered rocks where once might have stood a house, a fort, a palace, or a temple. Considering the wear and tear on the board, and the beauty of the vista, it might have been meant for outdoor use and two accompanying stone benches are known to exist.





However, the farming family who owns the land, (whose house can be seen above), has hidden away the benches because they want a larger sum of money than they got from the nearby Folk Art and Calligraphy Museum, where the board is now housed. (This is a common problem in China and Tibet regarding the discovery and removal of artifacts). Perhaps the family or their neighbors even have the stones and/or oral stories about the set that might have been passed down through generations, but so far, no one is talking. If more is discovered, I will post a second Appendix.

Below is the beginning of the game I played with a Tibetan prince. It gives an idea of the small size of the stones in his 200+ year-old set. For good measure, and to illustrate my ideas about the origins of go as being only one of many pebble games, I have also included a picture I took in a market in Qinghai Province, which was once part of Tibet.



There is additional information about go in ancient Tibet and China in my book, *Go! More than a Game* (Tuttle 2005) and in my papers at: <http://www.usgo.org/bobhighlibrary>