

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Players wishing to study this game further may find food for thought in the following selection of books.

Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1, pp. 30-34. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.

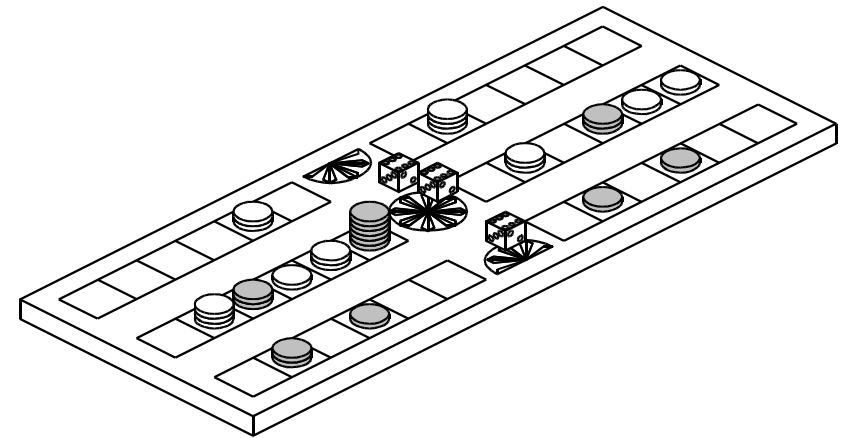
Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board-Games Other than Chess*, pp. 30-31. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 70-72. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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# LUDUS DUODECIM SCRIPTORUM

by Damian Walker



## INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

The game of backgammon is often attributed to the Romans. Their game of tabula certainly resembles backgammon, but even more interesting is an earlier game, ludus duodecim scriptorum, meaning “game of the twelve lines”, from which tabula was developed.

Ludus duodecim scriptorum was probably adopted from the Greeks. Its board had three rows of twelve playing spaces, or points, and players each raced fifteen pieces around the board, according to the throws of three dice. The game was gradually replaced by tabula after the first century, though

it was still played as late as the sixth.

Over 100 surviving game boards attest the popularity of the game in ancient Rome. Boards were found further afield, from Wales to Egypt. Boards were also decorated in a variety of styles, some with squares, some with geometric patterns, but the most interesting are decorated with phrases, the letters forming the points. One amusing example reads “levate dalocu ludere nescis idiota recede”, meaning roughly “get up, get out, you don't know how to play; go away, idiot.”

## HOW TO PLAY

As with many ancient games, the rules are lost to us. But plausible reconstructions can be made by examining the boards that survive, the artwork, and some occasional accounts in literature. The rules below are given by the respected board game historian, H. J. R. Murray.

### Beginning the Game

1. Ludus duodecim scriptorum is played by two on a board consisting of three rows of twelve points, each row of twelve being divided in half (see Illustration 1).

2. Each player has fifteen pieces of his own colour, either black or white. At the start of the game these pieces are off the board.

3. Three six-sided dice control the movement of the pieces.

### Moving the Pieces

4. Players decide who goes first, either at random or by agreement.

5. A player begins his turn by throwing the three dice. The player can take the numbers rolled in any order he pleases, and with each number rolled, do one the follow-

ing:

(i). a piece waiting to enter the board may be placed on the appropriate point 1-6 shown in Illustration 1;

(ii). a piece on the board may be moved along the course by the appropriate number of points; Illustration 1 shows the direction that pieces move;

(iii). if all of the player's pieces are on the points I-VI at the end of the course, then a piece may be borne off the board from the appropriate point I-VI as shown on the die; that piece has completed its race;

(iv). if a piece has been captured as described later in rule 8, it must be re-entered on point 1-6 as in rule 5(i), before any other piece is played.

6. Pieces of the same colour may be stacked upon a point, to an unlimited height.

7. A piece may not land on a point if two or more of the opponent's pieces already occupy that point.

### Capturing Pieces

8. A piece sat alone on a point is captured if an opponent's piece lands on that same point. The captured piece is removed from the board, and its owner must on his turn re-enter it before he moves any other piece (see rule 5(iv)).

### Ending the Game

9. The game is finished when one of the players has borne all fifteen of his pieces off the board. He is then declared the winner.

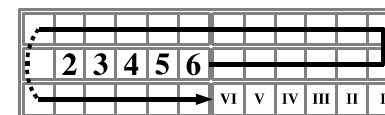


Illustration 1: showing entry points 1-6, the direction of travel, and the bearing off points VI-I. Note the jump from the top to the bottom row: the pieces do not travel through or land on square 1 at this point.