

GABATA

by Damian Walker

FURTHER INFORMATION

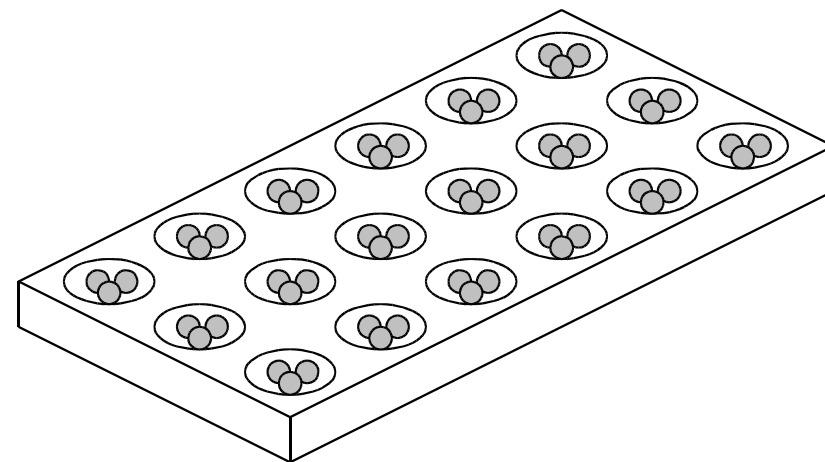
The interested reader can obtain more information about this game from the following sources.

Bell, R. C. *Discovering Old Board Games*, pp. 65-66. Aylesbury: Shire Publications Ltd., 1980.

Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board Games Other than Chess*, p. 206. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 219-220. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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f	e	d	c	b	a
g	h	i	I	H	G
A	B	C	D	E	F

Illustration 3: board notation.

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Mancala is a family of games in which a large number of identical pieces occupy a relatively small number of holes, each hole accommodating a number of pieces. One of the diverse mancala family of games is *gabata*.

Its antiquity is not known, but

it was first recorded in western literature by J. T. Bent in 1893, in his book *Sacred City of the Ethiopians*. It was thought obsolete until 1971, when Richard Pankhurst recorded, in the *Ethiopia Observer*, that it was still being played.

HOW TO PLAY

This is one of the three-rank mancala games, that is, where there are three rows of holes used as the playing space.

Setting up the Game

1. The board consists of three rows of six holes, and sometimes an extra storage hole at each end to store captured pieces.

2. At the start of the game, each hole contains three pieces, as shown in Illustration 1.

3. Each player owns the six holes in his nearest row, and the three rightmost holes in the middle row.

4. The pieces are moved, or sown, in an anti-clockwise direction, as shown in Illustration 2.

5. At the start of the game, each player simultan-

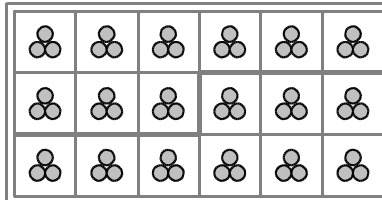


Illustration 1: pieces set out for play.

eously picks up the pieces in his first hole (A in Illustration 3), and sows the pieces by dropping one in each subsequent hole along the route described above.

6. Then the players lift the pieces from that last hole, and continue sowing in the same way.

7. This is a race, and it continues until one of the players drops their last piece into an empty hole. The game proper then begins as below.

Movement and Capture

8. From this point on, the players take turns, starting with the player who dropped his last piece in the empty hole.

9. To move, a player selects any one of his own holes, and sows as described in rule 5.

10. If the last piece drops into an already-occupied hole, all the pieces are picked up from that hole and the player continues to sow as described above.

11. This continues until the last piece is dropped into an empty hole. At that point, the player captures any enemy pieces in the same column of holes into which he dropped that last piece. If nothing is captured, the turn ends.

12. Otherwise the player continues to sow, from the hole into which the last piece was dropped, as above.

13. At the end of the player's turn, the opponent gets to play.

14. At some point, one player's side will be empty of pieces. The opponent then captures all pieces on his side of the board.

Ending the Game

15. If one player has captured all the pieces, he has won the game.

16. If both players have captured pieces, then players reload their holes as follows.

17. The player with the least captures (the weaker player) reloads first, starting at the leftmost hole in his nearest row, putting three pieces in each hole as at the start of the game.

18. If the last hole has only one or two pieces, the stronger player makes it up to three from his own store.

19. Then the strongest player fills up his own side, matching the number of pieces the weakest player has. He keeps the remaining pieces in his store.

20. The game continues as in rule 9 onwards.

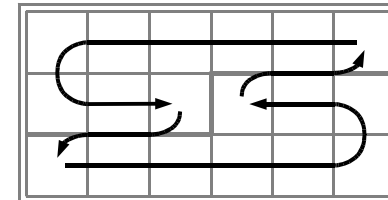


Illustration 2: direction of movement.