

# Latrunculi

Annie Moore

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## 1 History of the Game

This game was first played in Greece where it was known as Pettia. It was first recorded in Roman literature around 100 BCE in book II of Marcus Terentius Varro's "De Lingua Latina" <sup>1</sup>. Here he uses the image of the board (similar to that used in chess) to illustrate how the endings of words change to demonstrate their role in a sentence.

The game is mentioned in later writings. In the first century AD, the Laus Pisonis was written, supposedly to describe the wonderful qualities of Gaius Calpurnius Piso. It was said that he was very good at latrunculi, so the rules of the game were included <sup>2</sup>.

## 2 Purpose

It appears that this game was popular among soldiers as the skills needed to win were similar to those needed in warfare. Playing this game frequently was thought to help improve the critical thinking skills that all soldiers would need. It was really a game of strategy. It was also easy to transport and set up. It only requires a board and a small number of pieces.

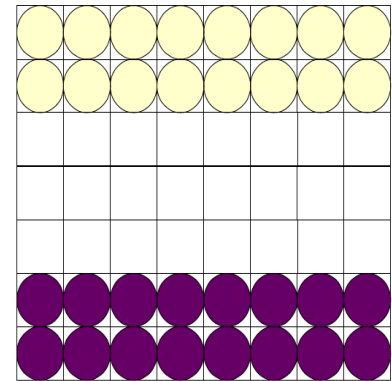


Figure 1: setup of board

## 3 Rules of the Game - Based on the Museum Quintana Reconstruction <sup>3</sup>

All that is needed to play this game is a board (similar to a chess board) and 32 pieces (16 white and 16 black). The actual size of the board used has not been determined as boards of various sizes have been found. Some sources have said that there was an additional piece called the Dux that had additional moves. Recent sources indicate that the inclusion of

<sup>1</sup>I found a copy that I could read online at: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/varro.ll10.html>

<sup>2</sup>Laus Pisonis, 24-27. Found at: [https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Laus\\_pisonis/text\\*.html#note25](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Laus_pisonis/text*.html#note25)

<sup>3</sup>Game rules and images adapted from <https://www.mastersofgames.com/rules/Ludus-Latrunculorum-Rules.pdf> and <https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/kelsey-assets/kelsey-images/kelsey-edu-resources/games/Ludus>

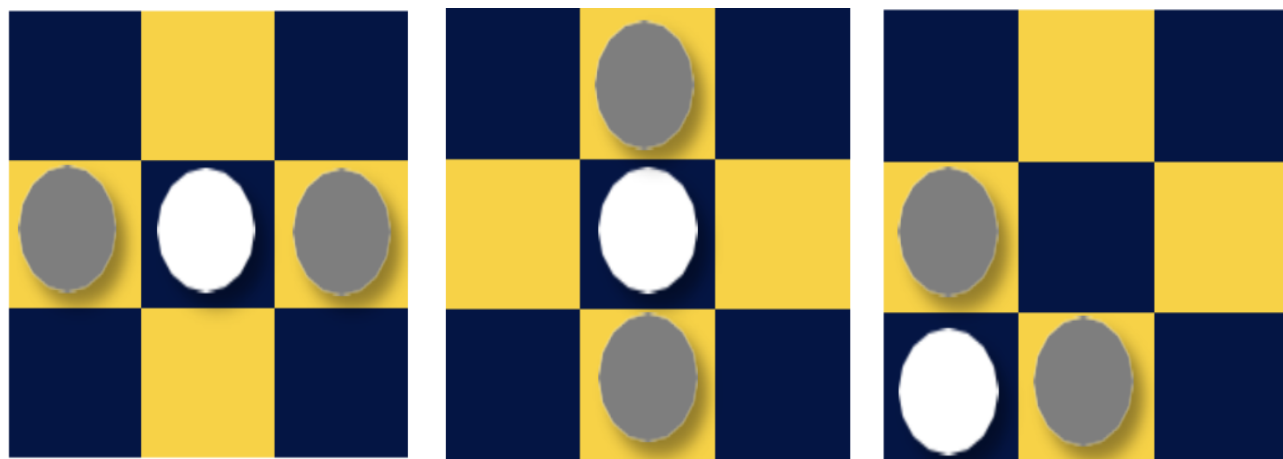


Figure 2: Possible ways to trap enemy piece

this piece was uncommon, so I have left it out. To start the game, the pieces are arranged on the board as shown in fig. 1. A coin is flipped to determine who goes first. Each piece can move any number of spaces forward, backward, left, or right as long as it does not encounter another piece. The goal of the game is to capture all of your opponent's pieces. A piece is captured when it is surrounded by enemy pieces in orthogonal directions or in the corners of the board. These situations are shown in fig. 2. A player wins when all of the opponent's pieces are captured, or it is obvious that the opponent cannot win. An example of this second point is the formation of a blockade shown in fig. 3.

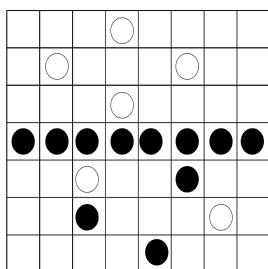


Figure 3: Black would be the winner in this case as there is no way for the white pieces to cross the blockade and claim the additional black pieces.