FURTHER INFORMATION

Those in search of further information might like to consult the following books:

Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1, pp. 26-29. New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1979.
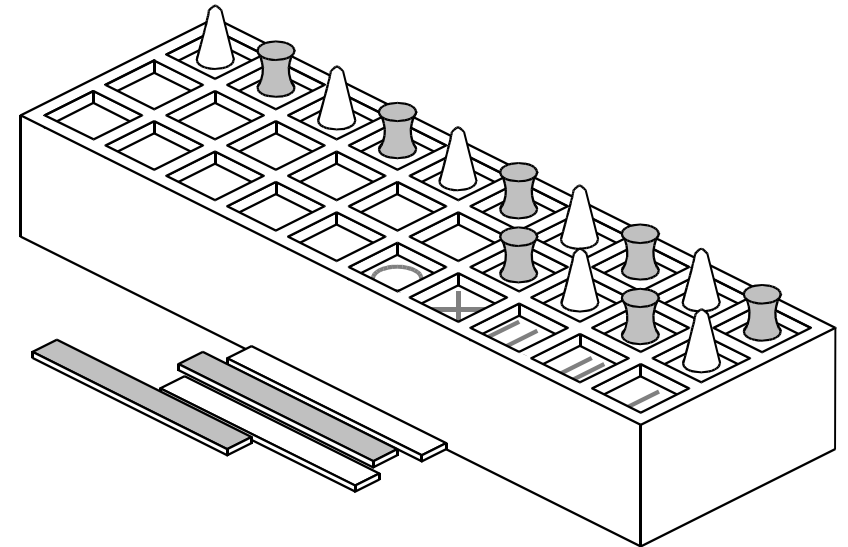
Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board-Games Other than Chess*, pp. 13 & 17. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp.66-68. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

SENET
by Damian Walker

Board Games at ⊞ CYNINGSTAN
Traditional Board Game Series
(Second Edition)
Leaflet #4

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Five thousand years ago, Egyptians amused themselves by playing senet, a race game for two players. The game was popular for over two and a half thousand years, and was played by rich and poor alike. It gave rise to many descendants, and it is possible that backgammon itself may be of the lineage of senet.

Tomb paintings show us much of what we know about this game. These images are of limited value, however, as they are all shown in profile. More interesting are those boards and pieces that remain, as these give us better clues about how the game was played.

The Egyptians never thought to leave a written summary of the rules for posterity, and unless some new discovery throws light upon the subject, the actual game played by the Egyptians shall remain a long-kept secret. However, several possibilities have been proposed by Egyptologists and historians to amuse those of us who would relive at least part of the experience of senet.

HOW TO PLAY

The rules given here are based upon those of Timothy Kendall. Other possibilities have been proposed by Gustav Jéquier, R. C. Bell and Professor John Tait.

Beginning the Game

1. Senet is played with fourteen pieces, seven per player, on a board of thirty squares, in three rows of ten. These form a continuous track from top left to bottom right, with the fifteenth square and the last five marked (see Illustration 1).

2. At the start of the game, the pieces are laid out on the first fourteen squares of the track, white on square 1, black on square 2, alternating white and black thereafter (see Illustration 2).

3. As the black pieces are slightly ahead, white starts the game.

Making a Move

4. On his turn a player will first throw four casting sticks, each of which is marked on one side and plain on the other. The value of the throw is the number of marked

Illustration 1: numbered course on the senet board.

sides showing, or five if no marked sides show.

5. After throwing the sticks, the player shall move a piece forwards along the track by the number of squares indicated by the throw. A piece cannot land on another piece of the same colour. Nor can it land on an opponent's piece if that is adjacent to one or more of the opponent's other pieces.

6. Pieces are considered adjacent only if they sit on consecutive squares of the track. Those on separate rows are not considered to be adjacent, unless they sit on squares 10/11, or 20/21 as shown in Illustration 1.

7. If no forward move is possible, then a piece must be moved backwards instead. If no backward move is possible, then the throw is lost and the opponent takes the casting sticks.

8. A piece may not pass over the 26th square. All pieces must land on this square before continuing further.

9. If a piece lands on the 27th square, it becomes trapped in the water and the player's turn ends.

10. Pieces landing on the last three squares, marked III, II and I, may not progress further, but may be borne off the board. An exact throw is required for squares III and II, but any throw can be used to bear a piece off square I. If it is necessary to move one of these pieces backwards, then it lands in the water as described above.

11. While a piece is in the water, its owner may move no other piece. He must either move the piece to the 15th square, instead of casting the sticks, or alternatively he can throw the casting sticks and bear the piece off the board on an exact throw of four. If there is already a piece on the 15th square, the player has no option but to throw the casting sticks and hope for a 4.

12. If the player's throw was 1, 4 or 5, and none of his pieces are in the water, then he wins another turn.

Capturing Enemy Pieces

13. If a piece lands on a lone piece of the opponent, the opponent's piece is moved back to the square from which the other piece came—i.e. they swap places.

Ending the Game

Illustration 2: the pieces laid out on the senet board, ready for play.

14. The player wins who is first to bear off all seven of his pieces from the board.