

# Rules for Petteia and its variants

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## I. Introduction

**Notation 1** *These rules are a slightly modified rules-set which incorporates an expansion. The rules related to the expansion are inserted into the basic rules. The expansion itself is based on archaeological finds discussed among other places in the article:*

**Notation 2** *Arthur Tilley. Ludus Latrunculorum. The Classical Review. Vol. 6, No. 8 (Oct., 1892), pp. 335-336*

**Notation 3** *I respectfully disagree with the conclusions of the scholar and believe that a simple explanation can account for evidence, both literary and archaeological referred to in the cited article and other sources.<sup>1</sup> Namely, I agree with the interpretation that at least in some areas and during a certain period, captured pieces were not removed from the board. Instead they become inciti, which were immobile pieces occupying the space on the board where the piece was when captured. When hemispherical pieces were used for the playing pieces, a captured piece was merely turned upside-down. Yet archaeological evidence suggests that in at least some cases a captured piece by either side was replaced by a third color. That is the approach the expansion uses.*

Presented in these rules are a number of related games. They represent the progression or development of what from a modern perspective one might regard as a family of related board games but which the ancient peoples who played these games and their variations would likely regard as essentially the same game. Neither view is particularly *wrong* but they do stem from different perspectives.

The game or the first game introduced, if one prefers, was properly called *poleis* (*cities* or *communities* in the sense of the people as opposed to the location). Yet more commonly the game was referred to as *Pessoi* (literally just the plural of *game-stones*) as it is for example in the first book of the Homeric epic the *Odyssey* on line 107. *Petteia* is the related word which properly means any board game using such stones, but in modern usage this has become the standard name used for the Greek game. As such, modern names are fairly arbitrary in that ancient board games are rarely given unambiguous names. Therefore these rules attempt to represent the game or games as accurately as possible but to do so from the perspective of someone whose primary interest is in actually playing the games rather than in reading a historical treatise on them.

One of the oldest games in the world,<sup>2</sup> *Petteia*, from which a wide variety of games (including possibly the *tafl* games<sup>3</sup> and draughts) seem to have evolved, was called by the Greeks *Petteia*<sup>4</sup> and by the Romans *ludus latrunculorum* or just *latrunculi*.<sup>5</sup> The board, number of pieces and rules varied from place to place and over time. One author suggests 30 pieces per side but other authors and archaeology both suggest the number of pieces varied. The ancients viewed the Greek and Roman games as essentially the same, even after marked Roman modifications. The Roman author refers in his work "De lingua latina X2" to strictly orthogonal, non-diagonal movement of pieces in the game. The object of the game consistently appears to be capturing of more pieces than the opponent by the end of the game. Likewise, viewing pieces as starting lines up at the side of the board is also more consistent with the repeated comparisons of the game to battles, given that use of formation warfare.

At the same time, we know that the Romans introduced a leader piece (pyramidal in archaeological finds) the function of which seems to vary. Represented in these rules are some of the functions of such a piece. What also influences these rules is the identification, at least in the early period, of the Irish board game *Fidchell* with the Roman game. Yet at the same time, at this stage of research I do believe that the name is later applied to a *tafl* game which is markedly different in many respects. The last games in this set of rules reflect hypothetically how such an evolution might have progressed.

Again, in the modern sense, what we in the modern world would class as a family of games, the ancients viewed as mildly differently versions of the same game. Although extant documents only hint at the rules, those clues are enough to be confident that the game remains extant today as far away as Japan where the two standardized forms are called *hasami shogi* and *dai hasami shogi*.<sup>6</sup> A similar game on a smaller board also exists in Korea called *Jol-Gonu*. This usage of the identification of these games serves a practical function similar to the documentation of *Tablut* by Linnaeus; in other words, it lets us fill any gaps in the rules with a high degree of confidence so long as one assumes that the

game is playable as a game and that details such as the board size, number of pieces used and the number of pieces which must be taken to trigger the end of the game varied, as we know they did.

## II. Equipment

### A. Base game

- 1  $8 \times 12$  board (an uncheckered grid of spaces of the most common size)
- 2 sets of 24 identical pieces called stones (similar to Go stones, conventionally black and white but this is a modern usage)
- 1 pyramidal piece in each of the 2 colors used (comparable in size to the other stones but taller and so resembling extant pieces)
- 1 4-sided die (numbered 1 through 4, the knuckle-bone of a sheep is traditionally used and a replica could be used)

### B. Expansion

- 1 set of 47 stones of a third color (such as red). These are referred to through as *inciti*, singular *incitus*.

## III. General rules for all games

Since these games represent stages in the evolution of a single game, a number of rules are shared and so apply to all games. For convenience, these are listed here.

### A. Set-up

The board is always placed between the two players with the long side of the board facing the players.

As stated in each individual game below, each player initially fills either the one row or two rows nearest. Each row will accommodate exactly 12 pieces each. If the pyramidal piece is used, it is placed on the next row adjacent to the initial placement of other piece and occupies the leftward center square. [Insert Figures 1-4]

Initially no *inciti* (third color pieces) are on the board.

### B. Common rules of play

#### 1. Base game

1. The object of each game and the specific equipment used is listed under each individual game.
2. All games are strictly two player games. Turns alternate. Players decide randomly which player moves first unless otherwise stated.
3. Except for the pyramidal piece, all pieces are referred to as stones. The pyramid-shaped piece is called a leader. Stones and leaders are together called pieces.
4. No two pieces can ever occupy the same space, whether the two pieces belong to the same or different players.

5. A player must move exactly one piece on a turn if that player has a legal move. A player who does not have a legal move loses immediately.
6. All pieces move one or more spaces as desired in a continuous horizontal or vertical (not diagonal) line, similar to a rook in standard chess. A piece cannot jump over another piece nor land on the same square as another piece. No piece can change direction during a move.
7. An opponent's stones can be captured via custodial capture. To capture a piece in this manner, a player must move a piece onto a space vertically or horizontally (but not diagonally) immediately adjacent to one of the opponent's pieces such that one of the player's own pieces is immediately on the other side of the opponent's piece. Thus, the two pieces sandwich the captured piece so that before the captured piece is removed from the board all three pieces form a short line of immediately adjacent pieces either horizontally or vertically.
8. More than one stone can be captured simultaneously in this manner if the piece moved performs custodial capture (as just described) on more than one side.
9. A piece is free to move between two of an opponent's pieces without being captured.
10. Capture is not normally compulsory. Only those games which are exceptions state so explicitly.
11. Captured pieces are removed from the board and from play at the end of a player's turn.
12. Rules regarding capture of a leader (if applicable) are described under each individual game.

## 2. Expansion

All rules in this section assume that the expansion is in use.

1. Whenever a piece is captured, it is immediately replaced by an *incitus* (third color piece) which cannot be moved by either player. Thereafter no piece may move onto or through the space occupied by the *incitus*. For all purposes, a space occupied by an *incitus* is treated as if that point were completely removed from the board so that it cannot be occupied or traversed. Such a space's only role in capture arises due the fact that it limits the movement of any piece on an adjacent space.
2. Pieces without a legal move due to the presence of *inciti* are treated as captured.
3. If a piece or group of pieces has a legal move but due to the presence of *inciti* cannot even in principle make a capture, the piece or group of pieces is treated as immobilized, namely as if those pieces did not have a legal move at least for purposes of ending the game and victory. Whether such pieces should be treated as captured should be agreed upon before the start of the game, but it is recommended.
4. If due to the position of *inciti* a situation arises in which no further captures are possible, the game immediately ends.

## C. Common optional rules

Any or all of these can be used with each game.

- In a game won by capture of stones, capture is compulsory so that a player must capture a piece if able, although a player can always freely choose which piece to capture where an option exists.
- Before a turn, a player rolls the die. No piece can move more than the number of spaces rolled. This rule was typically associated with gambling or divining using what was otherwise a game of skill.
- In a gambling version of each game, when a capture is made, for each piece captured, a player rolls the die. The player whose piece was captured pays the other player the number of some small coins rolled. Gambling in this fashion was common in the ancient world.
- A piece belonging to the opponent occupying a corner space can be captured by moving a piece into a position so that both spaces adjacent to the opponent's piece in the corner are occupied by a piece belonging to the capturing player.
- If a leader piece is used, players should agree beforehand whether or not the leader piece can be used to make captures.
- If a piece or group of pieces is completely surrounded so that no single piece within the group of adjacent friendly pieces has any available space to which it could be legally moved so that the same is true of all pieces of a single player's group of adjacent pieces within a single group, then that group is captured. (This is analogous to a group in the game Go with no liberties being termed dead, if the reader is familiar with that game.)

## IV. Individual games

### A. Simple petteia

**Equipment** Each player uses 12 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the row along the side of the board nearest to that player. (See Figure 1.)

**Object** The first player to capture 7 stones wins.

**Other rules specific to the game** If due to board position no further captures can be made but both players have a legal move, the player who has captured more pieces wins. If the number of pieces captured by each player is the same, the game becomes a draw.

**Example 4** *Both players have pieces positioned in the middle of the board so that the opponent's pieces cannot pass. Yet sufficient space exists behind the pieces blocking the middle so that neither player is unable to move. Then the game would be decided by the number of pieces already captured.*

### B. Double petteia

**Equipment** Each player uses 24 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the two rows along the side of the board nearest to that player. (See Figure 2.)

**Object** The first player to capture 13 stones wins.

**Other rules specific to the game** If due to board position no further captures can be made but both players have a legal move, the player who has captured more pieces wins. If the number of pieces captured by each player is the same, the game becomes a draw.

**Example 5** *Both players have pieces positioned in the middle of the board so that the opponent's pieces cannot pass. Yet sufficient space exists behind the pieces blocking the middle so that neither player is unable to move. Then the game would be decided by the number of pieces already captured.*

### C. Simple latrunculi

**Equipment** Each player uses 12 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the row along the side of the board nearest to that player. In the second row from each player, the leader is placed in the leftward center space. The two leaders therefore do not occupy the same file but adjacent files. (See Figure 3.)

**Object** The first player to capture 7 stones wins.

**Other rules specific to the game**

1. A leader can only be captured by simultaneous custodial capture both horizontally and vertically.
2. If due to board position no further captures can be made but both players have a legal move, the player who has captured more pieces wins. If the number of pieces captured by each player is the same, the game becomes a draw.

**Example 6** *Both players have pieces positioned in the middle of the board so that the opponent's pieces cannot pass. Yet sufficient space exists behind the pieces blocking the middle so that neither player is unable to move. Then the game would be decided by the number of pieces already captured.*

### D. Double latrunculi

**Equipment** Each player uses 24 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the two rows along the side of the board nearest to that player. In the third row from each player, the leader is placed in the leftward center space. The two leaders therefore do not occupy the same file but adjacent files. (See Figure 4.)

**Object** The first player to capture 13 stones wins.

**Other rules specific to the game**

1. A leader can only be captured by simultaneous custodial capture both horizontally and vertically.
2. If due to board position no further captures can be made but both players have a legal move, the player who has captured more pieces wins. If the number of pieces captured by each player is the same, the game becomes a draw.

**Example 7** *Both players have pieces positioned in the middle of the board so that the opponent's pieces cannot pass. Yet sufficient space exists behind the pieces blocking the middle so that neither player is unable to move. Then the game would be decided by the number of pieces already captured.*

## E. Simple capture the leader

**Equipment** Each player uses 12 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the row along the side of the board nearest to that player. In the second row from each player, the leader is placed in the leftward center space. The two leaders therefore do not occupy the same file but adjacent files. (See Figure 3.)

**Object** The first player to capture the opponent's leader wins.

### Other rules specific to the game

1. A leader can only be captured by simultaneous custodial capture both horizontally and vertically.
2. If due to board position no further captures can be made but both players have a legal move, the player who last moved loses.

**Example 8** *Both players have pieces positioned in the middle of the board so that the opponent's pieces cannot pass. Yet sufficient space exists behind the pieces blocking the middle so that neither player is unable to move. Then the player whose move created that situation loses.*

## F. Double capture the leader

**Equipment** Each player uses 24 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the two rows along the side of the board nearest to that player. In the third row from each player, the leader is placed in the leftward center space. The two leaders therefore do not occupy the same file but adjacent files. (See Figure 4.)

**Object** The first player to capture the opponent's leader wins.

### Other rules specific to the game

1. A leader can only be captured by simultaneous custodial capture both horizontally and vertically.
2. If due to board position no further captures can be made but both players have a legal move, the player who last moved loses.

**Example 9** *Both players have pieces positioned in the middle of the board so that the opponent's pieces cannot pass. Yet sufficient space exists behind the pieces blocking the middle so that neither player is unable to move. Then the player whose move created that situation loses.*

## G. Simple passing of the leader

**Equipment** Each player uses 12 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the row along the side of the board nearest to that player. In the second row from each player, the leader is placed in the leftward center space. The two leaders therefore do not occupy the same file but adjacent files. (See Figure 3.)

**Object** A player wins by moving his or her leader to any space on the back row.

### Other rules specific to the game

1. A leader cannot be captured.

2. If due to board position no further captures can be made but both players have a legal move, the player who last moved loses.

**Example 10** *Both players have pieces positioned in the middle of the board so that the opponent's pieces cannot pass. Yet sufficient space exists behind the pieces blocking the middle so that neither player is unable to move. Then the player whose move created that situation loses.*

## H. Double passing of the leader

**Equipment** Each player uses 24 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the two rows along the side of the board nearest to that player. In the third row from each player, the leader is placed in the leftward center space. The two leaders therefore do not occupy the same file but adjacent files. (See Figure 4.)

**Object** A player wins by moving his or her leader to any space on the back row.

### Other rules specific to the game

1. A leader cannot be captured.
2. If due to board position no further captures can be made but both players have a legal move, the player who last moved loses.

**Example 11** *Both players have pieces positioned in the middle of the board so that the opponent's pieces cannot pass. Yet sufficient space exists behind the pieces blocking the middle so that neither player is unable to move. Then the player whose move created that situation loses.*

## I. Proto-tafl

**Equipment** One player uses 24 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the two rows along the side of the board nearest to that player. This player does not use a leader. This player is termed the attacker. (See Figure 5.) [Insert Figure 5.]

The other player uses 12 stones which are initially placed one in each space of the row along the side of the board nearest to that player. In the second row from this player, the leader is placed in the leftward center space. This player is termed the defender.

### Object

1. The defender wins by moving the leader to any space on the back row.
2. The attacker wins by capturing or immobilizing all the defender's pieces.

### Other rules specific to the game

1. The defender moves first.
2. Capture is compulsory for the attacker but not for the defender.
3. The leader can only be captured by simultaneous custodial capture both horizontally and vertically.

## V. Research Bibliography

<sup>1</sup>William Smith, LLD, William Wayte, G. E. Marindin, Ed. A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities (1890). LATRU'NCULI

Available at url: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0063:id=latrunculi-cn>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.aerobiologicalengineering.com/wxk116/Roman/BoardGames/petteia.html>  
<http://ablemedia.com/ctcweb/showcase/boardgameslat1.html>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.gamecabinet.com/history/Hnef.html>

<sup>4</sup>Modern English follows the Attic dialect here as for most Greek words. Most other dialects called the game Pesseia. The game is for example alluded to in Plato's *Republic*. H.G. Liddell and R. Scott. 1996. Greek-English Lexicon, 9th ed. Clarendon Press: Oxford. pg. 1396, 1st col.

<sup>5</sup>Like all Latin words, the form of the name declined depending on context as in the statement by Seneca in his letters *latrunculis ludimus* i.e., *We played latrunculi*. Lewis and Short. 1996. A Latin Dictionary. Clarendon Press: Oxford. pg. 1041, cols. 2,3.

<sup>6</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasami\\_shogi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasami_shogi)