Ludus XII scriptorum – The game of 12 points

A game for 2 players

Equipment: 15 checkers for each player (black and white), 2 dice, 1 game board.
The game board consists of three parallel rows of 12 squares. Symbols forming something similar to the "bar" in modern backgammon, divide the rows into "boards" of six squares each. The 12 squares in the middle row are marked A, the six squares in the 1st board are marked B, the squares in the 2nd board are marked C, the squares in the 3rd board are marked D, and the squares in the 4th board are marked E. This determines the direction in which the pieces move.

Game Setup

On the screen, you can see the board in plan view. On the right are the 15 white checkers. Your opponent or the computer plays with the 15 black checkers. By clicking with the cursor, you can select a checker and drag & drop it onto the corresponding square. The two dice are also thrown by clicking with the cursor. The screen shows both the squares that can be reached and the dice that can be played.

2nd board							1st board					
C	C	C	C	C	C		B	B	B	B	B	B
o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6		A7	A8	A9	A10	A11	A12
o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
D	D	D	D	D	D		E6	E5	E4	E3	E2	E1
3rd board							4th board					

Objective of the game

The objective of the game is to move your 15 checkers through the 36 houses of the board, i.e. starting from square A1 running through A12, then further from B to C and D to E6-1). The winner is the player who first manages to remove all of his 15 pieces from the board after having assembled them in the last quarter (squares E6 to E1).

Game play

As you can see on the screen, at the beginning of the game the pieces are outside the board. The player with the white checkers, you!, starts the game. Then the players take turns in rolling the dice and moving their checkers.
At first, both players must introduce all their 15 pieces in the A-line (squares A1 to A12). Only then can they advance to the 1st board. The checkers can therefore only move in one direction and counterclockwise. As long as not all the 15 checkers are on the board, at least one checker must be entered in a turn. You may use both dice to enter one checker. If it is impossible to enter a checker, because the squares are occupied by the opponent, the die cannot be used.

The player rolls the two dice by clicking them with the cursor. According to the roll of the dice, he moves one or two of his checkers. To do this, click a selected checker and drag it to the selected square. Then it is the opponent's turn. The following rules apply for the moves:

1. The numbers rolled can be attributed to a single checker but can also be distributed between two different checkers. Example: After a roll of 2+5, either one checker can move a total of 7 squares (but see next paragraph), or one checker can move 2 squares and another one 5. The order in which the checkers move is up to the player.

2. The numbers rolled must be used separately and must not be added. If a checker is to move twice, it must move each number individually, according to our example first 2, then 5 or vice versa (and not just 7). If one or more numbers cannot be drawn legally, they expire.

3. Doubles: In a doubles (= two equal numbers) the numbers are played twice, e.g. a doubles of four (4+4) results in 4+4+4+4.

4. There is no limit to the number of checkers that can occupy the same square at a time. No square is ever occupied by checkers from both players simultaneously.

5. A checker can only move to a square that is or unoccupied or is occupied by one or more of the player's own checkers. It may also land on a point occupied by exactly one opposing checker, or "blot". In the latter case, the opponent's checker is hit. Two stones of the same colour on one square are protected from being hit and block the square for the opponent.

6. Re-entering of hit checkers: A captured checker is placed on the circle in the centre of the board. It must first be re-entered from square A1 before other checkers can be moved. If the checker cannot be re-entered because the squares indicated by the dice roll are occupied, the player loses his turn.

The following rules apply to the bearing off of checkers:
As soon as a player has assembled all his own checkers in the last board (squares E6 to E1), he can begin to bear them off the game. The player may remove one stone at a time from the square corresponding to the number of points rolled. Example: After throwing 4+2, a checker can be removed from square E4 (the fourth but last square or fourth square counted from the edge of the board) and one from square E2 (the second but last square or second square counted from the edge of the board). The removed checkers appear next to the board. Alternatively, a checker can also move forward within the board without being removed.

If there is no checker on a square corresponding to the number of dice and there are no more checkers on higher squares, a checker may be removed from the next lower occupied square. Example: A 4 was rolled, but there is no checker on the fourth but last square (square E4). But, if there are still checkers on E5 or E6, a checker from there advances four squares. However, if there are no checkers left on E5 or E6 either, a checker from square E3 (3rd but last) can be removed with 4. If E3 is not occupied, a checker can be removed from E2 and so on.

If a checker of the removing player is hit while bearing off, he may not continue to bear off his checkers until the captured checker has been re-entered and reached the last board.

End of the game
The first player to remove all his 15 checkers from the game board is the winner.

Our proposals for the rules

We based our rule set on a game board found in the Roman port city of Ostia (CIL XIV 5317). The houses are marked with letters of the alphabet, which seem to indicate the direction of the game. The 12 houses in the middle row, marked A, seem to have a slightly different function than the outer boards B, C, D and E. Other sources suggest that these types of boards were used for a game from the backgammon family. Roman sources call the game "Duodecim scripta" or "Ludus duodecim scriptorum", i.e. "game of 12 points" because "scripta" means the dots on the dice. From this, it can be concluded that the game was played with two six-sided dice.

In later times, the game was obviously speeded up by playing with three dice and finally by not playing the third row of houses (see "Zeno's Tavli").

Further reading

- Ulrich Schädler, XII Scripta, Alea, Tabula – New Evidence for the Roman History of "Backgammon", in: Alexander J. de Voogt (ed.), *New Approaches to Board Games Research*, Leiden 1995, p. 73-98.

- Ulrich Schädler, Du 36 cases au backgammon, in: Isabelle Bardiès-Fronty, Anne-Elisabeth Dunn-Vaturi (ed.), *Art du jeu, jeu dans l'art*, Paris 2012, p. 146-149.

- Ulrich Schädler, Zwischen perfekter Balance und Hochspannung – die Geschichte des Backgammon im Überblick, in: U. Schädler (ed.), *Spiele der Menschheit. 5000 Jahre Kulturgeschichte der Gesellschaftsspiele*, Darmstadt 2007, p. 31-41.

- Véronique Dasen (éd.), *Ludique. Jouer dans l'Antiquité*, catalogue de l'exposition, Lugdunum, musée et théâtres romains, 20 juin-1er décembre 2019, Gent, 2019.