

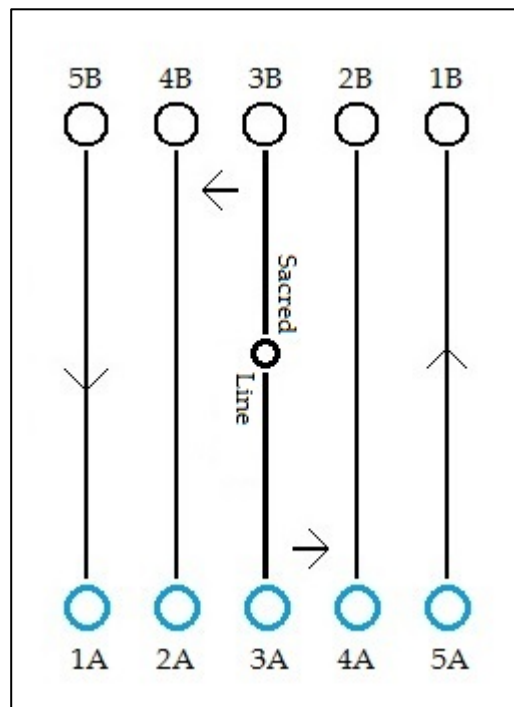
Pente grammai

The game of "five lines": knock-off mode

A game for 2 players.

Equipment: 5 counters for each player (blue and white), 1 die for both players, 1 game board.

The board consists of 5 parallel lines. The middle line (3A-3B) is called the "sacred line". A small circle in the middle of the "sacred line" divides it into two halves. At the two ends of each line, a circle indicates where the counters are to be placed. The counters move from one such point to the next in a counterclockwise direction.



Game Setup

On the screen, you can see the board from above. At the bottom left, the five blue counters are ready for you. At the top right are the five white counters for your opponent or the computer. To the left of the board is the die. You introduce your counters in the lower row (1A - 5A) counterclockwise, i.e. from left to right, your opponent in the upper row (1B - 5B) from right to left.

Objective of the game

The objective of the game is to place all 5 of your counters on the opposite side of the "sacred line". That is, player A on side B and player B on side A. The first player to do this wins the game.

Game play

As you can see on the screen, at the beginning of the game the counters lie outside the playing field. The player with the blue counters, i.e. you!, plays first. The players then take turns to move a piece of their own colour.

The player who has the move rolls the die by clicking on it with the cursor. According to the result of the die roll, he moves one of his counters to a point on his side. To do this, click on any counter

and drag it to the point. If it is 1, it lands on point 1, if it is 2, it lands on point 2, and so on. If it is 6, it moves to point 1 on the opposite side. Then it is the opponent's turn. The following rules apply for the moves:

1. On each point, only 1 counter may be placed. Only the "sacred line" can take any number of pieces from both players.
2. You may pass over already placed counters.
3. If a counter can move to a point occupied by an adversary piece, this stone is sent back out of the game. Counters standing on the sacred line are safe from capture.
4. Bringing counters into play always has priority over the moving of already placed pieces. If a die roll does not allow introducing a counter, because the corresponding point is already occupied, another counter may be moved. This is the procedure until all 10 checkers are on the board. The pieces then move counterclockwise around the board in a circular movement.
5. Zugzwang: It is compulsory to move a piece, if possible, even if a counter has to be moved away from the "sacred line". If no move is possible, the player misses his turn.

End of the game

The first player to collect all his 5 pieces on the opposing side of the "sacred line" is the winner.

Our proposals for the rules

Important information concerning the game of five-lines come from the lexicon of Pollux (2nd century A.D.). He describes the board with the 5 lines, states that each player has 5 counters and that the middle line was called "Sacred Line". He also explains the proverb "to move one's stone from the Sacred Line" (9, 97). The aim of the game is derived from a commentary by Eustathios (12th century A.D.) on Homer's *Odyssey* (1397, 28). Terracotta game boards together with dice were found during excavations in Athens and the surrounding area. Whether stones could be captured is not clear from the sources, but remains a possibility.

Further reading

- Ulrich Schädler, *Pente grammai – the Ancient Greek Board Game Five Lines*, in Jorge Nuno Silva (ed.), *Board Game Studies Colloquium XI, Proceedings*, Lisbon 2009, p. 169-192
- Stephen Kidd, *Pente Grammai and the «Holy Line»*, *Board Game Studies Journal* 11, 2017, p. 83-99.
- Véronique Dasen (éd.), *Ludique. Jouer dans l'Antiquité*, catalogue de l'exposition, Lugdunum, musée et théâtres romains, 20 juin-1er décembre 2019, Gent, 2019.