

# Rules for Petteia and its variants

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## I. Introduction

One of the oldest games in the world <sup>1</sup>, from which a wide variety of games (including possibly the tafl games <sup>2</sup> and draughts) seem to have evolved, was called by the Greeks Petteia <sup>3</sup> and by the Romans ludus latrunculorum or just latrunculi <sup>4</sup>. The board, number of pieces and rules varied from place to place and over time. In the modern sense, what we in the modern world would class as a family of games, the ancients viewed as mildly different 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>5</sup>. This usage of the identification of these games serves a practical function similar to the documentation of Tablut by Linnaeus.

The Romans introduced an additional piece which was distinguished from the other pieces. How this piece was actually played has not been documented, but in practice the fact that the tafl games are believed to have evolved from this form of the game and that chess was seen as a related game gives one a strong hint about a few ways the piece was used.

Presented here are a number of games which represent probable stages in the evolution from petteia to tafl. While one can never be completely sure that the ancients played these games this way, one can be fairly confident that they likely did— or that some of them did.

## II. Equipment

- One 8x12 board (an uncheckered grid of spaces of the most common size)
- Two sets of 24 identical pieces called stones (similar to Go stones, conventionally black and white but this is a modern usage)
- One pyramidal piece in each of the 2 colors used (comparable in size to the other stones but taller and so resembling extant pieces)
- One 4-sided die (numbered 1 through 4, the knuckle-bone of a sheep is traditionally used and a replica could be used)

## 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 pieces and occupies the leftward center square.

### B. Common rules of play

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. 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.
13. By the standards of the ancients, playing to not win is tantamount to conceding. In other words, if a player makes no move which advances the game within some agreed upon number of moves, that player loses.

### 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.

## 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.

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 1: 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.

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 2: 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 Iatrunculi

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.

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 3: 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 Iatrunculi

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.

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 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.

## 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.

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 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 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.

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 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 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.

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 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 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.

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 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.

## 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. 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

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

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

3. *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.

4. *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.

5. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasami\\_shogi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasami_shogi)