

LUDUS LATRUNCULORUM – The game of little soldiers

Seneca Variant

A game for two players

Equipment: 1 game board of 8 x 8 squares, 20 counters for each player (black and white). The counters have an upper side decorated by concentric circles and a flat underside.

Game Setup

On the screen, you see the board from above. At the right, the 20 black counters are ready for you. The white counters on the left are for your opponent or the computer. At the beginning of the game, the board is empty with no pieces put on the board in a kind of starting position.

Objective of the game

The objective of the game is to capture all but one opponent counters or to prevent the opponent from making a move.

Game play

The game consists of two phases.

1st phase: To start the game the players take turns in placing one counter after the other on any vacant square. In this phase, the counters are called “vagi”: vagues. During this phase, no captures are made, i.e “vagi” are not captured.

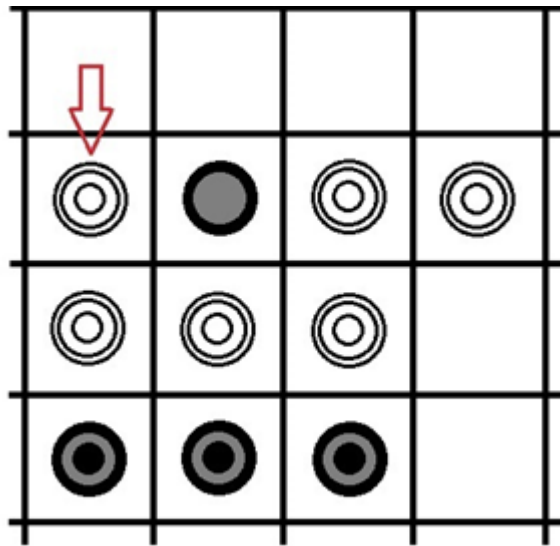
2nd phase: Once all the pieces have been placed, the counters can be moved orthogonally to any adjacent vacant square. A counter can leap over a single counter of his own colour, provided the square behind is unoccupied. Thus, multiple leaps in one turn are possible (as in draughts). In this second phase, the counters are called “ordinarii”: regulars.

Multiple moves back and forth of the same counter are not allowed.

Mechanism of capture: The mechanism of capture is enclosure from two opposite sides. If a player can trap an opponent counter between two of his own, the counter is blocked and cannot be moved. Such a stone is called “incitus”: immobile. Counters in the corner can be trapped by placing two counters on either side:

An “incitus” is completely passive. We can imagine him being disarmed and handcuffed. He cannot move and cannot help one of his own to capture an opponent’s piece. In order to visualize his state of immobility, the counter is turned around to show the flat underside.

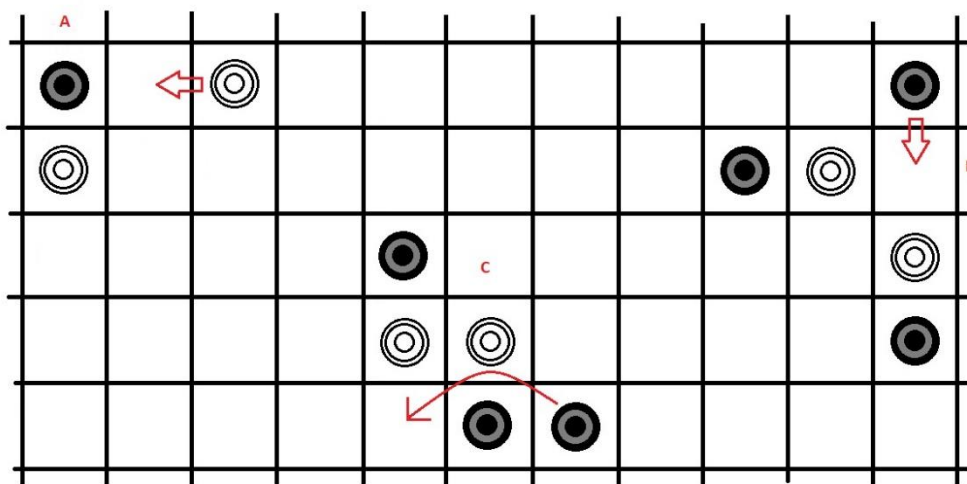
In his next turn and before moving another piece, the player must remove the trapped stone (“incitus”) from the board, provided his two surrounding stones themselves are still free. If however the opponent in his turn manages to trap one of the two surrounding stones, his counter is immediately set free and can also help to catch an adversary counter.



By trapping the black counter, White sets his trapped counter free.

It is possible to trap more than one opponent's counters in one move.

In this case, the player may choose which one to remove. He must remove the other trapped counter(s) in his next turn(s), one in each turn.



A: White captures Black in the corner.

B: Black captures two white counters in one move.

C: With a leap over its neighbouring counter, Black captures a white counter.

A player is allowed to move a stone between two opponent counters. By this move, his counter is not captured (no "suicide" possible).

End of the game

The game ends, when

- or one player is reduced to one counter,
- or a player is blocked so that he cannot do any legal move anymore.

The player who captured most counters is the winner.

Our proposals for the rules

Our rule set is based on the combined interpretation of various Roman written sources and archaeological finds. That the game was played on a grid is clear from the comparison by Varro (*De lingua Latina*, X 22) of the game board with a declination table. It seems that there was no standardized dimension of the board, since boards with 7x8, 8x8, 9x9, 9x10, etc. squares are recorded. However, a certain preference for 8x8 squares can be observed. Since there was no standard dimension, the number of counters must have varied, too.

We are convinced that there was no starting position of the pieces as in chess or draughts by the threefold formulation in the “Laus Pisonis” (1st cent. CE), that at the beginning of the game the pieces (a) are distributed (b) in an intelligent way (c) on the empty board (“callidiore modo tabula variatur aperta calculus”). The terms «vagus», «ordinarius» and «incitus» are given by bishop Isidore of Seville (7th century) in his *Etymologies* (XVIII 67) and seem to refer to this game. The Roman poets Martial (*Epigrams* XIV 17) and Ovidius (*Tristia* II 478, *Art of Love* III 358) both relate the method of capture by enclosure from two sides. The Roman philosopher Seneca reports (*Letters*, 117, 30) that a captured counter could still be set free. We suggest a possibility to do so.

We have no information about the way the pieces moved nor the suicide rule. We opted for a fluent gameplay.

Further reading:

- Ulrich Schädler, Latrunculi – ein verlorenes strategisches Brettspiel der Römer, in: *Homo Ludens. Der spielende Mensch* IV, Salzburg 1994, p. 47-67
- U. Schädler, Latrunculi, a forgotten Roman game of strategy reconstructed, in: *Abstract Games Magazine* 7, 2001, p. 10-11

LUDUS LATRUNCULORUM – The game of little soldiers

Piso Variant

A game for two players

Equipment: 1 game board of 8 x 8 squares, 20 counters for each player (black and white). The counters have an upper side decorated by concentric circles and a flat underside.

Game Setup

On the screen, you see the board from above. At the right, the 20 black counters are ready for you. The white counters on the left are for your opponent or the computer. At the beginning of the game, the board is empty with no pieces put on the board in a kind of starting position.

Objective of the game

The objective of the game is to capture all but one opponent counters or to prevent the opponent from making a move.

Game play

The game consists of two phases.

1st phase: To start the game the players take turns in placing one counter after the other on any vacant square. In this phase, the counters are called “vagi”: vagues. During this phase, no captures are made, i.e “vagi” are not captured.

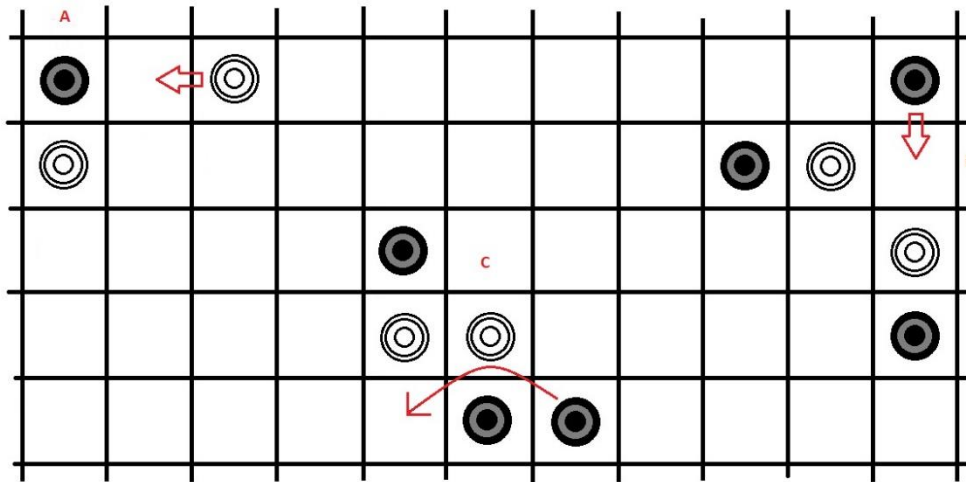
2nd phase: Once all the pieces have been placed, the counters can be moved orthogonally to any adjacent vacant square. In this second phase, the counters are called “ordinarii”: regulars.

Multiple moves back and forth of the same counter are not allowed.

Mechanism of capture: The mechanism of capture is enclosure from two opposite sides. If a player can trap an opponent counter between two of his own, the counter is captured (“incitus”) and removed from the board. Counters in the corner can be trapped by placing two counters on either side.

It is possible to trap more than one opponent’s counters in one move. In this case, the trapped counters are removed altogether.

A player is allowed to move a counter between two opponent counters. By this move, his counter is not captured (no “suicide” possible).



A: White captures Black in the corner.

B: Black captures two white counters in one move.

C: With a leap over its neighbouring counter, Black captures a white counter.

End of the game

The game ends, when

- or one player is reduced to one counter,
- or a player is blocked so that he cannot do any legal move anymore.

The player who captured most counters is the winner.

Our proposals for the rules

Our rule set is based on the combined interpretation of various Roman written sources and archaeological finds. That the game was played on a grid is clear from the comparison by Varro (*De lingua Latina*, X 22) of the game board with a declination table. It seems that there was no standardized dimension of the board, since boards with 7x8, 8x8, 9x9, 9x10, etc. squares are recorded. However, a certain preference for 8x8 squares can be observed. Since there was no standard dimension, the number of counters seems to have varied, too.

We are convinced that there was no starting position of the pieces as in chess or draughts by the threefold formulation in the “*Laus Pisonis*” (1st cent. CE), that at the beginning of the game the pieces (a) are distributed (b) in an intelligent way (c) on the empty board (*callidiore modo tabula variatur aperta calculus*). The terms «vagus», «ordinarius» and «incitus» are given by bishop Isidore of Seville (7th century) in his *Etymologies* (XVIII 67) and seem to refer to this game. The Roman poets Martial (*Epigrams* XIV 17) and Ovidius (*Tristia* II 478, *Art of Love* III 358) both relate the method of capture by enclosure from two sides.

We have no information about the way the pieces moved nor the suicide rule. We opted for a fluent gameplay.

Further reading:

- Ulrich Schädler, *Latrunculi – ein verlorenes strategisches Brettspiel der Römer*, in: *Homo Ludens. Der spielende Mensch* IV, Salzburg 1994, p. 47-67
- U. Schädler, *Latrunculi, a forgotten Roman game of strategy reconstructed*, in: *Abstract Games Magazine* 7, 2001, p. 10-11