

YOTÉ AND CHOKO

by Damian Walker

FURTHER INFORMATION

Information on these games is available from the following books.

Bell, R. C. *Games to Play*, p. 41. London: Michael Joseph Limited, 1988.

Grunfeld, F. V. *Games of the World*, pp. 90-91. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975.

Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board-Games Other Than Chess*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

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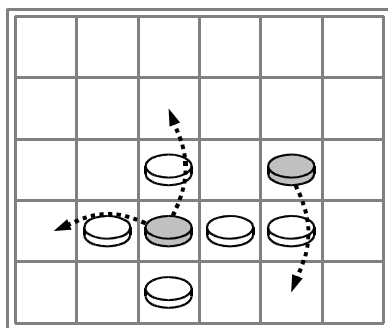
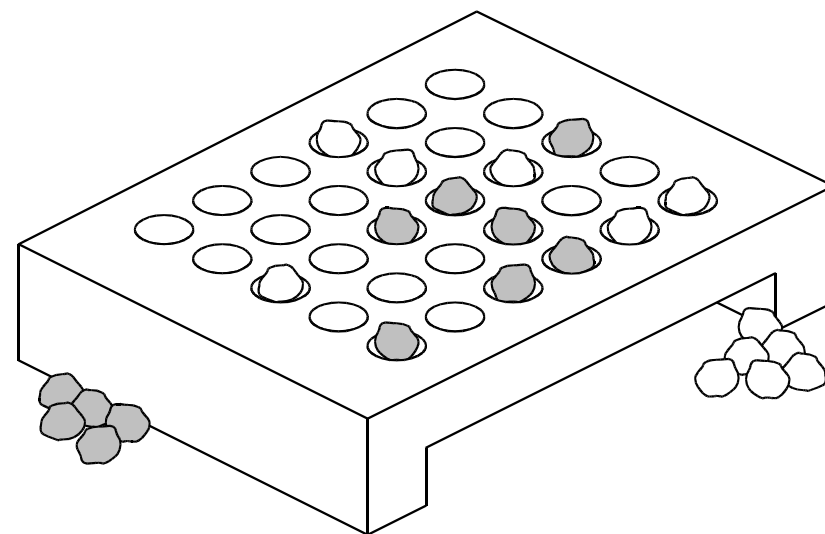


Illustration 3: some capturing moves for black. Note that it is not possible to jump past a row of two or more pieces.

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Yoté and *choko* are a traditional games played across west Africa. They are from a family of draughts-like games which have been noted in the west since at least 1879, but whose antiquity might be much greater. There can be quick and rapid changes of fortune in these games, owing to the fact that when a player captures one piece, he selects a second piece to be removed at the same time. These changes make them a good subject for

gambling, and *yoté* is often played for stakes in Senegal.

Traditionally *yoté* and *choko* boards are a grid of holes scooped out of the sand. *Yoté* pieces are pebbles and pieces of stick, though shells and large seeds have also been used. *Choko* uses sticks of two different lengths and pieces. For more affluent players the board is sometimes made out of wood, with small holes made to hold pebbles as pieces.

HOW TO PLAY

Yoté will be taken first, with *choko*'s differences being described later.

Yoté is played by two people on a board of five rows of six squares, as shown in Illustration 1. Players may sit anywhere and are not assigned any side of the board as their own. Each player has twelve pieces which start in his hand. In keeping with tradition the pieces will be referred to as *pebbles* and *sticks*.

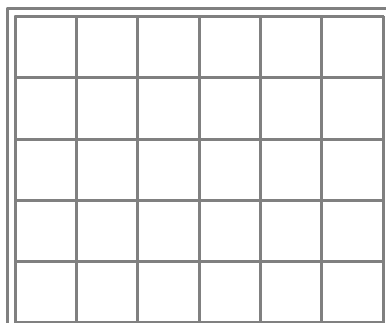


Illustration 1: the empty *yoté* board. *Choko* uses a board of 5x5 squares.

Beginning the Game

1. At the start of the game, the board is empty.
2. The player holding the pebbles goes first, after which the player with the sticks takes his turn, play then alternating between them.

3. Each player on his first turn must place a piece on any vacant square of the board.

Moving the Pieces

4. In subsequent turns, a player may opt to place another

piece if he has any left in hand, or instead to move a piece already on the board.

5. A piece moves one square horizontally or vertically, to an adjacent square, which must be empty. Some example moves are shown in Illustration 2.

6. There are no diagonal moves in this game.

Capturing Enemies

7. An enemy piece is captured by jumping over it and landing on the square beyond, which must be vacant. This is shown in Illustration 3.

8. The captured piece is removed from the board and takes no further part in the game.

9. Having captured a piece, the player then selects a second enemy piece and removes it from the board.

10. As with movement, diagonal captures are not allowed.

11. This game does not have multiple leaps as some other games do.

Ending the Game

12. The game is finished when a player has captured all enemy pieces, in which case he is declared the winner.

13. If both players are reduced to three pieces or less, the game is declared a draw.

Variation: Choko

Choko is described by the game historian H. J. R. Murray. It is very similar to *yoté*, differing only as follows:

14. *Choko* is played on a board of five rows of five squares.

15. If one player places a piece, his opponent must then do the same, after which, the choice between placement and movement returns as described in rule 4.

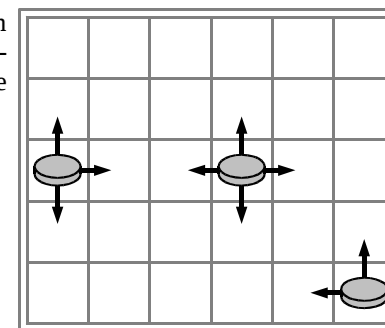


Illustration 2: moves of the pieces. There is no concept of "forward" or "backward" in this game, so a piece may move in any available direction.