

any further. His opponent is the winner

10. The game also ends if one player is completely trapped and unable to move; his opponent is similarly the winner.

11. Players may agree a draw if the game has no apparent conclusion in favour of one player or the other.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Readers wanting to learn more about these two ancient games will find further information in the following books:

Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1, pp. 84-87. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.

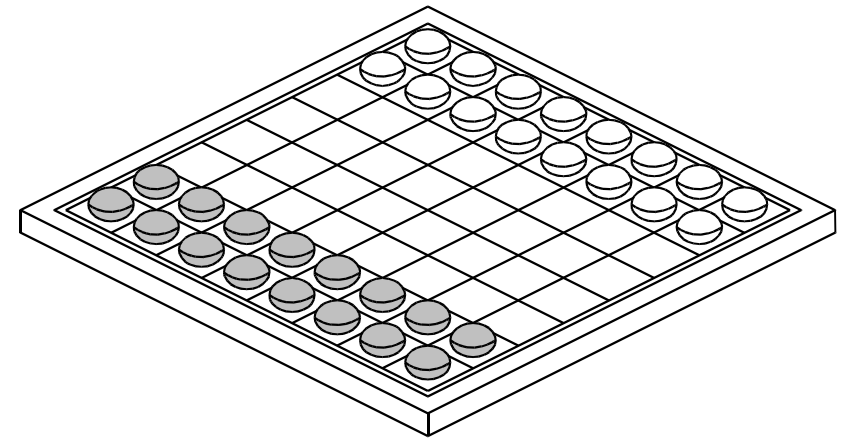
Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board-Games Other than Chess*, pp. 27 & 33-34. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 234-238. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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## PETTEIA & LUDUS LATRUNCULORUM

by Damian Walker



### INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Neither chess nor draughts had been invented in the days of the Greek city states or the Roman empire. These peoples had instead their own games of strategy which were held in similarly high regard. *Petteia* was the Greek name, meaning “pebbles”, and *ludus latruncolorum* the Roman, meaning “the game of little soldiers”, for their principal board games of pure strategy.

References to *petteia* abound from Homer onwards, and it is known to have been played before the 5th century B.C. Greek authors thought it was of Egyptian origin. By the 2nd century B.C. the Romans had adopted the game, and they subsequently

took it with them throughout their empire. References to *ludus latruncolorum* in literature suggest that it is identical to *petteia*, but some later pictures and archaeological finds suggest that changes were made, including the addition of a special piece to each side.

*Petteia* was last mentioned in the 2nd century A.D., and *ludus latruncolorum* at the end of the 4th. It seems that the game survived the fall of the Roman empire in some of its outlying provinces, and a 10th or 11th century Persian reference to a similar game, *nard*, gives some clue as to what the special pieces were for.

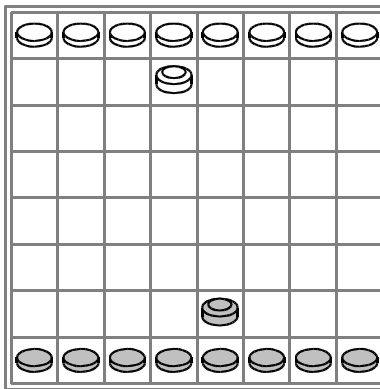


Illustration 1: the pieces at the start of a game of *ludus latruncolorum*, the generals being out in front.

### HOW TO PLAY

The rules given here cover both *petteia*, the original Greek game, and *ludus latruncolorum*, a name here given to a reconstruction of the later Roman development with its two special pieces. Unless other-

wise stated, a rule applies to both games.

#### Beginning the Game

1. The game is played on a board of squares, of any size the

players have to hand. 8 rows of 8 squares is the most convenient for today's players.

2. The pieces are laid out on the board as follows:

(i). in *petteia*, each player has enough pieces to fill two rows of the board; each player's pieces are placed in the two rows nearest to him;

(ii). in *ludus latruncolorum*, each player has enough pieces to fill one row, the soldiers, and has also one piece called the general; each player's soldiers fill the row nearest to him, while the general is placed centrally in front of them, as shown in Illustration 1.

#### Moving the Pieces

3. The players decide between them, at random or by agreement, who is to have the first turn.

4. A player in his turn moves a single piece from one square to another. All pieces move as far as the player wishes, in a straight line horizontally or vertically.

5. A piece cannot land on, nor jump over, another.

#### Capturing Enemies

6. The following rules of capture are shown in Illustration 2:

(i). an enemy piece is captured by trapping it between two of the player's own pieces, in a straight line horizontally or vertically; the

captured piece is immediately removed from the board;

(ii). in *ludus latruncolorum*, the general cannot be captured, but may himself take part in capturing enemies.

7. If a moving piece traps two or three enemies between separate comrades, then those two or three enemies are all

captured.

8. It is permissible, however, for a piece to voluntarily place itself between two enemies without harm.

#### Winning the Game.

9. The game ends when a player is reduced to a single piece, thus preventing him from waging war

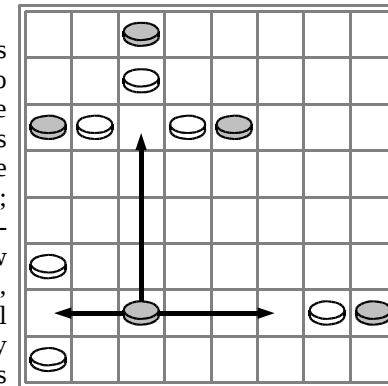


Illustration 2: The piece indicated can move right to capture one piece, or upwards to capture three at once. It may move left between the white pieces without harm.