

20. After capturing, a player is granted another turn. So after completing her moves she again proceeds as per rule 4 onwards.

21. Pieces on marked squares (palaces or the keep) are not prone to capture. Pieces of different colours may therefore share these squares.

22. Twins can be captured only by other twins. Single pieces landing on twins will simply share the same square as if it were a palace or the keep.

23. Twins being captured are separated and re-entered as single pieces.

24. Twins may capture singletons.

Ending the Game

25. The keep is at the end of each player's course, and may only be entered by an exact throw.

26. Twins entering the keep are there regarded as two individual pieces.

27. When a player has all her pieces in the keep, she may start bearing off.

28. On a throw of one, a piece completes its journey and is removed from the board (borne off).

29. When a player has borne off all of her pieces, the game is over and she is declared the winner.

Variation

Before a game begins, the players may agree a variation.

23. When captured, twins stick together and must be re-entered only when a pair of ones are thrown. They are moved around the board as twins. Once paired up, therefore, twins remain twins for the rest of the game.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Readers wanting further information on the game of thaayam can start their search with the following books:

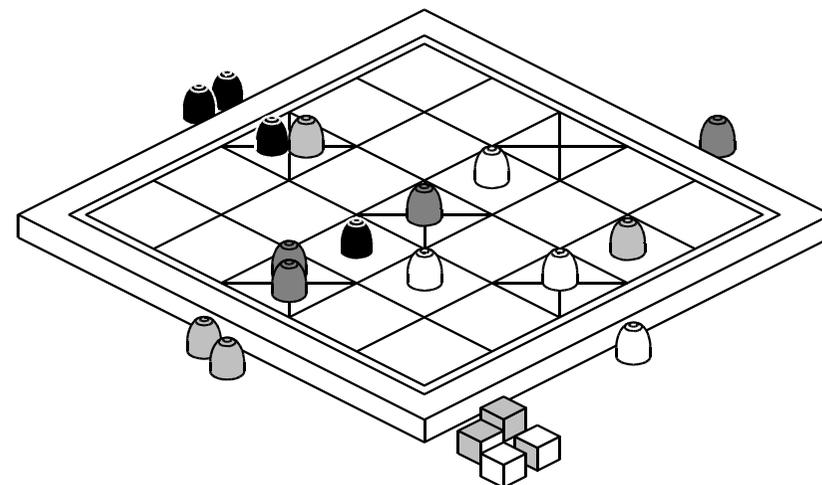
Bell, R. C. *Board and Table Games from Many Civilizations*, vol. 1 pp. 17-20. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.

Parlett, D. *The Oxford History of Board Games*, pp. 54-56. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Copyright © Damian Walker 2011 - <http://boardgames.cynningstan.org.uk/>

THAAYAM

by Damian Walker



INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

In southern India, as the season approached for the rice to ripen and be harvested, girls were once employed to watch over the paddy fields and scare away any birds that tried to disturb the crop. They would play games to while away the time. One of the most popular of these games which has survived to recent times is *thaayam*, a race game which is played on a square board.

The board for *thaayam* would be marked in the dirt on the ground, and sticks were used as pieces. Dice for the game were made by taking tamarind seeds, which are cubical, and rubbing off the brown

husk on three sides to reveal the white kernel inside. As each die showed only two values, sometimes cowrie shells were used instead.

The age of *thaayam* itself is unknown, but these square-shaped race games, in which the pieces move around a labyrinthine path, have been played for centuries. The board for one of them, the *ashtapada* of eight squares by eight, was used as the board for chess in the first millennium.

The game is notable in that a small element of memory is needed to play. Dice are thrown several times, and the individual scores must be remembered for later use.

HOW TO PLAY

Thaayam is played by two, three or four people, on a board of five squares by five. The central square is marked with a cross and called the *keep*. The middle square on each edge of the board is also marked in the same way, and is called a *palace*, one belonging to each player. As each player has four pieces, and pieces may sit together in the same square, the board for this game needs to be big enough to accommodate many pieces in each square.

Beginning the Game

1. The game begins with all the pieces off the board.

2. Each player throws the dice. The score is the number of white sides up, with none scoring 8. If cowries are used, the mouths are counted instead.

3. The player who throws highest starts the game, play passing to her left when she has completed her turn.

Moving the Pieces

4. A player starts her turn by

throwing the dice repeatedly, noting the throws made, until a two or three is thrown.

5. Once the series of throws ending in two or three is complete, the pieces can be entered and moved, using in any order the throws noted.

6. A piece not already on the board can only be entered using a throw of 1, in which case it is placed on the player's own palace.

7. If a player has no pieces on the board, any throws made before a 1 are discarded.

8. A piece already on the board may be advanced along it using any of the throws individually or combined.

9. The order in which the numbers were thrown is not significant except as noted in rule 7.

10. A piece does not move twice; when combining two or more throws to move one piece, the piece moves the total number of squares without stopping on any intervening squares.

11. If one of the throws is 1, a piece may, how-

ever, enter the board and advance in the same turn.

12. Each player's pieces follow a path starting on her own palace. The route is shown in Illustration 1.

13. Every throw in a series must be used, if possible.

14. Any number of pieces may occupy the same square.

15. If two pieces land on the palace opposite a player's own, she can declare them *twins*.

16. Twins move together as one piece, but for half the number of squares scored. If an odd score is used to move the twins, the result is rounded down (e.g. throws of $8+3=11$ could be used to move twins 5 spaces, wasting one point).

17. There are no special rules for triplets or quadruplets.

Capturing Enemies

18. If a piece lands on a square occupied by enemy pieces, those enemy pieces are removed from the board and handed back to their owner (or owners).

19. Such captured pieces must re-enter the board as if they had never been on it.

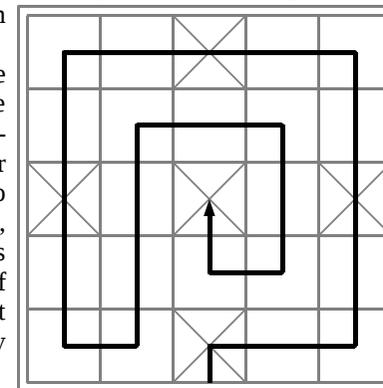


Illustration 1: the *thaayam* board, showing the palaces and keep, and the direction of movement for the south player. Other players' paths are rotations of this, starting in their own palace.