GAT 110: Game History

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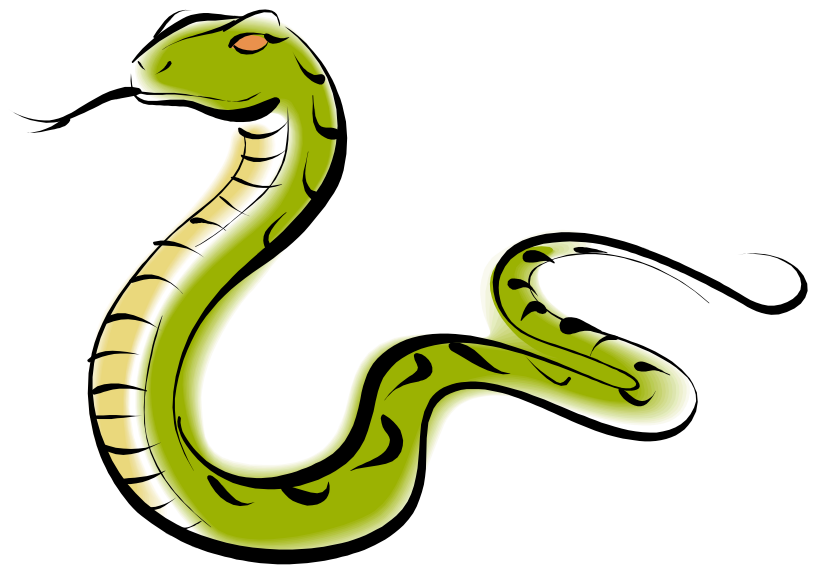
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Spiral Race Games

Game of Goose, Snakes & Ladders, The Mansion of Happiness

Snakes & Ladders

Mehen

- Mehen (Coiled Snake) games are some of the oldest Egyptian race games.
- The playing pieces, tiny lions and small balls, were moved from the tail of the snake to the goal on its head.
- This sample dates to 2750-2250 BCE.
- While this game was only played in the Old Kingdom in Egypt, it was played in Cyprus for at least another 1,000 years.

Mehen

- **Goal**: Be the first player to reach the final space with all of your tokens.
- **Mechanics**: Race, Token Exchange, Resource Management
- **Components**: 3d2, 6 Pawns/Player, Chips, Board
- **Board Topology**:
  - Landing on an Ankh means move in one ring to the adjacent space (if unoccupied).
  - Landing on an Jackal means move out one ring to the adjacent space (if unoccupied).
  - End spot must be landed on with an exact count.
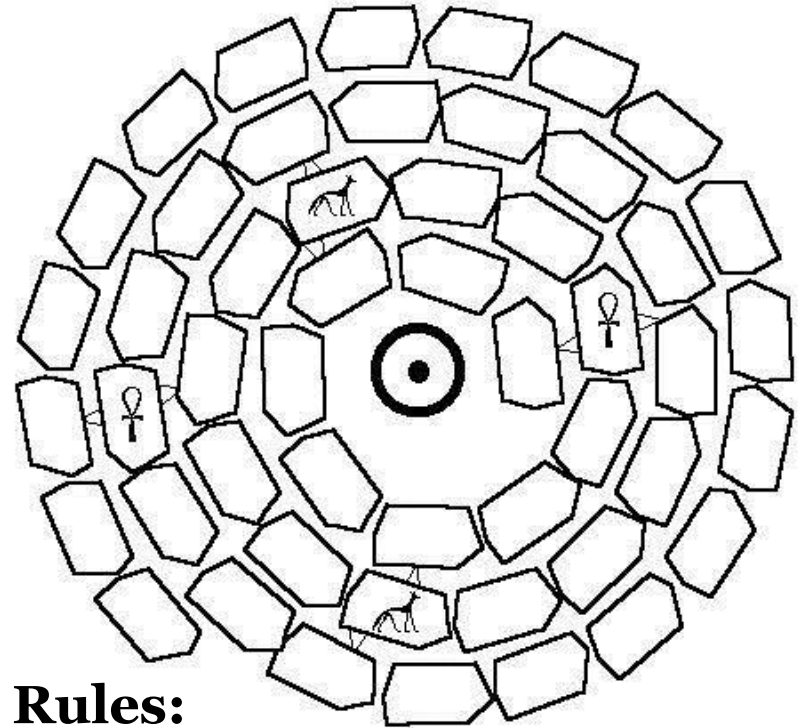
- **Rules:**
  - 3d2 Throw: 1, 2, 3, 6 (0)
  - Thow of 1 grants a chip
  - Throw of 2 ends the turn, otherwise rethrow
  - Entering the board costs 1 chip, leaving the board costs 4 chips
  - You can spend chips for movement instead of throwing
  - Landing on an opponent's pawn swaps spaces.

# Phaistos Disc

2nd Century BCE, Crete

Snakes & Ladders

- Snakes & Ladders originated in ancient India, most likely based on the earlier Coiled Snake games.
- The game originated in India as a morality game teaching that good acts lead you closer to nirvana.
- The earliest boards of this game were spiral in shape like this board, created in 1892.
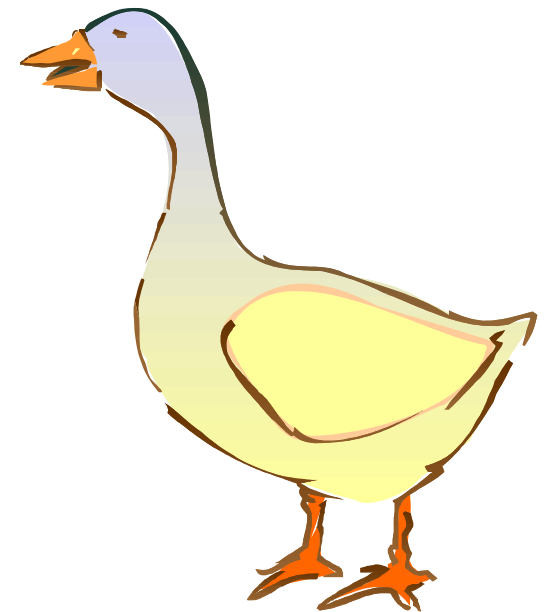
Snakes & Ladders

- The game has precursors dating back centuries, like Leela or Gyanbazi. This is a Jain diagram of a Gyanbazi game dating to 16th Century.

- In 1893, R.H. Harte introduced the square board to England, which is the form that it retains today.
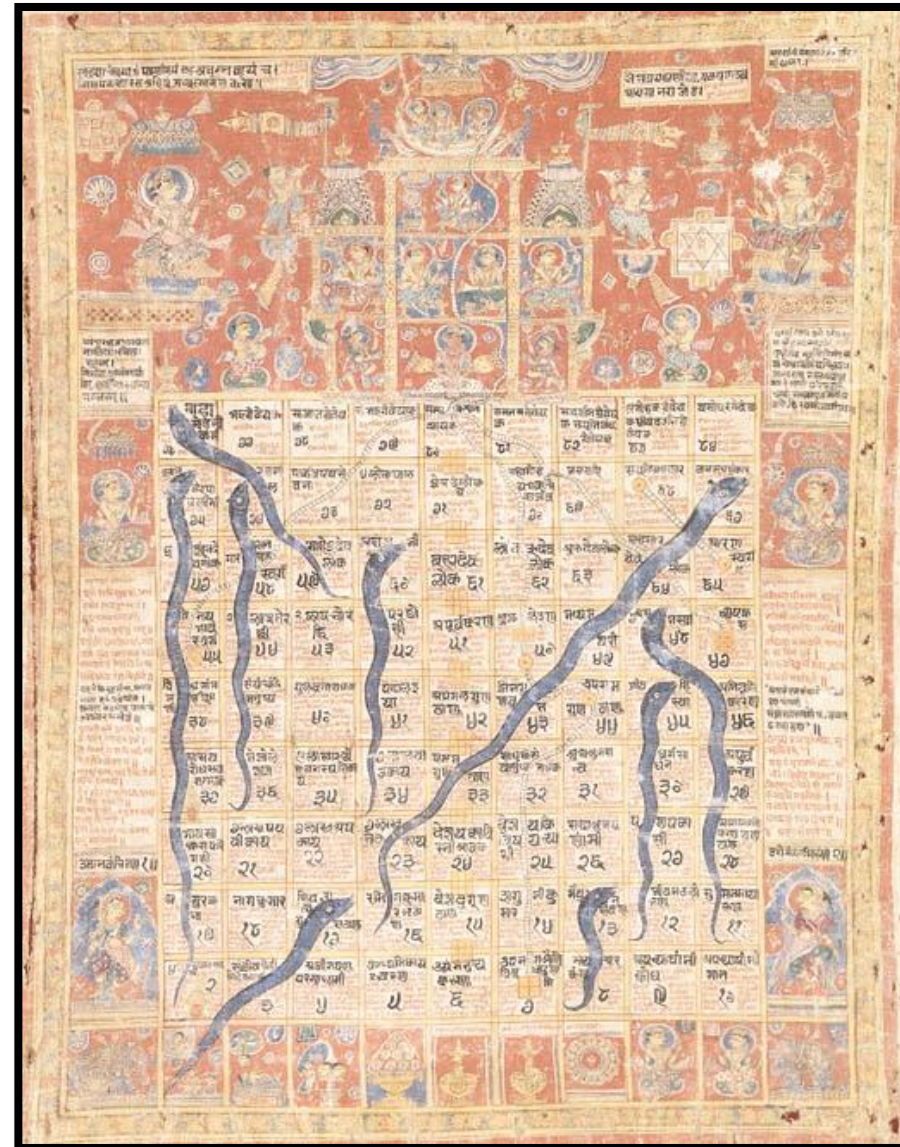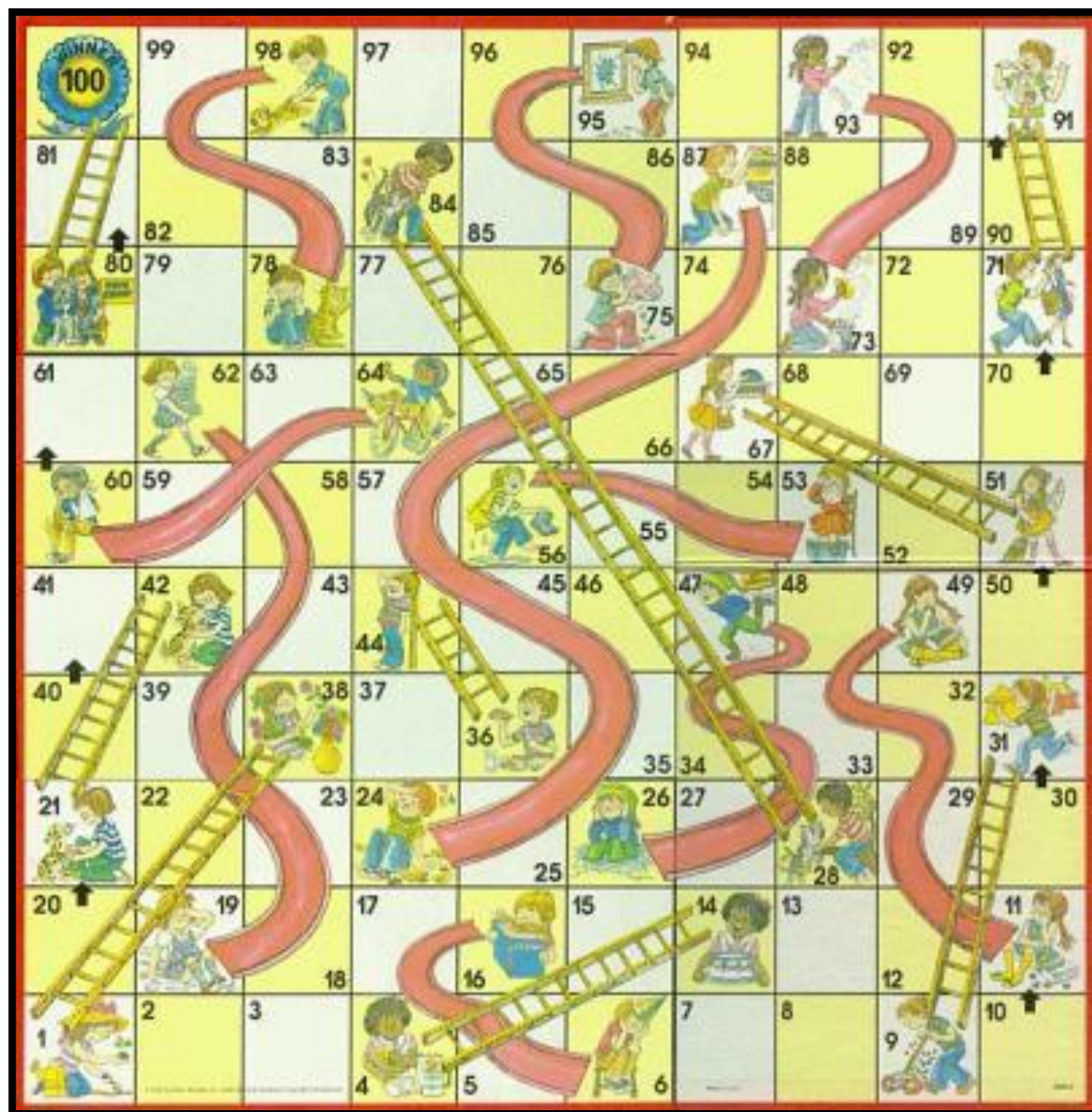
Royal Game of Goose

The Royal Game of Goose

Medici

- The Game of Goose, like Snakes & Ladders, is all about life's ups-and-downs.
- Exact origins of the game are unknown. The oldest written information about the game dates back to the 16th Century.
- It is known that Francesco de Medici (1574-1587) gave the Giocco dell'Oca as a present to King Phillip II of Spain.
- The game was recognized as having arrived in England on June 16, 1597 from an inscription in the register of Stationer's Hall in London as "The New and Most Pleasant Game of Goose."
- The Game of Goose is often considered the prototype of many racing games of the last few centuries, and was a popular basis for many educational games.


Phillip II

Royal Game of Goose

- **Goal**: Be the first player to reach the final space and claim all the chips in the pot.
- **Mechanics**: Race, Token Exchange, Wagering
- **Components**: Pair of Dice, Pawns, Chips, Board
- **Board Topology**:
  - Landing on a goose means move your dice roll that number of spaces forward or backward.
  - Certain board spaces have special meaning like lose a turn and pay 3 chips into the pot.
  - End spot must be landed on with an exact count, but you can over-count by moving backwards the remainder.
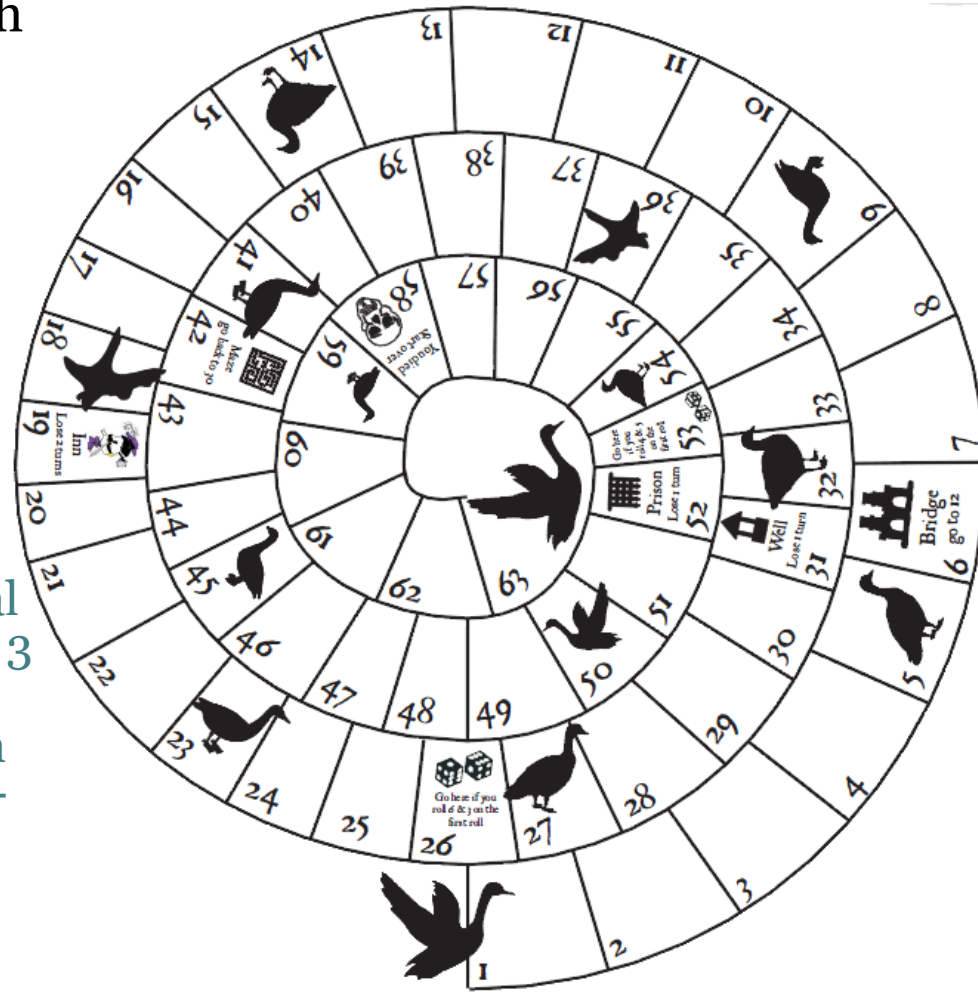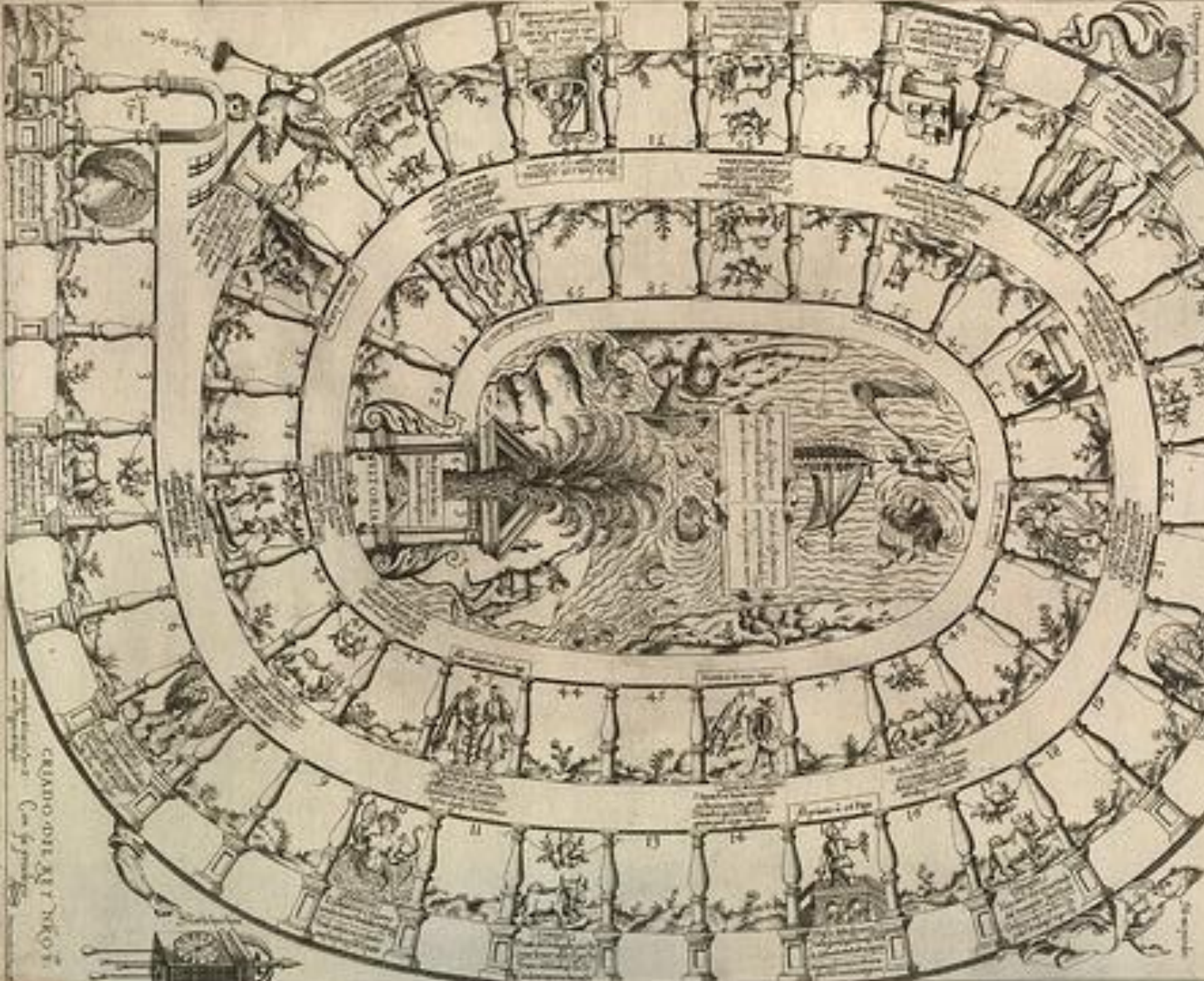
The Mansion of Happiness

- The Mansion of Happiness was published in 1843 by W. & S. B. Ives, and republished in 1894 by Parker Brothers.
- The game was attributed to Anne Abbott, but it was actually designed by George Fox in 1800 and published in London.
- This game was one of the progenitors of the American board game industry.
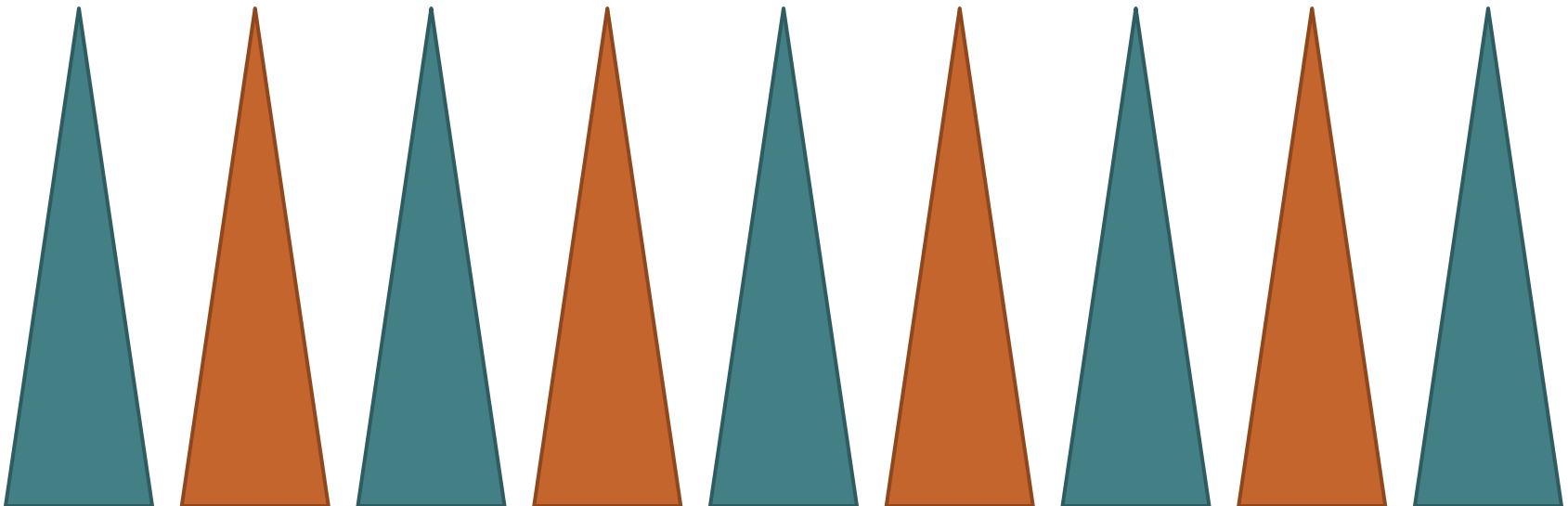
THE MANSION OF HAPPINESS.
AN INSTRUCTIVE MORAL AND ENTERTAINING AMUSEMENT.

The Tables Group

Royal Game of Ur, Senet, Nardshir, Ludus Duodecim Scriptorum, Tabula, Fayles, Backgammon

The Royal Game of Ur

Ur SO old…

Discovery

- The Royal Game of Ur was discovered by Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1920's
  - Archaeological excavations sponsored by University of Pennsylvania and the British Museum in Mesopotamia, a.k.a. the Fertile Crescent
  - Tombs discovered near the Sumerian city of Ur, which was mentioned in the Bible as "Ur of the Chaldees".
  - Specimens dated to approximately 3000 BCE.
  - Believed they were gifts to deceased Sumerian royalty to keep them company in their journey to the afterlife – earliest known road trip game?
- Boards have been found from Egypt to India, and date from around 3000 BCE up until modern times. (The spread from one culture to another.)

Whence the Rules?

- Game also known as The Game of Twenty Squares.
- Original rules (as played on the boards discovered by Woolley) are unknown.
- We do have evidence from a c.177 BCE cuneiform tablet that contain a fairly vague description of the rules of the game. Assuming that it hasn't changed TOO much since the board is substantially similar, researchers have reconstructed what we believe the rules of the game might have been.
- Probably used knucklebones by the time of this version of the game.
- A 100-200 years older version of the board was discovered in the Burnt City of Iran in 2004.
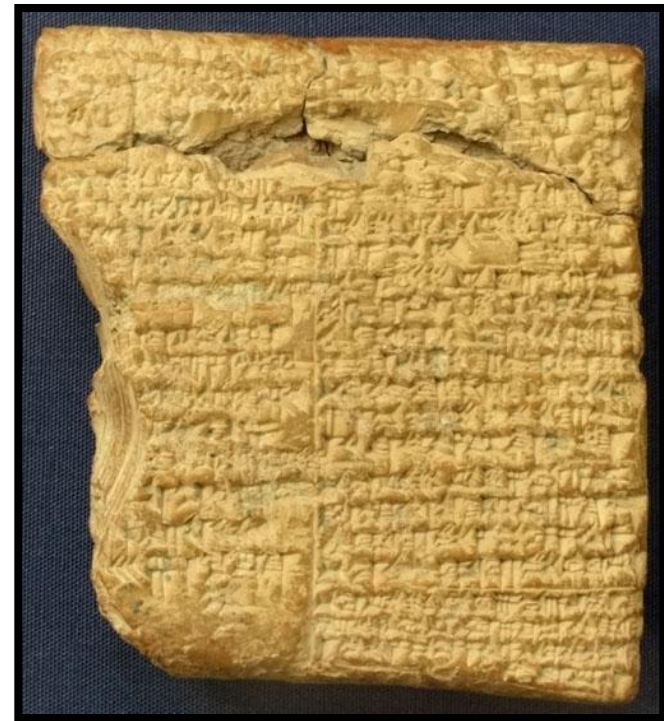
Ebony board found at the Burnt City, with 60 pieces in turquoise and agate

Rules Overview

- Goal:
  - Introduce seven tokens, move them along your designated path, and be the first to have all the tokens out of the game, similar to backgammon.
- Components:
  - Each player starts with:
    - Seven Tokens (pawns)
    - Three Tetrahedral Dice (2 white and 2 red vertices)
    - Twenty-five Wagering Tokens
  - 20-square game board with 5 rosettes in the following configuration:
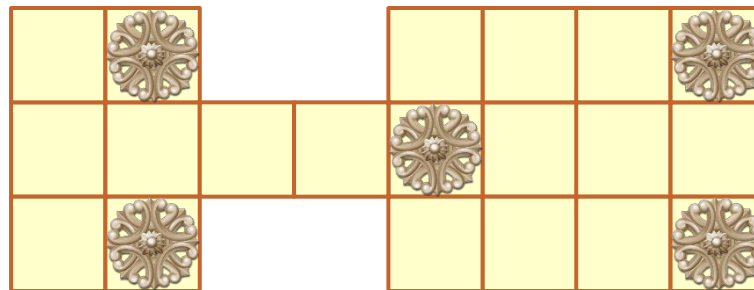
Rules Overview (continued)

- Select a starting player
  - One player rolls a die, and the other player guesses whether a marked or unmarked point lands up. Guessing correctly means that player selects the color they play with and moves first.
- Determine initial wager and penalty amount
- Players take turns rolling the dice. On a player's turn, the following rolls are possible:
  - 3 marked points: Move a token 5 spaces or add a token to the board and roll again
  - 3 unmarked points: Move a token 4 spaces and roll again
  - 1 unmarked point + 2 marked points: Move a token 1 space and roll again
  - 2 unmarked points + 1 marked point: No moves and end turn
- Capturing enemy pieces:
  - If a player's token lands on the same location as an opponent's, they remove that token from the board and return it to their opponent.
- Landing on a rosette:
  - Opponent must pay the pre-agreed penalty amount
- Bearing off:
  - By rolling exactly the right number of movement points to leave the board.

# Board Topology

Safe

Combat

Safe
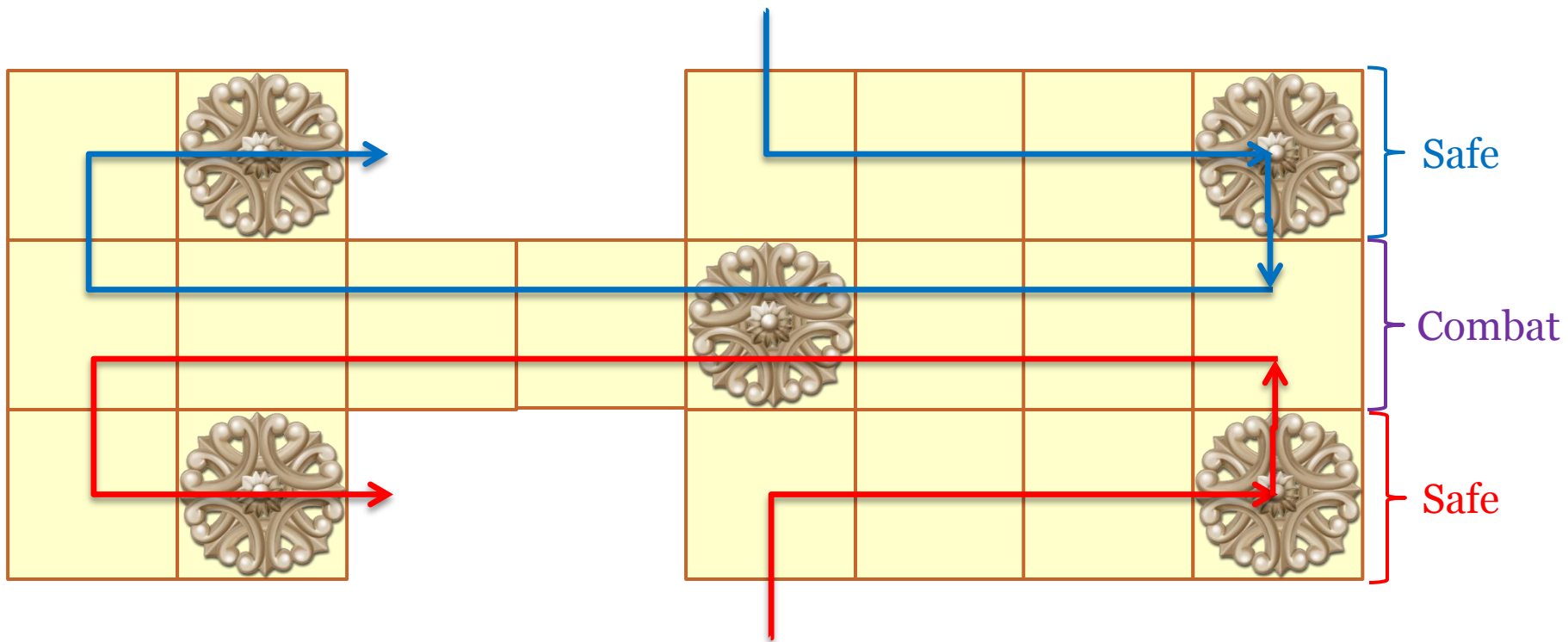
Significance

- The game also had a cultural and sociological significance: the game's legacy is about wealth and power driving game production.
- Games change from something done by kids and soldiers to a symbol of power and dynastic credibility.
- It was a used as gift to kings and nobility of other nations as a sign of their power, creativity, and ingenuity.

Senet

Religious Symbology

Board Topology
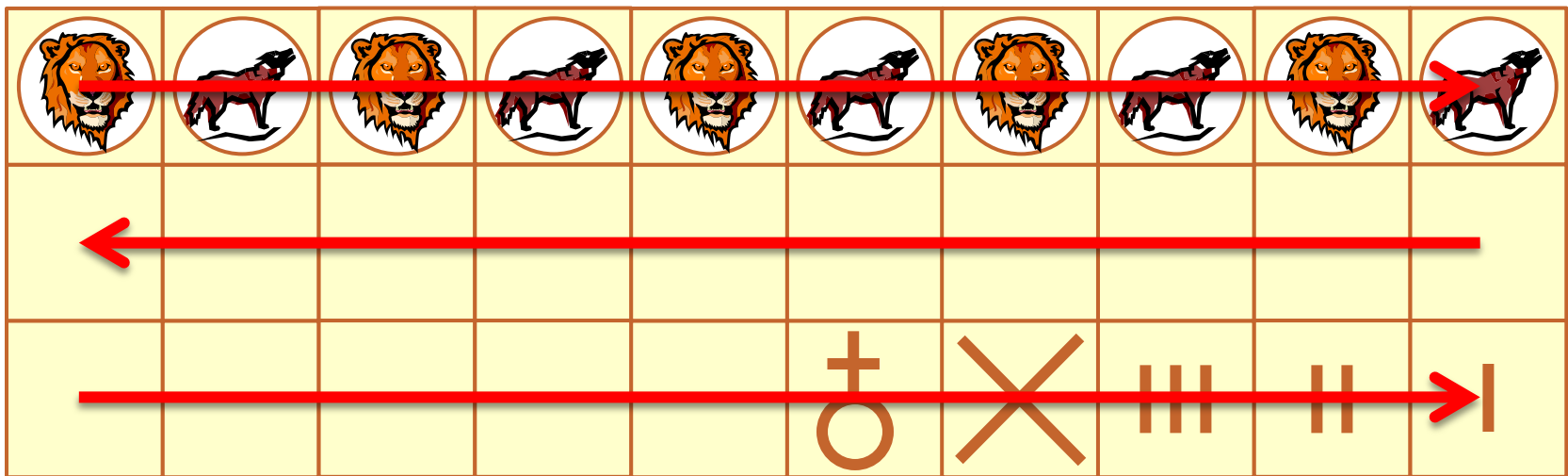
Return to Start

Significance

- The Game of Senet (also Senat or S'net or S'n't) is the first game in which we see true spiritual significance.
- The markers on the board represented religious symbolism. Since much of Egyptian life revolved around the afterlife, this makes sense.
- Egypt is one of the first long running dynasties. Which means its civilization is well recorded and had time to spread.
- The Egyptians also had paper, which made it easier to record things like game rules.

Significance

- It required:
  - Priests to interpret the spiritual significance
  - Craftsmen to fashion the boards
  - Written language to record rules
  - An established legal system, so rules could be modeled and enforced.
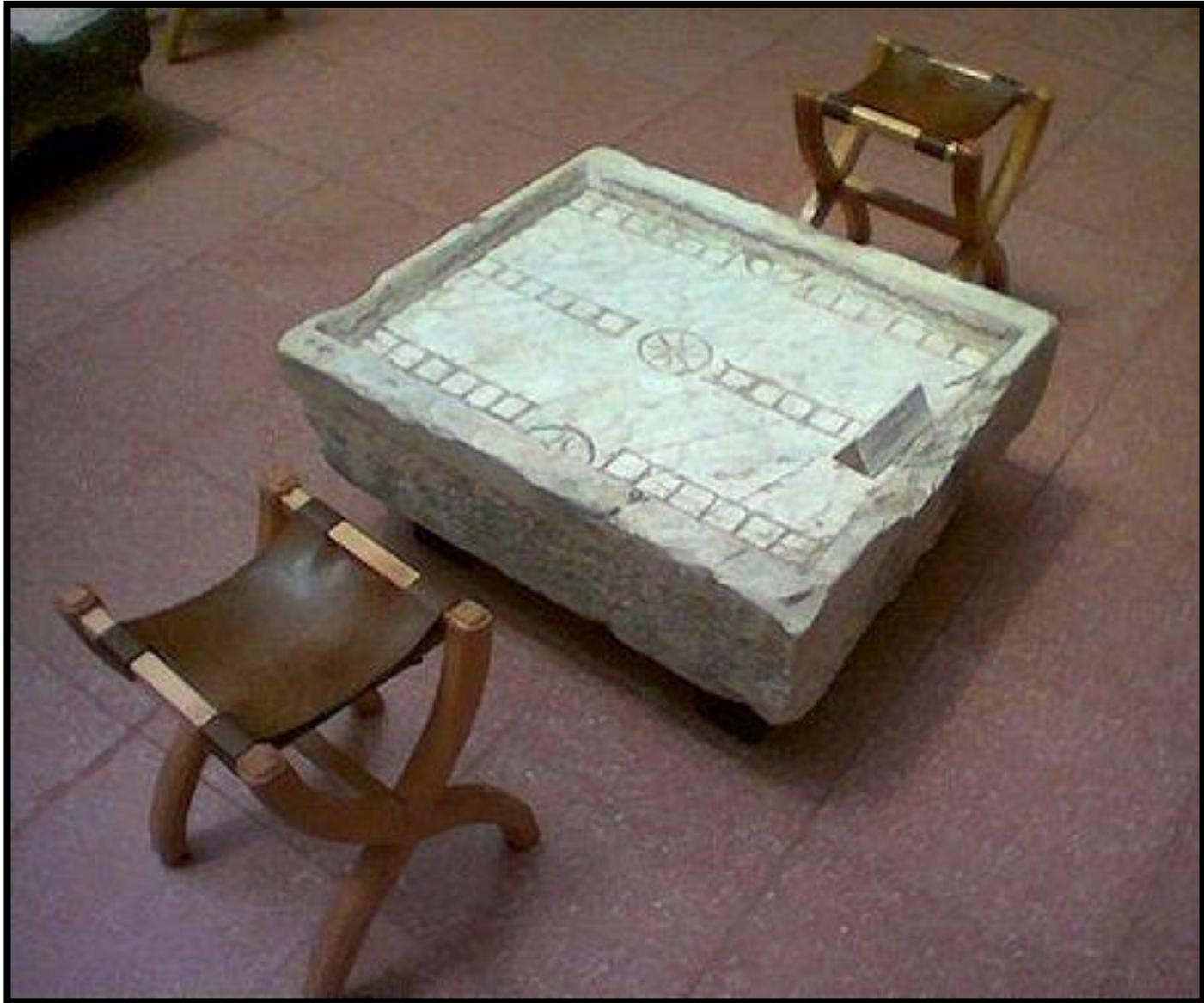
Backgammon
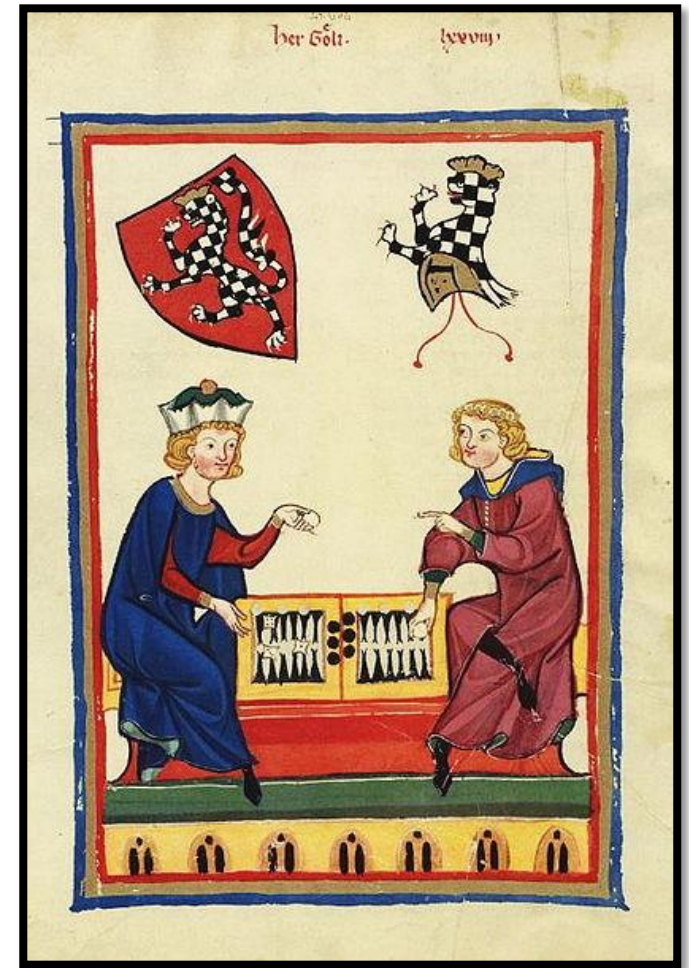
Herr Goeli, from the 14th century Codex Manesse

Backgammon Origin

- Backgammon is the most recent evolution of the tables family of games.
  - **Ludus Duodecim Scriptorum**: A game played by the Romans around the 1st Century, also known as XII Scripta (12 lines).
  - **Nardshir**: A Persian poet, Ferdowsi, claims Burzoe (a Persian physician) invented Nardshir in the 6th Century in his epic poem *Shahnameh*, (c.977-1010 CE). The oldest known reference to the game is thought to be a passage in the *Talmud* (c.200-500 CE). Name comes from the Persian word for "wooden block" (*nard*) and "lion" (*shir*), the two piece types commonly played with.
  - **Tabula**: Byzantine evolution of XII Scripta that reduced the number of lines to two in the 5th Century.
  - **Game of Tables**: Rules for several backgammon variants described by Alfonso X in his *Libro de los juegos* manuscript in 1283.
- Name ***Backgammon*** was first used around the mid-1600's, and may have come from the Welsh words *baec* (back) and *cammaun* (battle) or possibly the Middle English words of *baec* (back) and *gamen* (game).

Ludus Duodecim Scriptorum, Museum of Ephesus

Burzoe demonstrates Nard to a visiting Raja from India

Libro de los juegos depiction of a Tables variant, *Six, Deuce, and Ace.*

Backgammon

OUTER FIELD, BLACK   INNER FIELD, BLACK

2 — Doubling Cube   Bar

OUTER FIELD, WHITE   INNER FIELD, WHITE

- Goal:
  - Be the first to have all your tokens out of the game.
- Mechanics:
  - Race, Capture, Blocking, Wagering
- Components:
  - Each of the two players start with 15 tokens of their color distributed around the board.
  - Pair of d6 for movement.
  - Doubling Cube (d6 with values of 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, and 64) – invented by an unknown player in New York in the 1920's
  - Game Board with 24 movement locations, divided into groups of six, two on each side of the board
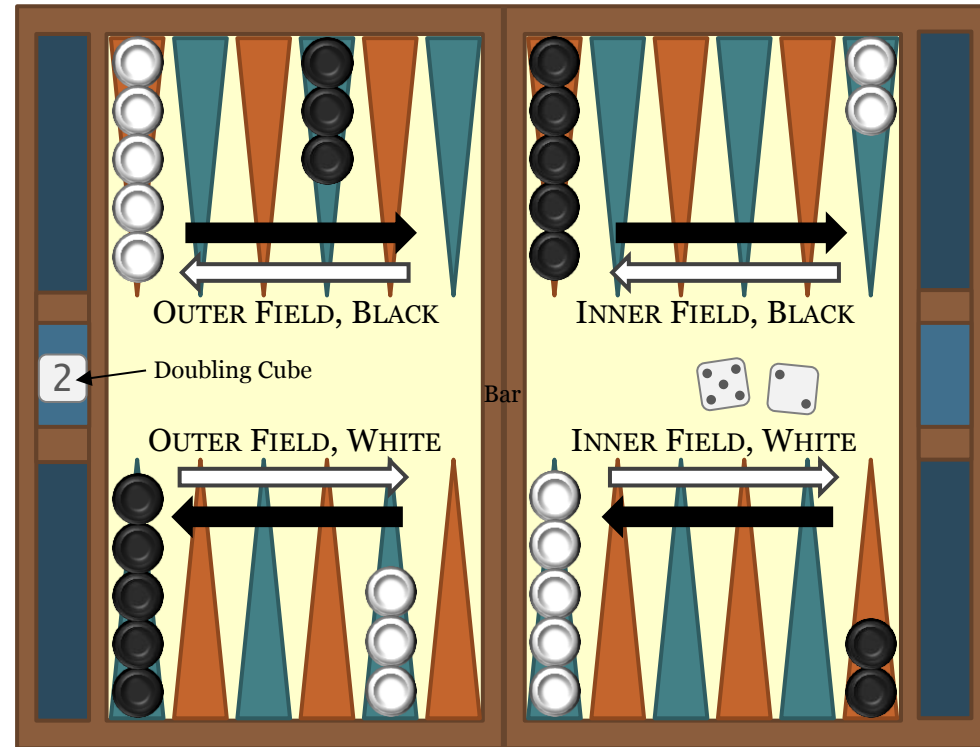
Backgammon Rules

- Turn Structure
  - On a player's turn they roll the dice and move any one piece by the value on one die and any one piece by the value on another die. Doubles act as four of the same die value, so up to 4 pieces can be moved.
- Blocking
  - A player can not move a piece onto a point that contains two or more of the opponent's pieces.
- Capturing
  - Moving a piece onto a point that contains a single piece of the opponent causes the opponent's piece to be captured and move to the bar.
  - Opponent must move all pieces off the bar into the opponent's inner field before moving any pieces not on the bar. If the die roll indicates a blocked point, that die may not be used and the player may have to pass.
- Bearing Off
  - Once all of your pieces are in your inner field, you may begin "bearing them off the board" with off the board. The first player to bear off all their pieces wins the game.

Backgammon Rules

- Wagering
  - The Doubling Cube is used for wagering. The players may be wagering either match points (in a best of X games match), or money.
  - If a player wins when his opponent has no pieces in the opponent's inner field, it is called a *gammon* and the wager is doubled. If a player wins when his opponent has one or more pieces in the player's inner field or on the bar, it is called a *backgammon* and the wager is trebled.
  - A player may, before they roll the dice, "double" the value of the game by incrementing the Doubling Cube. The opponent may either immediately forfeit or accept the doubling.
  - Once a player doubles, they may not double again until their opponent "redoubles" the game. This doubling may pass back and forth between the players up to six times (when it reaches 64).
  - Doubling Cube also affects *gammons* and *backgammons*.

Cross & Circle Games

Pachisi, Ludo, Patolli, Zohn Ahl, Nyout, Sorry!, Aggravation, Trivial Pursuit

Cross & Circle Group

- This group of the Race Family are characterized by a circle divided into 4 equal portions by a cross inscribed within.
  - Characterized by the Korean game Nyout
- Some versions have a collapsed circle design
 - Characterized by games like Pachisi
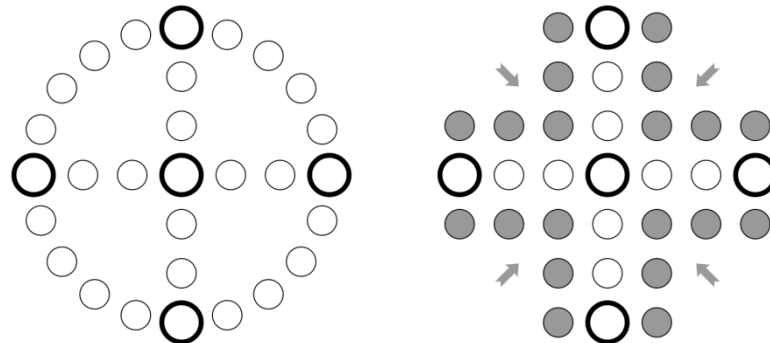
Pachisi

Origin

- Pachisi derived with the sister game of Chaupar in 6th Century India played on the same board.
  - In the town of Decca, researchers have found a board in the shape of a cross engraved on a stone.
  - The history has not been positively documented back past the 16th century however.
  - Some evidence that the game derived from an even earlier game called ASHTAPADA from the 4th century, which we'll learn more when we discuss war games.
- Name comes from the Hindu word Pachis, meaning 25, which refers to the maximum possible score that can be thrown with the cowrie shells.
- Arrived in Europe by way of English travelers according to the book *Ludis Orientalibus*, published by Thomas Hyde in 1694.
- Symbolizes reincarnation and the goal of arriving at *charkoni*.

Board Topology
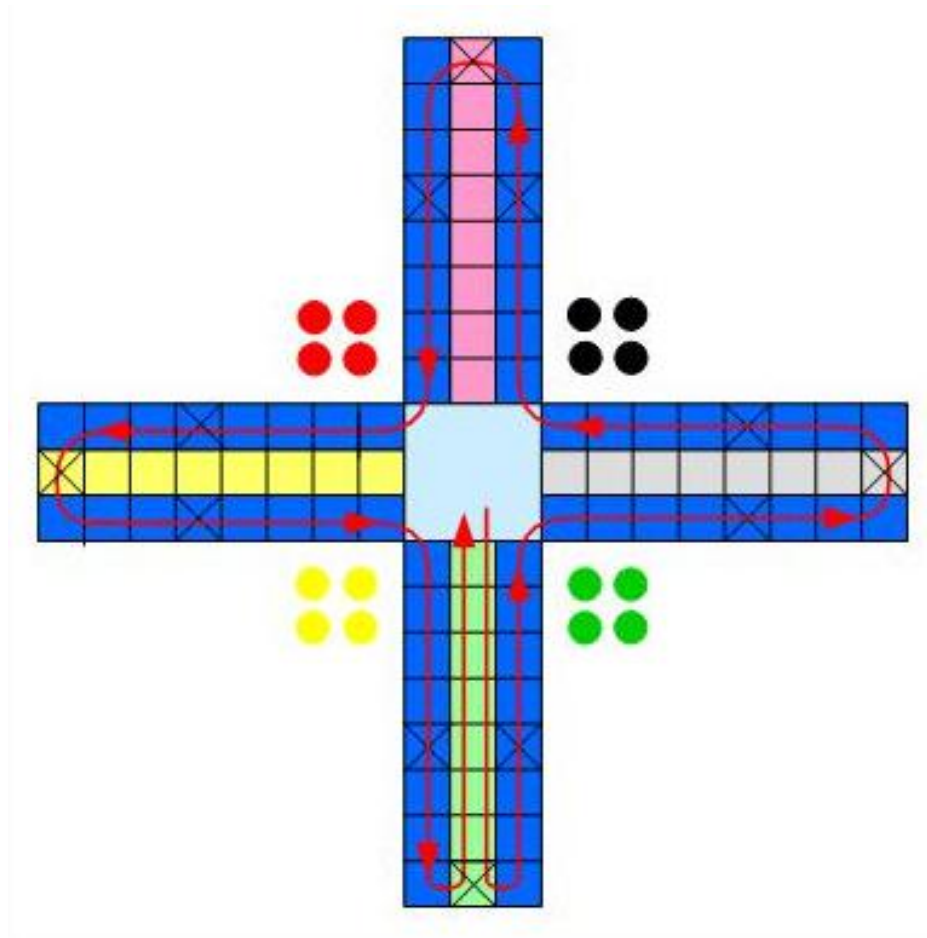
Rules Overview

- Goal:
  - Be the first team to return all of their tokens home by circumnavigating the board.
- Components:
  - Each player starts with:
    - Four Tokens (pawns)
  - Six cowrie shells
  - Game board

Rules Overview

- Scoring:
  - 2 cowries with mouths up: Move 2
  - 3 cowries with mouths up: Move 3
  - 4 cowries with mouths up: Move 4
  - 5 cowries with mouths up: Move 5
  - 6 cowries with mouths up: Move 6 and throw again
  - 1 cowrie with mouth up: Move 10 and throw again
 - 0 cowries with mouths up: Move 25 and throw again

Rules Overview

- Capturing:
  - Landing on an opposing team's token sends the piece back to *charkoni*.
  - Capturing lets you throw again
- Blocking:
  - Two tokens on a space create a blockade that cannot be passed, but landing on a blocked space captures both pieces.
- Entering:
  - The first piece enters the board on any throw, but thereafter only on a 6, 10, or 25.
- Passing is allowed.
- Movement is anticlockwise.

Descendants

- Pachisi has a number of modern game descendants:
  - Ludo
  - Parcheesi
  - Parchís
 - Parqués
  - Mensch ärgere dich nicht
  - Chopat
  - Sorry!
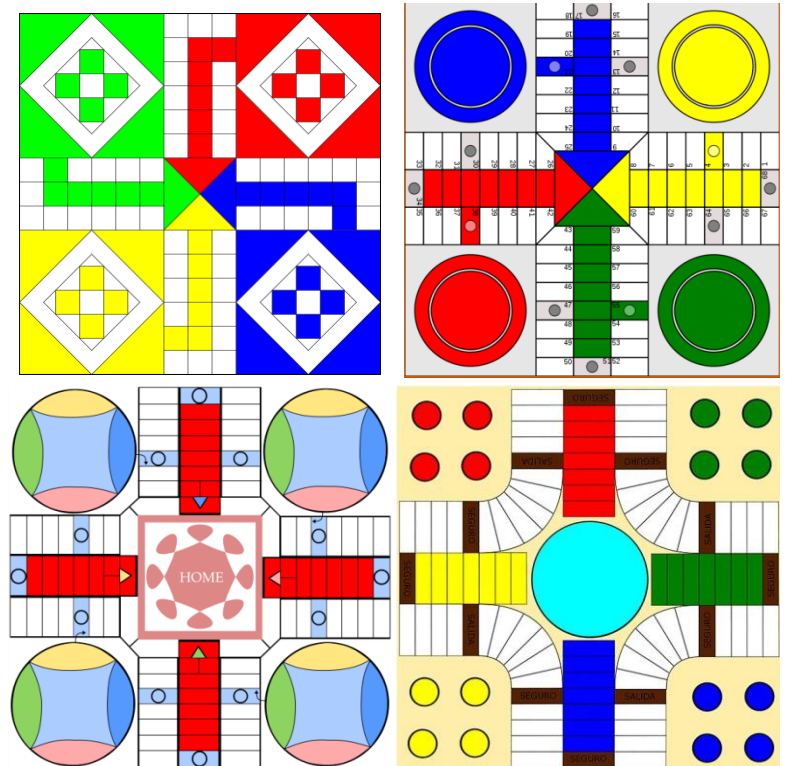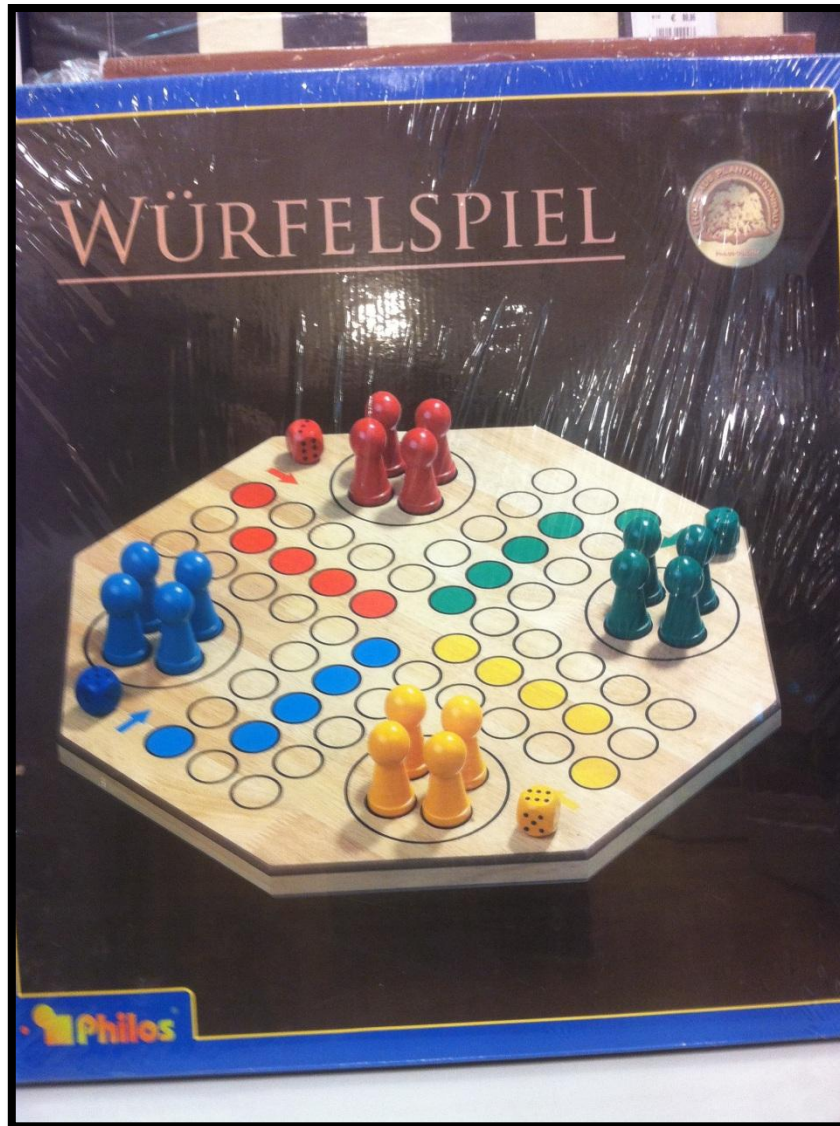
Peg Scoring Games

Hounds & Jackals board from the tomb of Reniseneb, c. 1450 BCE

Hounds & Jackals

- Hounds & Jackals (also known as Dogs & Jackals, the Palm Tree Game, Game of 58 Holes or the Shield Game) is named such for the design of the pieces (or board shape). The original Egyptian name of the game is unknown.
- Each player has 5 pieces of their type (either hounds or jackals) starting in the first 5 holes with the object of moving their pegs home first.
- Movement was likely the same as Senet with four throwing sticks.
- The board features lines connecting certain holes, much like Snakes & Ladders, and may be the origin of this mechanic.
- Peg boards like this can also be seen in Cribbage (invented by Sir John Suckling, 1609-1642), a descendant of the card game Noddy.
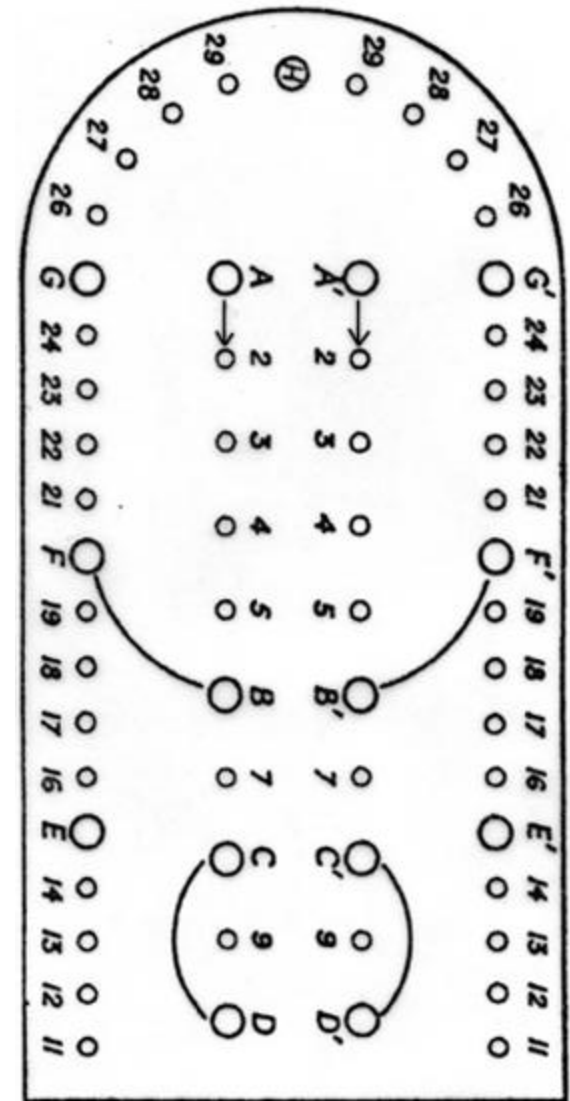
Next Lecture

Next Lecture

- Early War Games
  - Chess Group
  - Alquerque Group
  - Draughts Group
  - Tafl Group