Ludus Duodecim Scripta

Entertainment on a day-to-day basis, at home or at the bath-house centred on board games. Archaeologists often find game counters on sites in Leicester. These were usually made of bone and occasionally glass, stone and recycled pottery. Some were manufactures as sets in workshops, others were made in a ad hoc fashion from recycled materials. Common games included *duodecim scripta*, *ludus latrunculorum*, Rota and Nine Men's Morris.

Duodecim Scripta is an ancient Roman game which combines elements of luck and strategy, similar to backgammon. The name means 'Game of Twelve Inscriptions' which refers to the fact that some game boards had a latin letter written for each cell instead of a circle. The three rosettes in the centre of the board were markers where players would put coins that were being gambled on. The earliest reference to the game is in the 1st century AD.

Many of the Roman game counters and dice found in Leicester would have been used in games like this. Detailed rules have not survived but the game was reconstructed in the 1930s by HJR Murray and Roland Austin.

You will need a copy of the game board on the back of this sheet, 30 counters, 15 black and 15 white and three 6-sided dice, the game is for two players.

The board consists of three rows of 12 cells each. Many boards contained funny statements. This one reads in Latin: Jump Up, Push Off, You Can, Not Win, Idiot, Give Up.

Each player gets 15 counters, either white or black. The three 6-sided dice are rolled simultaneously on each turn.

1. All pieces start off the board. Players decide who goes first by lot or by agreement. Player 1 starts at 1A, Player 2 at 1B.

2. A player rolls all three dice simultaneously. Each die shows the number of cells to move by, either three different pieces, one for each die, or one or two pieces in sequence.

3. For each number rolled the player can choose to do one of the following:

   a) Enter a new piece onto the board into cells 1a-6a or 1b-6b, based on the number rolled on one die.

   b) Move a piece that is already on the board by the number of points on one die.

   c) If all of the player's pieces are in cells 25-30 they can move a piece off the board by moving it the exact number of spaces needed to remove it off the board.

   d) If a pieces was knocked off the board by the opponent, then it must be re-entered onto cell 1-6 based on the number rolled on one of the dice.

4. Pieces of the same colour can be stacked on top of each other to an unlimited height.

5. If two or more pieces are stacked on top each other they are safe. The opponent's pieces may not land on that cell.

6. If the player's piece lands onto a cell with only one opponent's piece in it, the opponent's piece gets knocked off the board and must be re-entered back from the beginning onto cells 1-6, on the opponent's next turn, before any other piece is moved.

7. A player must enter all 15 of their pieces onto cells 1a-6a or 1b-6b on their own side, before the pieces can be moved further down the board.

8. A player must place all of their 15 pieces onto cells 25-30, before the pieces can be moved off the board.

9. The player who moves all of their 15 pieces off the board first wins.

Roman stone and bone gaming pieces and bone die from Leicester.

Marble Duodecim Scripta board. This example was found near the agora (market) in Aphrodisias, Turkey. It dates to the 2nd century AD.

ABEMVS ♡ INCENA

PVLLVM ⊕ PISCEM

PERNAM PAONEM

BENA TORES

This example of a Duodecim Scripta board, from a tavern in Rome, shows a menu served for dinner. The game is possibly disguised like this to hide the fact that gambling (which was forbidden) was taking place on the premises.

The inscription reads:

ABEMUS INCENA	We have for Dinner
PULLUM PISCEM	Chicken, Fish
PERNAM PAONEM	Ham, Peacock
BENA TORES	Bon Appetit

Strategy

The main stratagem in *Duodecim Scripta* is choosing moves that will stack pieces to keep them safe, and not leave any pieces by themselves on a cell which puts them at risk of being knocked out.