### Ancient Roman Board Games

In the Roman world (ca. 500 BC to AD 500), it was a common pastime to sit down on a street, or on the steps of a temple, theater, or gymnasium, and play (for fun and/or profit) board games scratched into stone or soil. Evidence for these games is found throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, from Hadrian’s Wall in Britain to the southern desert frontier in North Africa, and from Spain to Palestine. These are all two-person games.

**Round Merils, or ‘3-men’s Morris’:**
- Each player has 3 tokens.
- Players alternate placing a token at any of the 9 spots on the board where the lines intersect.
- After all tokens are placed, players alternate moving a token to an adjacent spot each turn, trying to form a row of 3 of their own tokens diagonally (holding the central spot is necessary).
- Each player tries to prevent the other from forming a row of 3.
- A player may not ‘skip’ moving a piece on their turn.
- The first player to form a row of 3 wins.

**Merils, or ‘9-men’s Morris’:**
A more complex version of round merils. Pure strategy.
- Each player has 9 tokens.
- Players alternate placing a token at any of the 24 spots on the board where the lines intersect. This is the ‘place’ phase.
- After all tokens are placed comes the ‘move’ phase. Players alternate moving a token to an adjacent spot each turn, trying to form a row of three of their own tokens along any horizontal or vertical line (but not diagonally).
- Each time a player forms a vertical or horizontal line of 3 in the ‘move’ phase, they may remove one of their opponent’s tokens.
- A player may not ‘skip’ moving a piece on their turn.
- When a player is reduced to 3 tokens, they may ‘jump’ their token to a free spot.
- The player who reduces their opponent to just 1 token wins. In case of a stalemate, the player with the most tokens wins.

**Ludus latrunculorum, “the game of little mercenaries”:**
- The board is a grid of squares, and can have any number of rows/columns. 8x8 is common.
- The number of tokens for each player also varies; for an 8x8 grid, 15 tokens will do.
- In the ‘place’ phase, players alternate strategically putting their tokens on free squares, two at a time.
- In the ‘move’ phase, players move one piece, one square at a time, either horizontally or vertically (not diagonally).
- A player may not ‘skip’ moving a piece on their turn.
- If, through one of these moves, a player ‘traps’ an opponent’s token between two of their own pieces, the ‘trapped’ token is removed from the board.
- After a capture, the trapper gets a bonus move.
- A player may themselves move between two opponent’s tokens without being captured, but if the opponent moves one trapping piece away and then back to ‘trap’ it, the token is captured.
- The player who reduces their opponent to just 1 token wins. In case of a stalemate, the player with the most pieces on the board wins.

**Duodecim Scripta, “12 marks”:**
A mix of strategy and luck. A *race*.
- Each player has 15 tokens. There are 3 dice.
- The game board has three rows of 12 spaces each.
- The object is to move all of one’s tokens onto the board, progress along the course of squares to the end, and then off the board again, before one’s opponent does.
- Each player starts at the opposite end of the middle row (marked above by a red or green ‘X’).
- Each player rolls 3 dice and moves tokens onto their half of the ‘A’ row according to the value of each die, or their values combined (see below). When a player has moved all their tokens onto the ‘A’ row, they may begin advancing along the path B-C-D-E as noted by the arrows above.
- When a player has moved all their tokens onto the D-E row, they may begin to move their tokens off the board, by exact roll to move beyond the end of ‘E’.
- If 2 or more tokens of a player occupy a space (and there is no limit), the other player may not land on that space.
- If a single token occupies a space and another player rolls to move their token there, that single token is removed from the board and must be re-entered at the start of row ‘A’ before the assaulted player can make another move.
- If the die values are moved in combination, a token must be able to land on the spaces marked by each constituent die & must be free or occupied by only one opponent’s token. i.e., if one rolls a 1, 5, 6 and wishes to move one token 4 spaces, that token must be able to land safely on the 3rd, 8th, and 14th spaces.
- The game board spaces often consisted of letters that formed clever 36-letter phrases, such as *VENARI LAVARI LUDERE RIDERE OCCEST VIVERE* (‘to hunt, bathe, play, laugh: this is (what it means) to live!’ from Timgad in Algeria), or *TABULA CIRCUS BICTUS RECEDE LUDERE NESCIS* (“the board is a racecourse; having lost, withdraw! You don’t know how to play,” from Rome).