

FURTHER INFORMATION

The reader may find further information about Dara in the following books:

Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1, pp. 95-96. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.

Bell, R. C. *Games to Play*, p. 46. London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1988.

Murray, H. J. R. *A History of Board Games Other than Chess*, pp. 48-50. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 123-124. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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DARA

by Damian Walker

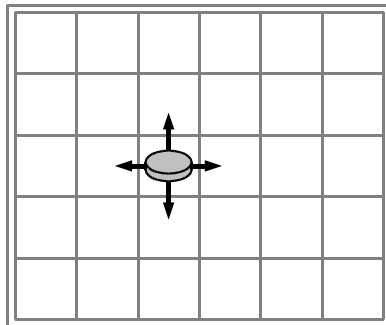
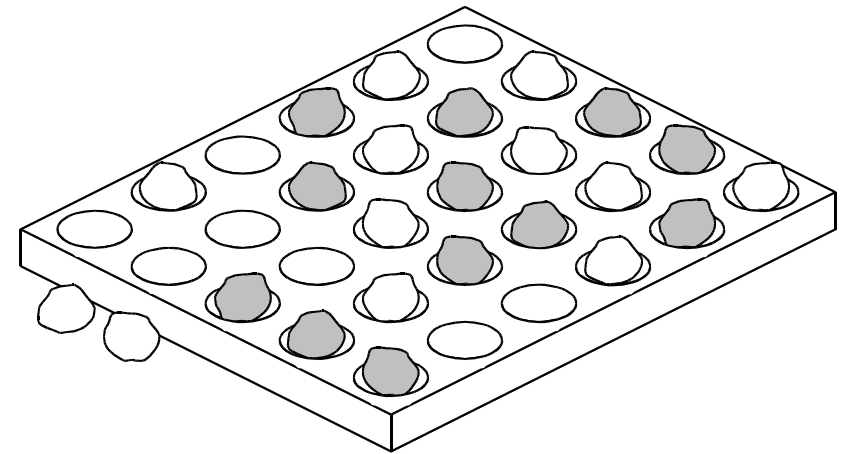


Illustration 3: the moves of the pieces.

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

There is an interesting family of games sometimes known as *shiva*, which are played across the Sahara and neighbouring parts of North Africa. The games are played on a lattice of 5×6 or 6×6 playing spaces, usually consisting of small holes in the ground. Pieces may be stones or broken pottery. The games resemble *nine men's morris*

in play, which is very ancient. But written accounts of shiva games date back no earlier than 1909.

Dara is the most well-known game from this family. It is played by the Dakarkari people of Nigeria, and under the name of *dra* by the Tamacheq people of the Sahara. This particular game was first recorded as recently as 1950.

HOW TO PLAY

This is a game of alignment and capture, played in two phases. The first phase involves the *placement* of pieces on the board, and the second involves *movement* and capture. Skilful placement of pieces in first phase of the game can be decisive.

Starting the Game

1. The board, a grid of 5 rows of 6 playing spaces (known henceforth as squares), starts empty, as shown in Illustration 1.

2. The players have twelve pieces each, one side black and the other white.

3. The players

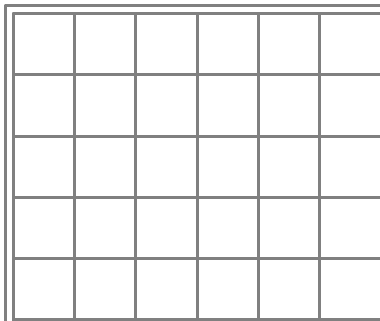


Illustration 1: the empty dara board, as at the start of play.

take turns to place a piece on any empty square, one at a time, black going first.

4. During this placement phase, it is not permitted to form a row of three pieces of one colour on the board, as shown in Illustration 2. Diagonal rows have no significance, and are therefore allowed.

Moving the Pieces

5. Once the placement phase is over, players take it in turns (black first) to move a piece from one square to an adjacent square, as shown in Illustration 3.

6. Diagonal moves are not al-

lowed.

7. A player is not allowed to form a row of four of his pieces.

Capturing Enemies

8. If, when moving, a player forms a row of three pieces (excepting diagonals), he can capture any one of his opponent's pieces and remove it from the board.

9. If two lines of three are formed at once, still only one enemy piece may be removed.

Ending the Game

10. If a player is reduced to two pieces, he loses and his opponent wins the game.

Matches

11. It is common to play a match, worth 10 points. A win is usually worth 1 point, unless the

winner has lost no pieces, in which case it is worth 2.

Variations

Some of the rules are not clear and consistent across all accounts; it is probable that there are variations from place to place. R. C. Bell describes a game with some slight alterations of rules. The adventurous player is free to experiment with them.

4. Rows of three or more are permitted, but they do not count as captures.

7. A player is permitted to form a row of four pieces, but this does not count as a capture.

8. One cannot form a row of three simply by moving the end piece from a row of four. Bell does not mention this rule, but it is common to other shiva games which allow rows of four.

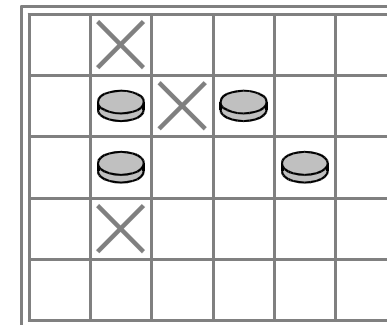


Illustration 2: during the placement phase, black cannot place a piece in any of the crossed squares, as this would create a row of three.