



TERNI LAPILLI

Terni lapilli is a game of ancient Rome, for two players, also known as Rota, due to the circular shape of its “tabula”, the board game, which remind to us a wheel.



Tabula di Terni lapilli incisa su pietra ritrovata a Ostia Antica (Roma)

In fact the archaeological findings show that was designed in many forms, in the table, at intersections, but the most common shape is that of a circle. The findings are numerous, on the amphitheaters, on the floors of public monuments and on the steps of numerous theaters.

It is the ancestor of the modern Tic Tac Toe, but with different rules that make the game much more interesting than the current version. Given its simplicity, it is recommended as a preparatory game for the logic of the board game.

Terni lapilli is mentioned by Ovid both in his “Ars Amatoria” and in “Tristia”. The most accredited quote is that on the transience of life comparable to a game of Terni lapilli. In the same works, the Latin author describes a game plan, however it is the opinion of many historians that it refers to another game, as he describes the game plan as “divided into as many sections as there are months of the year”, but we must remember that Ovid wrote these works before Julius Caesar reformed the calendar (which previously was, precisely, only ten months).

The reconstruction of the rules, on the other hand, is much more current than you think. None of the ancient authors or historians of the time wrote anything about it, however the Roman Empire was very extensive and many caravan routes departed from the borders to unknown countries. We know this from some findings, including incense burners and above all Roman coins also in China!

It is therefore not surprising that in Ghana games have been found still in use by the Ashanti who say they arrived there from beyond the desert (the Sahara, n.d.a.) and from Ghana that we were able to reconstruct the rules of the game.

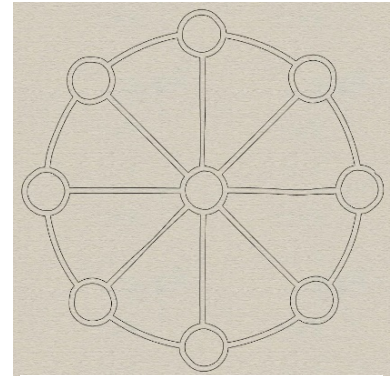
The most interesting feature of this game is that despite being pure strategy it is very quick to come to a conclusion and can never end in a draw, it must always have a winner.

PURPOSE OF THE GAME

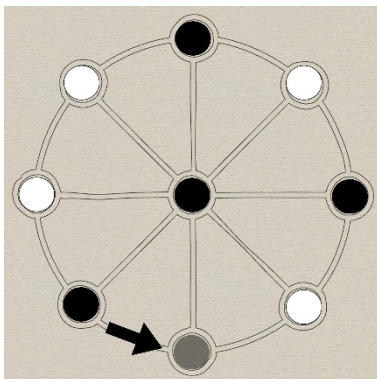
The purpose of the game is to place three checkers in a row along the circular edge or along the diameters.

GAME'S RULES

1. Each player has three pawns, you start the game with the free game plan and decide who starts, if you want you can rely on chance by throwing a coin.
2. The players take turns placing a pawn on a free square, trying to put them all in a row and preventing the opponent from doing the same.
3. Once all the pieces have been positioned, always taking turns moving them one at a time on the adjacent boxes following the lines (towards the center or towards the outside and along the edges).



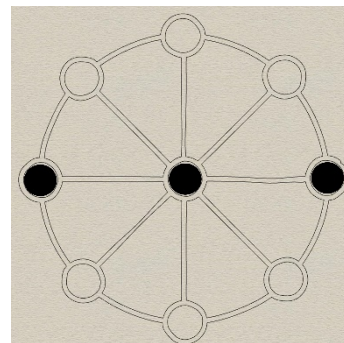
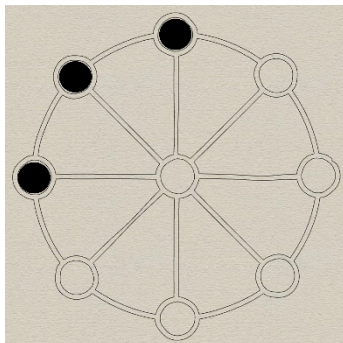
"Tabula" (board game) of Terni lapilli



Example of move and victory

lines (towards the center or towards the outside and along the edges).

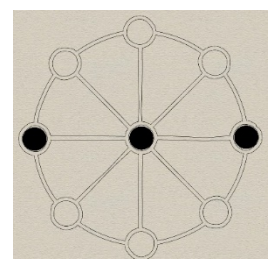
4. The players cannot skip the pieces, neither their own nor the opponent's, and the opponent's pieces cannot be eliminated. A pawn can only be moved to unoccupied cells. Two pieces cannot occupy the same cell.
5. Players cannot skip rounds.
6. The first player to form a row of three pieces wins.

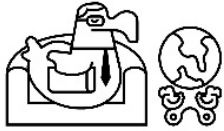


Examples of possible wins

GAME'S VARIATIONS

An interesting variant to apply is that of limiting the possibility of winning only if three pieces are placed along one of the diameters of the playing field and not along the edge.





THE ADVICE OF THE DODO

If you decide to play with the variant that limits the cases of victory, the player who goes first will always try to occupy the central cell first. In this case you will try to position your pieces in such a way that they are not blocked, but that, nevertheless, block the central cell.

In both versions of the game, occupying the central square first can be fatal...