Jama Musse Jama

Shax
The Preferred game of our camel-herders and other traditional African entertainments
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I am deeply indebted to all those who helped me in the development of this game. I would like to thank all those who helped me in the development of this game. I would like to thank all those who helped me in the development of this game.

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She did much with her grace. She did much with her grace. She did much with her grace.
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*Note: In the singular 3rd person, the masculine personal pronoun and adjective *he* and *his* are used instead of the feminine *she* and *her*, as, traditionally, *Shax* and similar games were predominately played by men.*
Chapter I. Shax: The Game

1.1 Introduction and Background

Board games are played on a specially arranged surface with pieces, whose powers of move and capture are defined by the rules of each game. The surface on which the game is played is commonly known as the 'board', although it is not necessarily made of wood or other material, and is in fact, in many parts of the world, more often marked out on a level piece of ground whenever a game is about to be played. The pieces are sometimes specifically fabricated for the purpose of playing, but, in many cases, seeds, nuts and other easily available elements are used.

John Jackson described "Abstract Board Games" in his book "A player's Guide to Table Games", as they are "... simple to learn (but often hard to master) and exceedingly narrow (but often deep) ... Abstract games are for those who like their strategy and tactics pure and unsullied by dice or chance cards, who find complicated directions unnecessary, a variety of equipment distracting, and realism irrelevant". He included his list of Abstract Board Games like Chess, Mancalà, Go, etc.

Shax (pronounced Shahr), the game here presented, is an abstract game according to the above description, and it is a wholly mathematical game which has as much scope as Chess.

Shax is one of the most popular strategy-thinking games played in the Horn of Africa, particularly in areas inhabited by Somalis. This game is known by various names in the different regions, but Shax is the most common and popular name. The Shax game belongs to the three-in-a-row family, which are well known and played throughout Africa as well as in other parts of the world. Shax is known also as Jare (meaning "cut") in some regions.

In Somaliland, in order to play Shax, one needs to have only two sets of pebbles, each set consisting of 12 pieces. The game board is formed through lines (or rings) traced on the sand. The simple and readily available game pieces has, perhaps, contributed to the
game's survival for centuries.

Games similar to Shax are played in other African regions. In Lesotho, for example, a Shax-like game called Morabaraba is played (see Zaslavsky's Africa Counts [14]). The difference between Shax and Morabaraba is basically in the ending rules of the game. The Ashan people of Guinea play a game similar to Shax, a 3 X 3, three-in-row game called Achi. Also in Asia, games similar to Shax are played. For example in Afghanistan, they used a Shax-like game, called Kitar.

Though a little different, Shax can be assimilated to with some strategy games played in Europe such as Nine Men's Morris [U.K.], Mühle [Germany], Filetto or Linea [Italy]. All these European games share with Shax the design of the board, but they have different rules. This difference is sometimes based on the number of pebbles used at the beginning of the game (e.g. Filetto) or at the end of a game (e.g. Mühle). See, for example, [3] for the difference between Shax and Mühle.

The Italian Filetto is a game with many variants. It is played with different kinds of boards. One of its variants, Tria, has a board design similar to that of Shax. The name Tria has probably a Greek origin [6]. The difference between Shax and Tria is that a Tria game is played with only three pebbles for each player, and the game ends whenever a player computes a three-in-a-row. When Shax is played with 12 pebbles for each player, different rules apply and the game will have a different conclusion.

In Europe, the game has similar names in different languages, for example: Nine Men's - Mill or Morris games in English, Méréilles in French, Morels in Spanish, Mühle in German, and Mølle in Norwegian. Although some scholars indicated that the name of the game may have derived from an old French word "merel" (counter), it seems that the term is a linguistic adaptation of the word "Moor" - the name of the Arabic people from North Africa who may have introduced the game into southern Europe. These games reached their peak of popularity in Europe during the 14th century.

According to some historians, Chinese players...

The most ancient European game board for Shax is dated in c. 1440 BC. This board testifies to the Greek period.

Alfonso X, King of Castile from 1221-1248, supports the theory of The Book of Games, which contains photographs of Shax.

The origin of the game is uncertain. Its roots are testified by many variants on the theme. According to the 13th Century Spanish society of Somontano, this is one of the history of the game. According to the game first appeared.

The first Europeans to visit the people used the Shax. Sir Roger Burton, in his reports, strongly indicated the Shax as a game for herdsmen in Sudan.

Burton wrote: "The Shax is the best pastime for a lazy man; it does not take up his time. Sometimes they are playing or they are passing the time. But it is not for an hour after hour. If the men are tired of the men, till they are not interested in the game."[2]
According to some authors (for example Thomas Hyde 1908), the Chinese played games similar to Shax some time c. 500 BC.

The most ancient documentation of Shax-like games, however, is a game board found in a grave at Kurna, Egypt. The board was made in c. 1440 BC. Although it might have been made some time later, this board testifies to the existence of the game in Africa before that period.

Alfonso X, King of Castille, known also as El Sabio (The Learned), 1221-1248, supervised a group of artists and writers in the production of The Book of Games. The pictures shown in Figure 1 are photographs of Shax-like game details from that book.

The origin of the game is probably not precisely known, but its African roots are testified by the widespread presence of the game and its variants on the Continent. The group supervised by King Alfonso X in the 13th Century was formed by Jewish and Morish artists. The society of Somaliland, which is based on orality, lacks written records of the history of Shax, and this fact makes it difficult to ascertain when the game first originated in Somaliland.

The first Europeans who visited Somaliland documented that the local people used to play Shax in many parts of the country. Sir Richard Burton, in his book First footsteps in East Africa, published in 1849, indicated the Shax game as one of the favorite hobbies of the herdsmen in Somaliland.

Burton wrote "The herdsmen wander about, watching the cattle and tasting nothing but the pure element or a pinch of coarse tobacco. Sometimes they play at Shahh, Shantrah, and other games, of which they are passionately fond: with a board formed of lines traced in the sand, and bits of dry wood or camel's earth acting pieces, they spend hour after hour, every looker-on vocifering his opinion, and catching at the men, till apparently the two players are those least interested in the game."[2]
There are also some variations of Shax in other parts of the world. The most widespread is the game of Lek, which is sometimes referred to as Somaliland.

When two players want to play, one of them starts by rolling a die and the other one gathers. The players use beans for this game.

At the beginning of the game, the player computes the sum of the numbers (in the case of Lek)

The following lines are part of the rules: "The intelligent man, an expert in the art of 'race' for a new generation...

Layli Goobaley
Nin garaadiyo
Geelu kugu yuu...

While in other games, the board (made with metal or wood) is often not usually have a specific number of holes because this kind of board is more flexible. A nomad can make it with the help of someone. These are often called toorey (digger) because they are used to construct the ancient.

Shax is a wholly different game, it is not the same scope as..."
There are also some other board games played in the nomadic areas of Somaliland. *Layli Goobaley* (known as *Layli*) is, after *Shax*, the most widespread one. *Layli* is a variant of the *Mancalà* game, which is sometimes referred to as "the African National Game."

When two players decide to play a *Layli Goobaley* or *Shax* game, one of them starts by digging holes or tracing lines on the sand, while the other one gathers the required number of pebbles. At times the players use beans, nuts, seashells or seeds.

At the beginning of a game and while designing the board on the sand, the players recite special verses. The same happens also when a player computes a good move and therefore captures more pebbles (in the case of *Layli*).

The following lines imply that *Layli* is played only by the most intelligent men, and are usually cited during the "warming up before a race" for a new game. A rough translation is here provided:

*Layli Goobaley*  
*Nin garaadliyo*  
*Geelu kugu yuus!*  

Oh! *Layli Goobaley*  
*a man with intelligence ...*  
*and the camels prefer you!*  

While in other games, such as *Mancalà*, the game board is different, (made with metal or curved trunk), the shepherd of Somaliland does not usually have his own board to play *Shax*, *Layli* or other games, because this kind of possession does not belong to his nomadic lifestyle. A nomad carries with himself only the essential paraphernalia. These are often the bare minimum such a *wayso* (water bottle), a *toorey* (digger) and a *godin* (an axe) to cut the trees in order to construct the animal pen.

*Shax* is a wholly mathematical game, and has, at times, much the same scope as *Chess*. 
1.2 Shax Game - Rules

Shax is a two-player game with a total of 24 pebbles. Each player receives 12 pebbles at the beginning of the game. Although other games can be played on the Shax board game, each game has its own rules. The two players sit facing each other under an acacia tree and draw on the sand a Shax board, the position of pebbles on the board is called "Holes" (Godad in Somali) and the set of holes occupied by a player is called “family” (Reer in Somali).

The game consists of three phases:

First, choice of an initial disposition of the “family”.

Second, opening of the game that consists of only two turns (one for each player) aiming at the removal of two pieces from the board; each player removes one piece of the other player.

and finally the third phase that is moving the “family”. The two players alternate turns. In each turn, a player computes one move of his pieces with the scope of putting three of them in a row. In this case he removes one of the other player’s pieces.

Sometimes there are supporters for each player but they are not allowed to give suggestions to the players during the game, unless this was established at the commencement of the game.

The board consists of three concentric rectangles with four segments, perpendicular to the four sides of each rectangle, and inter-loped in the middle points of the sides. Once the board design is completed, it has 24 holes. (Figure 2)

While playing the two players alternate turns and must make a move on each turn. On the first turn, unofficial traditional rules apply. For example, the least experienced player, or the younger of the two players, carries out the logistics of gathering the pebbles and has as well the responsibility of drawing the board on the sand. The expert, or the elder player, recites appropriate classic poems during the preparation of the game. In return for his work, the less experienced
or the youngest player, is given the opportunity to have the first turn of the game. However, in subsequent games, the winner has always the right to begin the first turn of a new game. Sometimes this continuation of "having the first turn", called with other words "detention of the cup", goes on for a long time, may even be years. In fact, two players use hebelow wali igamaad jabin, which literally means "My fellow my opponent, you could not break my winning streak".

![Figure 2. The Shax Board.](image)

The first phase is that of choosing positions and a first disposition of the "family". During this phase, each player must select his 12 positions. Each player selects one hole by placing one of his pebbles in it. This phase is very important for the foregoing of the game. A player considers the following three points while choosing a hole:

a. Placing for the first three-in-a-row of his pebbles. This challenge is important only for the first round, because the player who makes the first three-in-a-row, will have the first turn upon starting the second and third phase of the game.

b. Constructing "a good positioning" game. There are different strategies that can secure a player's victory. These strategies are known as "good positions" or sometimes "good family". An expert
player of Shax understands during or soon after the choosing phase if he has to renounce the game or if he is sure to win.

c. To prevent an opponent’s “good positioning”.

The second phase consists of only two movements, one for each player. The first turn is for the player who gets the first three-in-a-row during the first phase. If no one made a three-in-a-row, then the first turn is for the player who had the second turn at the beginning of the game. Each of these two turns consists of “destroying” one pebble of the opponent in order to allow the rest of the pebbles to move.

The third and last phase of the game is “moving”. Again each player computes the movement of his holes - pebbles can move one step adjacently with respect to the Shax board. Diagonal and jumps are not allowed. When a player computes a Jare (cutter), a three-in-row, then he takes out one of his opponent’s pebbles.

Figure 3. A simple active Jare (cutter) for the black. If computed, the black has three-in-a-row.

An unusual move rule applies when a player cannot, on his turn, move his pebbles. In this case, the opponent must compute a movement of his pebbles so as to give a chance to the other player; but in this movement, the player who is giving the chance must not score a Jare nor construct a new Jare. The Somali phrase used by the player who cannot move his pebbles in his turn, is jid isii aan jare lhayn (give me the move).

If this unusual move is not allowed, the opponent’s piece is taken away and this situation is considered as a win.

1.3 Winnings

A player wins if he scores two pieces, or all pieces, of the opponent if the player is able to move in order to give a chance to the opponent in the previous paragraph.

1.4 Playing

The first computer program for DOS release of Shax with a command-line interface was written for a Personal Computer. It was later adapted for a personal computer with a Floppy disk and driver for Shax for Windows. The same program is used on the Windows operating system.

Additional software has been developed by http://www.redd.com/shax
lahayn (give me access without Jare (cutter)).

If this unusual move happens to result in scoring a Jare, that player is not allowed to exercise his normal right to remove one of his opponent's pieces from the board. The Somali term used to describe this situation is oodan (closed).

1.3 Winning the game

A player wins a game if he reduces the family of his opponent only to two pieces, or if the opponent gives up. In contrast to Nine Men's Morris if the pebbles of a player are blocked so that he may not move, the opponent player must compute an additional move of his family in order to give a way to the other player's pieces as indicated in the previous paragraph.

1.4 Playing Shax Against the Computer

The first computer program program to play this game was Shax for DOS released in 1997. Shax is a simple freeware computer program for PC-Dos and Compatibles (Dos 3.3 +). It runs on a Personal Computer with at least 286 processor and CGI adapter, and it occupies circa 500 Kb on the Hard Disk, but it can be run also from a Floppy disk. The program is designed only for demonstration purposes. See section 3.1 for details.

Shax for Windows, the software presented here in chapter 3, is the same program with a more friendly graphical user interface that runs on the Windows platform.

Additional software on the East African traditional games is being developed by a group of programmers. Check out for updates at http://www.redsea-online.com/games.
1.5 *Shax-some strategies*

There are some common strategies used by *Shax* players. Each of these strategies consists in constructing, while selecting in the first phase or while moving the pebbles in the third phase, a particular disposition of the "family" which may favor the winning of the game.

For example, a simple *Irmaan* disposition -- shown here in figure 4 -- guarantees the player with black pebbles an active *Jare* in each turn.

![Figure 4. Irmaan](image)

Figure 5 shows a disposition known as *isa-sudhan (chain)* for it allows the player to have two consecutive active *Jare*-s. Computing the current active *Jare* will result in the creation of a new *Jare*.

![Figure 5. Isa-sudhan (chain)](image)

Figure 6 shows an *Irmaan Oodan* (closed *Irmaan*). This disposition is one of the most important *families*. The black has an *Irmaan* that his opponent cannot himself defend. In this case, the opponent gives up the game.
layers. Each of
reacting in the first
case, a particular
ring of the game.

were in figure 4 --
are in each turn.

(air) for it allows
Computing the
Jare.

this disposition is
Irmaan that his
ponent gives up

Figure 6. Irmaan Ooden (closed Irmaan)

Figure 7 shows Affray (four) disposition. When you have a four
pebbles in this disposition, you have at least one Jare guaranteed
whatever move your opponent takes.

Figure 7. Affray (four) for the black

Figure 8 shows Affray iyo Irmaan (Four with Irmaan). This is another
important disposition that gives you, at the same time, both Affary
and Irmaan. The black is quite sure to win the game if he succeeds in
building this disposition.

Figure 8. Affray iyo Irmaan (Four with Irmaan) for the black
Chapter II. \textit{Shax} a \textsc{Cultural and Educational Toy}

In the early stages of mathematical learning, a teacher may give the students, as practical exercise of arithmetic skills, the use of games such as \textit{Layli Goobale} (the Somali version of \textit{Count and Capture} game families presented here in Chapter 4) and in general \textit{Mancala}. The children will gain useful experience together with the pleasure and excitement of playing, for instance, on the computer. \textit{Shax} may be helpful where the child's analytical skills and planning ability are in the process of being developed.

The use of African Traditional games in the multi-ethnic classes will create a very comfortable educational environment. Games such as \textit{Shax}, \textit{Layli Goobale} and \textit{Kor-kabood} will also make huge cultural resources in mono-cultural classes where the students are learning within their own culture (i.e. African students in Africa). Recently some cultural inappropriate examples, used to introduce mathematical notions, were pointed out in Somali mathematical textbooks. In their place the introduction of local and cultural games was suggested. [8].

The main aim of this booklet, however, is to be a resource book for \textit{Shax} and other East African traditional games presented in it. For the Somali speaking children born in the Diaspora, the historical events and poems included in this chapter can be a chance to recapture at least a tiny page of their own culture.

\subsection{2.1 \textit{Shax} and Poems & Historical Events}

There are many historical events related to the \textit{Shax} game. Some of them are riddles used by wise men to lead the nomadic life of their clansmen. Others are related to the resolution of war between the different tribes, or passing on a message of threat. The story here reported is an unusual communication between a chief leader and one of his nephews.

Once upon a time, Wiilwaal, a great leader of Somali-Ethiopian origin who ruled the eastern province of Somaliland suspected that his wife (a very beautiful woman who was much younger than her husband) had a particular lover. He happened to be his nephew.

Wiiwaal invited his nephew to his palace and invited him to play \textit{Shax}. He ran a risk of bringing the young man to his house for the first time. He said:

\begin{quote}
Sac wahaab oo haydoo yahay \textit{Shax} qor ah?
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Inaadan waliin \textit{Shax} ita musee.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Kanaan degay \textit{Shax} qor ah.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
"(if) there is a winner, and this crazy and this crazy, I put my piece, he resp
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Waanaad i siiisaan \textit{Hal waraabe} cieg.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Inaadan weel.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
"Oh, my uncle, if you are a wise man, and if you are told this, I put my piece, he resp
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Other sayings.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Shaxdaan deg}
\end{quote}
had a particular feeling towards a youngster of the village, who happened to be one of Willwaal's nephews.

Willwaal invited the young man to play a Shax game with him. The clansmen understood that something unusual was to happen, and that the young man would have to solve a great enigma. If he failed, he ran a risk of losing his life.

Following the pattern of traditional communication, Willwaal engaged his nephew into a poetic riddle and before choosing the first piece on the board, he recited the following lines:

Sac wahaab oo wayl watoo wiilasha eryoda;
Inaadan wali naaskiisa qaban ii mar wacad eebe!
Kanaan degay.

"(if) there is a mad cow with a female calf near a well;
and this crazy cow chases the boy;
swear by God that you never touched its teat!
I put my piece there"

The young man understood that the invitation on the part of his uncle did not precisely aim at playing a Shax game, and before choosing his piece, he responded with the following lines:

Waanaad i siisaye, adeer hal aan ku waydiyo,
Hal waraabe cunay, oo haddana waran xalaaleeyey
Inaadan weel u soo qaadateen, ii mar wacad eebe.

"Oh, my uncle, you gave me an advice, let me ask you a question.
(if) a she camel is killed by a hyena and slaughtered by the owner;
if you are told to take a quarter for free;
swear by God that you do not bring a vessel for it!
I put my piece here"

Other sayings or poems related to Shax are:

Shaxdaan degay ba maad garan, wayna kaa shishaysa.
(You did not understand my Shax (strategy) at all, and it is very far from you!)

Shaxda jeexanayo jaalkayow jare haddaan yeesho;
Mama inaan kuu jixin jixayn jiri calooshaada.

(Oh my friend that now we have drawn the Shax board;
if I score a jare, let it be known to you that I will never be lenient to
you at all)

......
Waxay hibanayso, ninkay la hadlayso, hagaag ma u sheegtay!
Inday xorma xan gabadh oo horayso, Hubaal ma caddaysay!
Allay leh waa hog, Shax aan la halmaamin!

......

Has not she said what she wanted, and to whom she needed
to talk? Has she clearly said that she is giving up her life and
money for her dignity? This is a hole (good move, good Jare), in a
Shax game that will never be forgotten!

Shaxdii baan hayaanka u raray iyo shaambis geediga e!

(I thought deeply about this long transfer of the village, engaging in an
appropriate Shax (plan).)

Chapter III. Shax for Dos

3.1 Shax for Dos

This program is a counterpoint to the game for three men. As a
result, the program cannot be found in the source listed above.

The version (version 1.0) of Shax for Dos has been tested its function.
The program was tested with the help of others. A strong suggestion for
functions in the Shax for Dos is that you include copyright restrictions.

Two human players may play against the computer, using
Dos vs human or computer. The version of Shax for Dos on the
first level of the terminal you have to implement some of the
functions in the program, to use the game.

Shax for Dos - Shax for Dos is a game of two human players or
human vs computer. The version of Shax for Dos on the
first level of the terminal you have to implement some of the
functions in the program, to use the game.

The author encourages you to open the
files in 'zip' format and
make together for the
program as you wish.

The zipped archive
contains:

shax.exe
shax.ovi
shax.hlp

today.shx
updates.txt
readme.txt
readme.htm
shax.gif
Chapter III. Shax - The Program

3.1 Shax for DOS - Ver. 1.0

This program is a freeware software for Dos 3.0 +. The binary files of the program can be freely downloaded from the Shax web site. See below in the "more information section".

The version (ver. 1.0) included here is the first release, and no one tested its functionality. No one is currently maintaining the software. The program was designed with the only purpose of demonstrating the game. The author would however, appreciate any comments and suggestions for improvement in the next versions. Many of the functions in the Menu are not yet activated – this is not due to copyright restrictions, but to the present lack of implementation.

Two human players can play with this program, as well as computer vs human or computer vs computer. For the Computer player only the first level of the three "thinking levels" (novice, intermediate, expert) is implemented so far, therefore, if you are expert in playing the game, you have to install the Windows version of the software.

Shax for Dos - The Package: You will usually get the archive of the files in 'zip' format with the name "shax_m-n.zip" where 'm' and 'n' make together the version number of the current files (i.e ver. 1.0). The author encourages anyone who wants to redistribute this program, to use this convention.

The zipped archive file contains:

shax.exe (***)
shax.ovr (***)
shax.hlp (*)
today.shx (*)
updates.txt [not in the firstly released version]
readme.txt
readme.htm
shax.gif
In order to check the integrity of the package, run the “dir” command, and following should be your output:

```
Il volume dell'unità... C non ha etichetta
Numero di serie del volume: 106A-0BFE
Directory di C:\Development\wshax\dosversion

(DIR)   12/11/99 14:24  ..
SHAX    EXE   435,358 18/09/97 0.49 SHAX.EXE
SHAX    HLP    467 18/09/97 0.55 SHAX.HLP
SHAX    OVR  1,347 08/09/97 4.39 SHAX.OVR
TODAY   SHX    2,849 14/09/97 22.44 TODAY.SHX
README   HTM  8,344 18/09/97 13.40 readme.htm
README   TXT  7,796 18/09/97 13.40 readme.txt
SHAX    GIF  1,905 15/09/97 14.02 shax.gif
UPDATES  TXT  0 18/09/97 13.41 updates.txt

8 file  456,066 byte
2 dir  106,463,232 byte disponibili
```

In order to run the program, you must have the two files signed with (***) in a same directory (otherwise the Shax program cannot be run). The files signed with (*), instead, are additional files which improve the quality of the program (help on line and additional messages), but the Shax program can run without them. Anyway, all the files must be copied in a same directory.

**Shax for Dos - System Requirements** A Personal Computer with a Processor 286 or better, DOS 3.0 or later, a 500 Kb of hard disk space (it can be run also from a floppy disk), mouse driver installed (this version requires a mouse), a colour monitor is preferred. We would all like to live in a world where different colours make it more beautiful!

**Shax for Dos - Installation**: If you get this program in its “zip” format, you will need one of the programs “unzip, winzip or pkunzip” to extract files from the archive. Copy all the files extracted from the archive in a same directory. Run shax.exe program in a dos shell prompt.

---

3.2 Shax for Win

This version of the Shax program has been created for Windows 95/98/2000, with aWin32 interface, and a much improved program.

3.2.1 The Package

The package of Shax for Win contains all the files necessary for running the program, except those you need to have installed locally. All files come from the archive.

When extracted, the program will run from your target directory.

3.2.2 System Requirements

This version of Shax for Win requires a PC with a Pentium processor, Windows 95/98/2000, and a minimum of 16 MB of RAM.
3.2 Shax for WINDOWS (version - Ver. 1.0)

This version of the Shax software runs on WIN32 platforms (Microsoft Windows 95/98/NT operating systems). It has better graphical user interface, and a different "thinking level" than that of the Shax Dos program.

3.2.1 The Package

The package of Shax comes in a self-extracting zip file that contains all the files necessary to install and run the Shax game. If downloaded from the internet web site, you may receive a zipped file. In this case you need to have pkunzip, unzip or winzip software to extract the files from the archive.

When extracted, the list of files shown in figure 10 should be found in your target directory.

3.2.2 System Requirements

This version of Shax runs on Microsoft Windows 95/98/NT4.0.
Figure 10. List of files in the package

Minimum system:

- Intel® Pentium 75+ or 100% compatible
- 8 MB RAM
- 1 MB of disk space.
- Windows 95 compatible sound card (optional)
- Floppy disk unit 3.5" or CD Rom drive for installation if you received the package along with this book.
- It is recommended the use of SVGA graphic slot at 256 colours or better.

3.2.3 Installation & Running the Game

Installing Shax Game

Extract Shax distributed files to any directory. For example in to c:\temp.
Double click on SETUP.EXE (or in the command line, type SETUP.EXE and press Enter.) Otherwise choose from the application and press Enter.
Follow on the instructions to change the settings.
When the process is complete, return to the game.

Launching

To run Shax from the Command Prompt:
Click Start, Programs, Shax, Main Menu, Game. The Main Menu should appear on the screen.
Playing the game

A new dialog arises, and after a few moments the game will automatically start. The player only experiences the Computer Player, who is the Computer Player. The players alter the parameters and will inform the players in the opening phase (opening the game).
application bar **START -> RUN** and insert c:\temp\setup.exe and press **Enter**.

Follow onscreen prompts to set up. Accept the defaults or change them.

When the setup is complete, a prompt appears. Click **OK** to return to the desktop and launch the game.

**Launching**
To run Shax from the Windows **Start** Menu after setup:
Click **Start, Programs, Shax Game**. Choose **Shax** to play the Game. The Main Menu appears. Click **Game -> Open Game** to start the game.

**Playing the game**
A new dialog asking you which player should start the first move of the game will appear. The choice of the **Human Player** as the first player only expects the player to choose the first hole, while choosing the **Computer Player** as the first player, the game will directly start.

The players alternatively choose their moves. A dialog box message will inform the players when the first phase (choosing) and second phase (opening) will end up. In the bottom bar, you can see the last movement or action of the current player.

![Figure 11. The Game Board](image-url)
The number of positions owned by each player is displayed near to the name of each player.

Exiting

To exit the Shax Game:
1. From the Main Menu click Quit.

Customizing Shax

Shax has many options for customizing how to play the game and how the board should look like. These are called preferences (edit Menu), and you can control preferences for your Shax copy (Application Preferences), for individual game (Game Preferences) and for individual player (Player Preferences). All these specifications are created and modified through the edit Menu. In addition to these general preferences, you can add an additional database for the Ongoing Commentary (see below).

![Shax Application Properties](image)

Figure 12.

Sound

If you have a sound card and an external speaker setup, you can set preferences to hear an audio signal for each action.

Preferences -> Sound

Players and the Game Menu

Two human players can play a game. In order to change the game setup, do the following:

Game Menu -> Preferences

The first edit box allows the user to choose whether the first drop down box is for (Human), while on the second box one can select the player(s).

Ongoing Commentary

In the traditional version of Shax...
Sound

If you have a sound card, use this to set options. Press cursor keys or use mouse to select the Main Menu. Choose Edit -> Application Preferences -> Sound. Choose one of the options available for each action.

Players and their ability
Two human players, as well as computer vs human players can play a game. In order to set the ability of these players, choose from the Game Menu -> Edit -> Properties

![Shax Game Properties](image)

Figure 13.
The first edit box in each column contains the name of the player. On the first drop down Menu, you can choose the player (Computer or Human), while on the second drop down Menu in each column, you can select the players' ability (beginner, novice, expert)

Ongoing Commentary

In the traditional way of playing the Game, elders recite appropriate
verses, poems and sayings to mark their achievements and success in the game. This option simulates this fact. It randomly displays pieces from the Somali literature relating to Shax. If the sound option is ON, the pronunciation of the lines of these poems and sayings can be listened to. An additional window is opened to display these messages. Use the Main Menu and choose Edit -> Application Preferences -> Commentary. Use enter or click to switch options on/off button.

View log moves

With this option you can display in a drop-down box window the movements for each player during the game. It was first devised for debugging purposes, but it seemed equally important to learn the game from the moves chosen by the Computer player. To set this options go to Main Menu and choose Edit -> Game Preferences -> Logging. Use enter or click to switch options on/off button.

Uninstalling the Shax Game

Go to Windows Control Panel Menu and select the "Add/Remove Programs" icon. A new window will appear. On the "Install/Uninstall" Menu, select "Shax Game" and click the "Add/Remove" button to start the uninstallation. Follow the on-screen instructions to complete the uninstallation.

Chapter IV. Game Theory

4.1 Layli Game

The Somaliland National team for the African National Games exercise with closing exercises in 2 parallel rows. The six holes in a row opposite the game, each

![Game board image]

The pieces are laid out on the holes by picking them up and moving counters on a board. The opponent's and friendly options, one after the other, skipping any of them.

If the last piece is captured, the player picks up again and places them. A player can pick up in his turn in an empty hole.

2 The word layli which is the Somali verb 'layli' which in the English language translates as "horses".
Chapter IV. Other Board Games.

4.1 Layli Goobaley

The Somaliland version of the Mancalà game -- known also as the African National Game -- is called Layli² Goobaley (literally meaning exercise with circles). The game board is 12 holes dug in the ground in 2 parallel rows. Layli is played by two players, each of which owns six holes in a row on one side of the game board. At the beginning of the game, each hole contains 4 pebbles as shown in Figure 15.

![Figure 15. Layli Goobaley Board](image)

The pieces are all similar. The players redistribute the pebbles into the holes by picking up all the pebbles in a cell in their own row and moving counter-clockwise around the board from their own row to the opponent's and back again to their own. The player deposits the pebbles, one at a time, in each hole that he passes over without skipping any of them, until the pieces are used up.

If the last piece is dropped into a hole with pebbles, then the player picks up again all the pieces in this hole and continues redistributing them. A player is not allowed to count the pebbles before deciding to pick up in his turn. A lap ends when the last pebble in hand is sown in an empty hole. If this hole is on the opponent’s row, the move ends,

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² The word layli which means exercise in the modern school language, is derived from the verb layli which in the somali nomadic culture means “to tame and train young camels and horses”.

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and no capture is made. If this hole is on the player's side, but the opposite whole is empty, again the move ends, and no capture is made.

The object of the game is to capture more pieces than those of the opponent. Like many Mancalā Near East variants, a capture is made if the last piece falls in an empty hole on the player's own side, whereupon the pieces in the opposite hole are captured.

However, in contrast with many other Mancalā variants, the capture depends on the content of the opposite hole:

If the opposite hole contains one, two, four or more pebbles these and the last pebble to be sown are taken; but if it contains three pebbles, one pebble is transferred from this hole to the hole in which the last pebble in hand was sown, making the contents of both holes two pebbles. Each of these holes becomes an Uur (pregnant) which belongs to the player who made them Uur. No pebble can be lifted from the Uur hole to initiate a lap or move, but pebbles are sown in them in the ordinary course of the game and they accumulate for the benefit of the player who owns the Uur.

Figure 16

Suppose that the rows are numbered 1 and 2 as shown above, and player one (P1) owns row 1 and player two (P2) owns row 2. Suppose that the holes at the starting of the game are as shown above (they are numbered the holes from A to L).

Consider that player P2 has five pebbles in his hand and he drops the last pebble into hole L.

Since the hole contains five pebbles, he drops all 5 pebbles into row 1, the last one into hole G.

P2 again picks up all five pebbles and moves them to hole F.

P1 now makes a capture on hole E, moving pebbles into hole F and in the process P1 takes the five pebbles from hole F.

P1 does not make a capture on hole D but instead makes a capture on hole C, moving pebbles into hole B and in the process P1 takes the four pebbles from hole B.
that the holes are indicated from A to L, so player P1 is the owner of the holes from A to F, while holes from G to L belong to P2. Each hole at the starting of the game contains 4 pebbles.

Consider that player P2 starts the game by picking up the four pebbles in his hole number K and redistributes them until he drops the last pebble into hole number D. This is the new situation of the game board.

Since the hole D is not empty, player P2 should continue by picking up all 5 pebbles in home D and redistribute them until he drops the last one into hole H.

P2 again picks up all the 5 pebbles in home H and redistributes them until he drops the last one into hole F. The new scenario will be as follows.
P2 again picks up all 6 pebbles in hole F until he drops the last one into hole G.

The same player, P2, should go on until he drops his last pebble into an empty hole. In fact his last move consists in picking up the 6 pebbles in hole G and redistribute them until he reaches the hole F which is an empty hole.

Since hole F belongs to P1, player P2 does not score and does not take any pebbles. The move is now for player P1.
If, for example, P1 picks up the pebbles in hole E, which currently contains 6 pieces, he drops the last one into hole H. Then he picks up the 2 pebbles in hole H and distributes them until the last one ends into hole E. He will continue in this way until he ends into hole F which will be empty in the third loop, and as this hole belongs to him, he will capture the 10 pieces in the opposite hole (namely L) as well as the piece in hole F. This movement is shown in the next figure.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 21 (S=Starting point F=Ending point)*

A game ends when one side is deprived of pieces (except eventually the "Uur" - pregnant holes), therefore his owner is unable to compute a move in his turn. Each player then collects the contents of his Uur and other holes on his row. The winner is the player with the majority of captives.

*Layli for Windows* is a free program currently being developed by the author with the help of other programmers. It has many features, including the possibility of playing the game over the internet. The first Beta version will be released soon. New updates on *Layli* can be found at the official web site of *Layli*: [http://www.redsea-online.com/games/layli](http://www.redsea-online.com/games/layli).
There are several free software to play other major features of the Mancalà games on the computer. Oware by Sapient Software is the most popular of them.

4.2 Korkabood

The Shantarah or Korkabood board is made of five rows and five columns, with twenty-five points technically called houses. Each player has twelve counter pieces. The board is drawn on the sand, and as counter pieces, pebbles, seeds or charcoal are used. The starting positions of the pegs are as indicated in Figure 22.

![Korkabood Board](image)

Figure 22

Korkabood Board.

Each player takes position on the two rows on his side and two houses on the middle row. The 25th house, situated in the middle of the board remains empty so that the pegs can be moved.

The objective of each player is to pass one of his adversary's between the hole where he is moving from and the hole to which he is moving; in which case he removes it, and is entitled to continue moving till he can no longer take.

Players take alternate turns to move. Each peg can be moved either horizontally or vertically one step forward or backward. Diagonal

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4.3 Other Nan

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African Nationa

Name

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Lemmi

Hèesa & Kasé

Gabata

Qelat

Gabata

Mankala

Sadeqá

Gamache

Anywoli Anuak

Benchí

Alemungula
moves and jumps on the same players' pegs are not allowed. The second player is allowed to refuse to kill the first player's peg for the first time though he "jumped over" the opponent's first moved peg. This refusal is permitted only once.

A player wins either if all the opponent's pegs die or if they are all blocked. In some cases, the player who blocked the opponent's pegs can make an additional unusual move to give more chance to his opponent.

Richard Burton described the game with the following words: "it is a game of some skill, and an unending practice enables the young camel-herders to play it with great art and little reflection. The game is called also Kurkabod behind the action that the piece passing over one of the adversary's takes it."

4.3 Other Names of Layli Goobaley

The Mancalà game is spread in many parts of the African Continent; the following are some names and geographical locations, as well as the language of the people who use to play this game. The list of the names of this game is very far from being complete as this is an African National Game.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Language and or place</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dabude</td>
<td>Afar Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lemmi</td>
<td>Kulu-Konta, Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hēesa &amp; Kasé</td>
<td>Afar &amp; Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabata</td>
<td>Eriteria &amp; West Eriteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qelat</td>
<td>West Eriteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabata</td>
<td>Amharic Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mankala</td>
<td>Arab countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sadeqa</td>
<td>Afan Oromo &amp; Ethiopia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gamache</td>
<td>Hadiya: South-West Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anywoli Anuak</td>
<td>Sudan-Ethiopia frontier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchi</td>
<td>Kunama people-West Eriteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alemungula</td>
<td>Beni Shaigur -Nilo-Saharan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


REFERENCES


3. R. Davies, *Shax: A Somali Game*, Mogadishu, 1988. Available from the Author's web site at www.swan.ac.uk/cds/rd/shax.htm or by e-mail request to rick@shimbir.demon.co.uk.


5. W. Fiske, *Chess in Iceland and Islandic Literature with Historical Notes on Other Table Games*, London 1905.


**Further information and contact address**

The Internet official web site of the *Shax* program is http://www.redsea-online.com/games/shax.html. Check out upgrades and the latest version of the software at that site. Another internet resource web site, where to get more information about the Game is the *Shax* Dedicated Home Page, at http://www.dm.unipi.it/~jama/ethno/shax.html. In this site, there is an updated list of links on the *Shax* and other African traditional games. For additional information shax@redsea-online.com
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Glossary of some Somali words/phrases used in this book

Shax: pronounced SHAHH is the name of the game

Jare: (cutter) occurs when a player succeeds in placing a tree-in-a-row of his pebbles.

Jid: street, way

Jid is sii aan jare laa: give me access without Jare (cutter)

God: Hole (Godad, holes) means the positions in the board game

Reer: (family) the disposition of the player’s acquired positions.

Hebelow: (ehi') calling the attention of you adversary.

Wali Igamaad Jabin: you could not yet break (could not interrupt my ongoing winning).

Oodan: closed

Irmaan: Particular disposition of the game.

Irmaan oodan: closed irmaan

Afarrey: four

Laba jare: Two consecutive jare's
Isa sudhan: chain

Layli: the name of the Somali version of the Mancala' game. Also means exercise.

Layli gobalay: Somali version of the Mancala game. Laterally exercise with circles.

Uur. Pregnant.

Kor ka bood: Passing over.

shantarah: anm other name of Korkabood game.

riyo-ka.dhalis: an other name of the Lali goobalay game.
Shax (pronounced shahh) used to be played in the Sub-Saharan countries prior to the foreigners' arrival in Africa. It is presented here, recreated through the magical world of informatics, not only with the intent of documenting African cultural games or of teaching how to play them, but also of presenting the literature — the poems and sayings — they embody. Shax is both a board game and the best means of social and artistic expression.