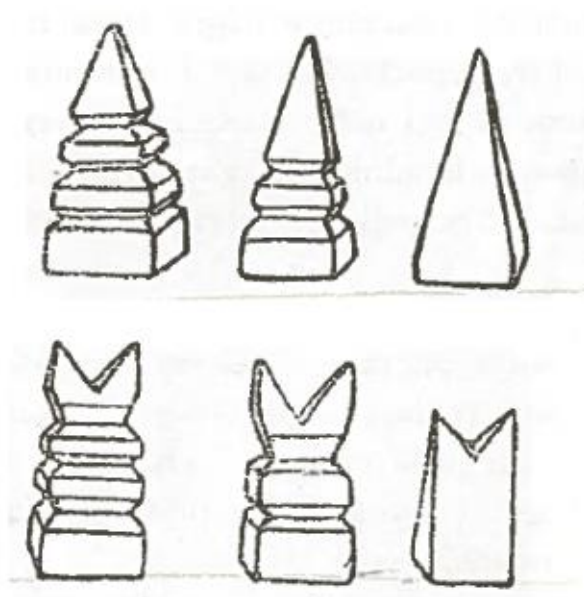


HOW TO PLAY

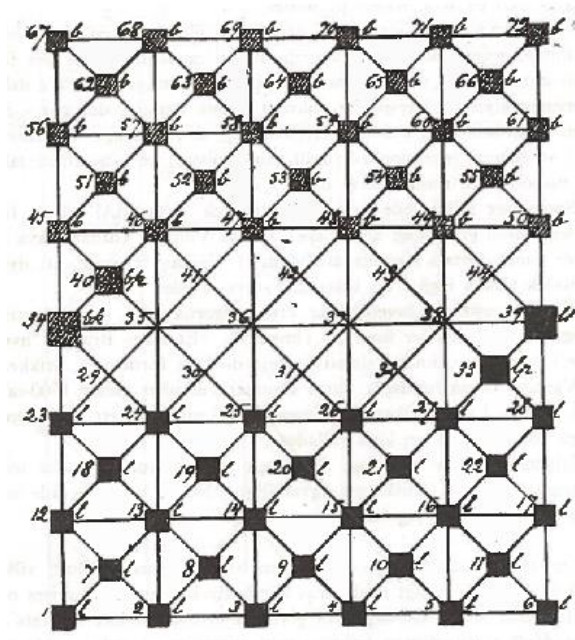
DABLO

Southern Sámi and Coast Sámi variants.



Mikkel Berg-Nordlie, 2018

DABLO is a name used for several closely related Sámi board games. The name just means “board game” or “gameboard” (South Sámi *daabloe*, Lule Sámi *dábllo*). Outsiders who wrote about Sámi culture interpreted these words as referring to this particular game, rather than being general terms for board games. In North Sámi, the game has been called CUHKKA (pronounced approximately *tsoohkka*).



Different variants of the game are known from the North Coast, Lule, Pite, Ume, and South Sámi areas. This booklet gives the rules for two variants that were played respectively on Sápmi’s northern coast and in its southern areas. It is unknown how long dablo games have been played among the Sámi. The variants in this booklet were described as played during the 1800s and early 1900s.

Players familiar with draughts/checkers will find the dablo games somewhat familiar, and this is not coincidental: draughts/checkers were developed from the Middle-Eastern game *alquerque*, which is a relative of dablo.

The name “dablo” bears similarity to the name of another Sámi board game, *tablut*. Tablut is not a part of the “dablo family” of games, but instead related to the “tafl games” that were played among other North European peoples during the Middle Ages. The words “dablo” and “tablut” are, however, related: just as “dablo” comes from the words *daabloe* and *dábllo* (“board games”), “tablut” comes from the word *dábllo* (“to play a board game”).

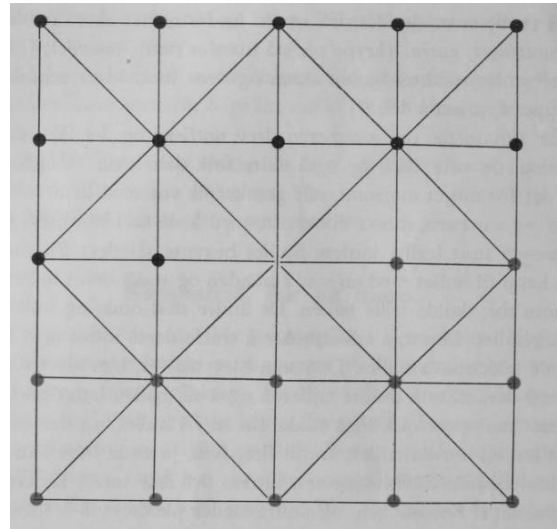
Coast Sámi Dablo

This game is traditional to the Sámi in parts of coastal North Troms and West Finnmark, for example Návuoŋna, Liidnavuoŋna, and Ivgovuotna (Kvænangen, Lerresfjord, and Lyngenfjord). This is the game in the dablo family that is most easy to learn, but it is not necessarily easy to win: like all dablo games, it is a strategy game with no element of chance.

Board and pieces

Coast Sámi dablo is played on a *cuhkka* board, a board of 2*2 squares where each square contains four lines that cross each other in the centre. The board hence has 5*5 points where lines intersect.

Each player has twelve pieces, known as “men” (*olbmát*, singular *olmmái*). At the beginning of the game, the players cover the two nearest rows of points with their pieces, and also the two rightmost points of the middle row. Hence, only the middle point of the board is empty when the game begins.



Actions

Each player must perform one action during their turn: *moving* one of their pieces, or using one of their pieces to *capture* an opposing piece.

Moving

A piece may be moved to any adjacent and unoccupied point that is connected with a line to the point where it is standing. The piece can be moved in any direction.

Capturing

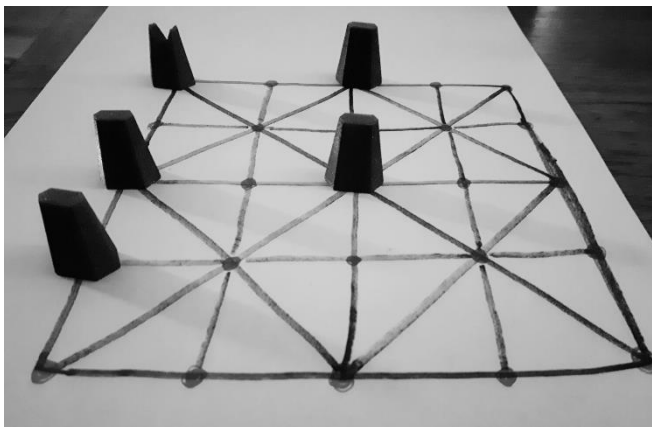
You capture (*goddit* – literally “kill”) an opposing man by jumping over it with one of your own men. You can only jump over a piece that is standing on a point adjacent to the point where your piece is standing, there has to be a

The Sámi author Anders Larsen (1870-1949), who knew the game from his childhood, described the rules in his book *Mearrasámiid birra* (“About the Coast Sámi”, 1950). The drawing of a board for *cuhkka* on this page is from Larsen’s book. This dablo variant and the Middle-Eastern dablo relative *alquerque* are nearly, but not quite, identical. Firstly and most importantly, *alquerque* has a rule stating that if you *can* capture an opposing piece then you *must* capture it. This rule is absent from Coast Sámi dablo. Secondly, the less important “*cuhkka* rule” (see: “Winning and losing”) is absent from *alquerque*.

vacant point behind the jumped piece for your piece to land on, and the jump must be in a straight line. You may jump in any direction. If your piece is positioned to jump again when it lands, it may do so immediately during the same turn.

Winning and losing

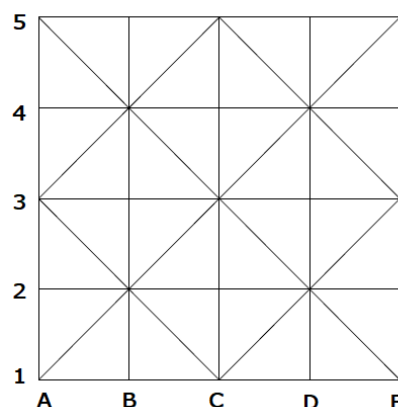
The game is won when the opposing player has no more pieces left, or when the opposing player's only remaining piece has been made *cuhkkeka* ("broken", "destroyed"). The last piece is said to be *cuhkkeka* when it cannot be moved without ending up in a position where it can be jumped (see picture).



Additional rules

Coast Sámi dablo may last forever if both players play very defensively. Some additional rules may help avoid this. Such rules can be for example:

- A player may not repeat a movement three times in a row. For example, if a player moves B2-A1-B2-A1-B2, moving A1 next time would constitute an illegal move.
- A game is declared lost by both players if a certain number of moves are made without any captures.



Southern Sámi Dablo

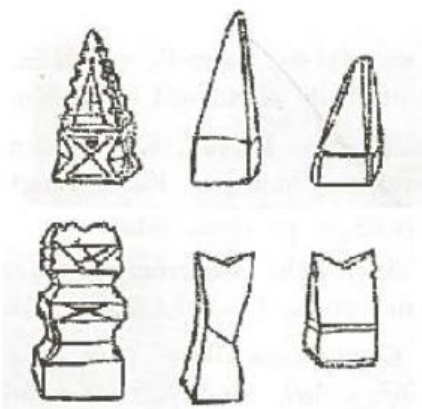
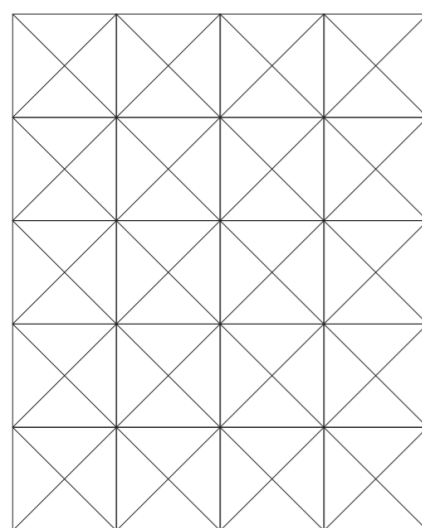
The dablo games of the South and Ume Sámi are more complex than the variant described above. They involve several types of pieces, and can have other rules for winning and losing the game in addition to capturing all your opponent's pieces. The type of dablo presented below is traditional to areas such as Frööstege, Sjieltie, Vualtjere, and Aarporte (Frostviken, Åsele, Vilhelmina, and Hattfjelldal).

Board and pieces

The board consists of a number of squares with two crossed lines inside each one. The size of the board varies. The version used here has 4*5 squares, giving a total of 50 points where the lines intersect.

Each player has an army of warriors (*dåarohke*, plural *dåarohkhe*) — exactly how many depends on the size of the board. Each player also has two royal pieces: a king (*gånka*) and a prince (*gånkan elkie*).

The two armies are distinguished by the shape of the pieces: one side have sharpened pieces (*tjuppek*), the other side have notched pieces (*skarrjok*). The pieces can also be distinguished by color: for example red, brown, black, or natural wood or bone color. In modern versions, black vs. white is common. Traditional names for the pointed army and the notched army are *aalmogh* and *daatjh*, meaning “the people” (the Sámi) and “the non-Sámi”.

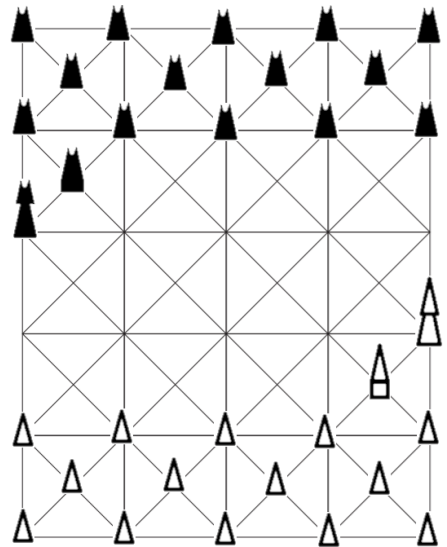


South Sámi dablo was taught by two Frööstege Sámi, Anders and Hanna Nilsson, to the researcher Niels Keyland, who published the rules in his article «Dablot preijesne och dablot duoljesne. Tvänna lappska spel från Frostviken, förklarade och avbildade» (*Etnologiska studier*, 1921). Three of the illustrations in this booklet are from Keyland's article: the drawing of dablo pieces from Frööstege on the front page, the second page's diagram of the Nilsson family's board with pieces set up ready to play, and this page's drawing of dablo pieces from Vualtjere or Dearnä (Tärnaby). Peter Michaelsen has done very important research on different variants of dablo. The South Sámi dablo rules in this booklet are based on the Nilsson family's rules, but also incorporates two other rules that are mentioned in Michaelsen's article «Dablo – A Sámi game» (*Variant Chess* 64, August 2010). Firstly, a rule stating that you lose the game if you lose your king. This rule is also known from Frööstege. The second rule is from nearby Sjieltie, and states that pieces may only move straight forward or diagonally forward.

Before the game begins, each player places their warriors on the nearest rows of points. After having placed out all their warriors, the prince is placed on the rightmost point of the row directly in front of the warriors. The king is then placed on the rightmost point of the row directly in front of the prince's row.

Actions

Each player must perform one action during their turn: *moving* one of their pieces, or using one of their pieces to *capture* an opposing piece.

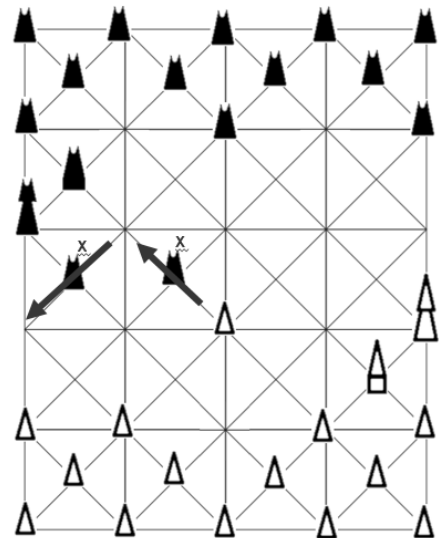


Moving

A piece may be moved to an adjacent and unoccupied point that is connected with a line to the point where it is standing. The piece can be moved either straight forward or diagonally forward – it may not move backwards or sideways.

Capturing

You capture an opposing piece by jumping over it with one of your own pieces. You can only jump over a piece that is standing on a point adjacent to the point where your piece is standing, there has to be a vacant point behind the jumped piece for your piece to land on, and the jump must be in a straight line. As opposed to moving, you may jump in any direction. If your piece is positioned to jump again when it lands, it may do so immediately during the same turn.



In the southern variants of dablo, pieces may not capture enemy pieces that outrank them. This means that the soldiers may only capture soldiers, the princes may capture both soldiers and princes but not kings, and the kings may capture any piece.

Winning and losing

You win by capturing all your opponent's pieces, but also if you manage to capture your opponent's king piece. This can only be done by using your own king piece,

but you may manage to surprise your opponent by “serial jumping” over lower-ranking enemy pieces until the enemy king is within your reach.

You also win if your opponent can’t perform any actions. Since in this variant of dablo the pieces may only move straight forward or diagonally forward except for when they capture opposing pieces, they risk getting stuck — either because they’ve reached the end of the board and aren’t able to jump backwards, or because they’ve been “walled in” by the opponent’s pieces.

Strategy in this dablo variant often involves keeping your own forward-moving tempo as low as possible, and using a combination of captures and blockades to limit your opponent’s available moves. Ideally, all your opponent’s available moves should either put one of their pieces in a situation where it is vulnerable for capture, or force one of their pieces to advance towards a “dead end” where it will eventually get stuck.

Additional rules

A rule that is not traditional to dablo, but known from some variants of another Sámi board game, *sáhkeu*, is that you lose if you only have your king left.