



ASTRONOMICAL TABLE

The Astronomical Table is a game that enters fully into what is called the Tabulae family, a series of games derived from the oldest Roman Tabula, considered the ancestor of modern backgammon.

Disappeared from the European area with the fall of the Roman Empire, the board games returned with the Crusaders from the east where in the meantime they had spread to China and Japan.



Folio 97 verso, Libros de los juegos, 1283

In 1283 Alfonso X “el Sabio”, king of Spain, concluded the work on his *Libros de los juegos*, an accurate research carried out by a team of scholars and scribes that the sovereign directed in person and to which he contributed personally by also participating in the drafting of some parts and the final revision of the text. As work lasted perhaps more than twenty years, as a certain date we have in fact the one in which it was completed, precisely 1283, but we do not know when this research work really began.

In this work, the Spanish king described all the most popular games at the time and the game of Tabula indicated fourteen variants; famous became those for more players: the Table of the Four Seasons and the Astronomical Table, respectively for up to four and seven players.

The characteristic of the Astronomical Table lies above all in its strong link to the number 7, considered magical and auspicious: seven are played, as are seven sides of the board and the positions of each side, seven are the pawns of each player and seven the redemption stakes, as many as the pawns, and seven is the bank's stake, the sum of the stakes of each player placed on the table for the winner. Seven pawns, seven sides, seven squares as seven were the planets in the sky and which are then brought back with their slice of sky on the board.

Unlike the game of the Tabula, this denotes greater complexity as the game strategies change as the number of players increases and the random factor of the roll of the dice almost loses its importance with respect to the movement logic to be implemented on the basis of the roll. . The game then becomes even faster and more fun, complete with alliances and betrayals between players.

It should be noted that the gambling note of the stakes recalls the typical medieval practice of redemption which, in all probability, was inspired by the creator of the mechanics: in fact, by capturing a pawn, the player who lost it he can redeem it by paying it with one of the coins at his disposal, just as it was done when a knight was captured in battle: the family paid a ransom for his freedom.

Although its origin is uncertain, it seems that this precise evolution was desired by Alfonso X of Spain himself, very tied to the esoteric meaning of the number 7, it is certain that it remained in vogue for almost half a millennium, reaching the gaming tables of the 1700s.

PURPOSE OF THE GAME

The aim of the game is to win the stake paid to the bank by the players, eliminating all the opposing pieces.

GAME'S RULES

At the beginning, each player has 8 tokens and 7 pawns of the color corresponding to the chosen planet. Small historical digression: in the eleventh century, also the Sun and the Moon were considered “planets” and like all the others visible to the naked eye in the night sky for this reason we represented the map of the Earth of the time in the central well of our Astronomical Table.

- Saturn: black
- Jupiter: green
- Mars: red
- Sun: yellow
- Venus: purple
- Mercury: blue
- Moon: white

You start by arranging for each player the pawns along the side of the segment in the direction of the center in correspondence with the chosen planet, then you choose the player who starts the game by throwing a dice.

Whoever scores the highest starts, then proceeds clockwise as in common table games.

It is possible to use the central well of the Astronomical Table as a dice roll.



Initial positioning

Movement, capture and redemption of the pieces, victory

1. The three dice available are rolled and a pawn moves according to the result obtained.
2. More pieces of the same player can stop on the same square, represented by the loops arranged along the perimeter of the board.

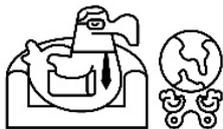
3. The first loop should not be calculated as a “step” of the movement as long as there are two or more pieces of the player of that color along the starting axis. It becomes an effective square from the moment there is only one pawn left at the start, right on the first square.
4. If during the movement the pawn ends up in a loop occupied by only one opponent’s pawn, the latter is eliminated from the game and the owner pays a stake to the player who captured it in order to be able to put it back into play from the beginning of the course.
5. If the pawn ends its movement in a loop occupied by two or more opposing pawns, it cannot complete the move and the player will have to move another pawn. If all the pieces at his disposal cannot complete the move, the player passes the turn.
6. The player cannot pass the turn if at least one of his pawns can perform the movement indicated by the dice.
7. There are no escape routes or “safe houses”, therefore the pawns exiting the starting axis can only continue their rounds across the sky even several times until the end of the game or until they are captured by an opponent.
8. The player who remains last with at least one pawn on the board wins.

GAME’S VARIATIONS

There don’t seem to be many variations, however being a game derived from the older Tabula, the basic mechanics alone would turn out to be a variant.

However, we find the application of a couple of variants of medieval origin interesting:

1. Playing without the ante tokens. In this way the game speeds up a lot because the pieces cannot be put back into play after capture and, although the game ends when there is only one color left on the board, the winner is actually the player who has captured the most opposing pieces..
2. The scoring of the dice can be managed as in the Table of the Four Seasons, using it to move a pawn of the total points obtained, or two pawns of the score of a single die for one and the sum of the results of the other two dice for the second or, again, move a pawn for each result rolled by the three dice.
3. The combination of both variants described above is itself a third interesting game variant for you to try.



THE ADVICE OF THE DODO

Always watch your back and, above all, do not mortgage the nest!