

SOMALI GAMES.

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NOTE.

The system of transcription used in all the words in italics conforms as much as possible to the recommendations of the Copenhagen Conference of Phoneticians (1925) and of the International Phonetic Association :

ħ = Arabic ح (Lepsius' *h*).

ç = Arabic ح (Lepsius' *ç*).

x = Arabic خ (Lepsius' *h*).

d = Sanskrit ढ (Lepsius' *d*).

dʒ = English *j* (Lepsius' *z*).

f = English *sh* (Lepsius' *s*).

q is not quite Arabic ق, but is the *voiced* corresponding sound, at least among the

Da-ro-d: the *Issa-q* usually pronounce it as an uvular fricative or affricate.

a = middle *a* as in *Italian*.

x = English *a* in *man*.

· lengthens the preceding vowel.

d has a falling tone (stressed).

a has a low level tone.

ā has a high level tone.

GAMES OF PRETENCE.

THE boys play at rearing camels, horses, etc., using soft stones roughly hewn out to represent these animals; they pretend to be looking for fresh pastures and to be busy migrating. They also play at war with wooden spears, lie in ambush and spy on the enemy. Or again they pretend to speak before the assembly.

The girls simulate household work; elongated stones are their dolls, which they wrap in old rags; they build their little huts with branches and use big leaves as mats; for goats and sheep they use two kinds of mountain shells.

SPORTS.

(Chiefly found in groups of horse or camel rearers.)

legdan.

Wrestling. The object of the game is to make the opponent touch the ground with any part of his body besides his feet; this must be accomplished four times in order to win.

la·mo·tan.

Two children (aged 4 upwards) are given a little stick each, and are told to hit each other anywhere, except on the head. The fight goes on until one runs away.

dabartan.

This is more in the nature of a little fight than of a game. When indulged in—which is seldom—a piece of ground is chosen, at some distance from the animals. Youths up to the age of 22 take part in it, and form two teams which always represent two different groups. The opponents hit each other with *dabar* (ropes used to tether the camels), until one team is driven away to its settlement.

daṣartan.

Throwing aloe-roots or dry camel dung at each other, and endeavouring to ward off these projectiles with little shields which the children make themselves with palm leaves.

tartan.

Foot-racing.

riddan.

Spear-throwing for distance.

niṣa·ḅan, ḅugtan.

Throwing at a mark.

he·go.

A kind of hockey. The players are divided into two teams; each team has its goal, which usually consists of a bush. In the centre, i.e. at an equal distance from each goal, they place either a bone or a piece of wood roughly hewn in the shape of a ball. The players hit this object with sticks, and endeavour to drive it into the opponents' goal.

lu·f (Issa·q).

A game of quoits. Two teams are formed. Each player in turn stands on a line drawn on the ground and endeavours to throw a stone in a hole dug at some little distance (should a boy hit the stone of one of his opponents both start again). The one who gets nearest to the pit wins the game for his team. All then go to the hole and those who belong to the winning side jump on the backs of the others who become their "donkeys," and must imitate the cry of that animal. Each donkey has to pick up both his own stone and that of his rider: the latter then throws his stone wherever he likes; the donkey can either try to hit it with his own or he can challenge his rider to do so himself. This is repeated twice again, and each time the donkey has the same option. As soon as the donkey succeeds—or his rider fails—he is relieved of his burden. But if neither has happened after the third throw, the donkey is compelled to carry his rider to the pit, then back where he was, and back to the pit once more: this threefold journey is called *lu·f*.

ḅu·d (Issa·q), also *Káḅḅal.*

This game is played like tipcat with a stick which serves as a bat, and a shorter one, the length of a hand, and bevelled at one end, which serves as a missile. The boy who begins has to hit the short piece six times with the bat before letting it fall on the ground. If he fails to do so, the other boy endeavours to hit it similarly, but only five times; if he also is unsuccessful, a complete replay is necessary. This preliminary is called *ḅagaḅageisi*.

As soon as one of the players has succeeded, he starts the game proper. A small groove is scratched in the ground and the missile is laid in it, slanting, in such a way that the bevelled end stands out, the bevel being turned downwards. This end the boy strikes with the bat, and as the missile bounces up in the air, he hits it again so as to send it as far away as he can. His opponents pick it up, and, without leaving the place where it fell, he hurls it at the bat which has in the meantime been laid across the groove. (This throw is called *so·dagón*.) If he hits the bat, the first player is out, and the second takes his turn; but if he misses, the first player replaces the missile in the groove, makes it bounce up as before, and hits it again with all his might. The distance between the place where it falls and the groove is measured by means of the bat. This is done three times in succession, the distances attained in each case being added up. The object is to reach the sum of 101 in bat-lengths. If this is not accomplished in three throws, the player must repeat the *so·dagón* (and thus give his opponent an opportunity to put him out) before he can go on and try to complete his score of 101.

GAMES OF NIMBLENESS.

dḅag (Issa·q).

Played by two children. One of them takes 8 or 12 stones in his right fist, throws them up in the air and endeavours to catch as many of them as possible on the back of his hand; he throws them up again and catches them back into his fist. The stones which have fallen on the ground during the process have to be picked up, one by one, in the interval between the

throwing up of the stones and their being re-caught. As soon as four stones are in the right hand, they are transferred to the left, which keeps them while the right hand goes on catching the next four.

If one stone falls over two others on the back of the hand, it is called *keggo*; the opponent takes it, and places it on the ground where it has to be picked up again during play as above.

Káutan (Da·ro·d).

This game is played in several manners: the most popular variety is called *san qayyar* [san 'ayyar], i.e. the "game of five stones." Two children take part in it, each having to accomplish the following six feats:—

(1) Throw the five stones on the ground. Pick up one, throw it up in the air, and before catching it, pick up a second stone; throw one up again and pick up a third, and so on until all five stones are in the hand.

(2) Throw up one stone, and before catching it, pick up two stones; throw one up again and, before it returns, pick up the other two.

(3) During the first throw pick up three stones; during the second pick up the last one.

(4) Only one throw, during which the four remaining stones must be picked up together. (This feat is done four times in succession.)

(5) Keep the five stones in the hand; throw one up, and before catching it back, touch the ground twice with the forefinger. (This is done twice.)

(6) Place the left hand in such a way that the tip of the forefinger touches the ground, while the thumb and the middle finger are joined to form a ring, the palm facing upwards. Throw the stones on the ground with the right hand by passing it underneath the left one. The opponent then points to a stone which will have to be handled fourth in the order of succession. Throw a stone up, and before catching it back, pass a second stone through the ring from right to left. During the subsequent throws pass the remaining stones through.

When a player misses a stroke, or when he accidentally disturbs a stone not in play at the moment, his turn ends and his opponent takes play. If the latter makes a mistake the former player resumes the game at the point where he himself has left off. The one who finishes the whole game first is the winner.

When the stones are cast on the ground, should one of them remain on the top of another the thrower wins 3 strokes; if it rests on two stones (*dabé·r* = "donkey") he wins 2 strokes; and if it rests on 3 stones (*Korsa·r* = "placed on top") he wins one stroke.

GAMES OF ATTENTION AND CELERITY.

djawico (Issa·q).

Played by two boys, or better, by two equal teams squatting in two rows facing each other. Four fanciful stakes are chosen, two by each team, alternately; e.g. one side may deem itself the owner of all the camels of the country, and of all its sheep and goats, while the other may

assume possession of all the cattle and of all the horses and asses, or of all the girls and of all the weapons, etc. At the same time, one team chooses *gu·d* ("above") and the other *ho·s* ("below"). The players then divide into groups of four—comprising two partners squatting side by side with their two opponents facing them.

All move their hands in quick succession and rhythm, but neither systematically nor always symmetrically; sometimes they will slap their knees, or their chests, will clap hands or extend one arm towards their opponent. Now, it often occurs that two opponents extend a hand at the same time; if it happens to be two right, or two left hands, the boy on the side which has chosen *ho·s* ("below," i.e. "palm versus palm") scores a *rawwo*; if it is one right hand and one left, the player on the *gu·d* side scores a *rawwo*. The winner of the *rawwo* then plays with his second opponent, if he wins again, his side scores "two"; if he loses, his *rawwo* counts for nothing. The playing between two children who have a *rawwo* each is called *gaura'*. Points are scored collectively by each team, in even numbers: "two, four, six . . ." up to "sixteen" which constitutes a *gamu·n* ("blunt arrow"). It is then deemed to have won from the other side one half of the camels, or of the cattle, as the case may be. Then a new count is started which must run up to "twenty-one," i.e. "twenty" and an odd *rawwo*. This constitutes a *'ayyar bog*, "big game," and secures "all the camels" or "all the cattle" from the enemy. After that, the game is repeated until one team finds itself owner of all four stakes, when it generously grants to the losers "all the flies" or "all the rubbish of the country."

SEARCHING GAMES.

la·l (Da·ro·d) = *qaddo-qaddeisi* (Issa·q).

A team game played by children on bright moonlight nights. A circle is drawn some 10 feet in diameter called a *hero*, "pen, enclosure" (Da·ro·d), or four white *maro*, "clothing sheets," are placed on the ground to mark the four corners of a *gola*, "stable" (Issa·q): this serves as a home base. A charred piece of wood, $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ foot long and about 2 inches thick, is thrown some distance while everyone keeps his eyes closed. As soon as the sound of the falling log is heard, a general search for it begins. When one of the players has found it, he must try and reach home by speed or wile before any one of the opposite team can touch him on the hair and shout *se·man*. If he succeeds, his team scores a number of strokes on their side of a main line drawn on the ground. Each team leaves a few "goal keepers" near the base.

The bulk of the following information was provided for me by my two friends *Ibrá·hín Issá·qíl*, of the *Re·r-há·dži* (hinterland of *qadqāddo*), *Warsangēli* tribe, speaking for the *Dā·rō·d So·ma·li*, and *qismá·n Dūbbed*, of the *Re·r-çumar* (*Ada·dlej*), *Hābar-gērhādžis* tribe, speaking for the *Issá·q So·ma·li*.

GAMES OF CALCULATION.

1. *ḡāh*.

This game is related to the old English "Nine Men's Morris" which was introduced into Europe by the Moors.

fāh might be termed the national game of the Sōmāli; men as well as children are passionately fond of it.

Three concentric squares are drawn on the ground, their sides being connected at their middle point by perpendicular (transversal) lines. Two distinctive sets of twelve stones are used instead of two sets of nine, as in the European variety. They are placed, one at a time, by the two players alternately. During this introductory stage there is no taking of pieces, but the one who is first able to place three of his stones in a straight connected line—this is called a *džāra* (Issā·q) or *džāre* (Dā·rō·d), "halter of a horse"—secures the privilege of starting the game proper. If neither player manages to do this, it is the one who has placed the last stone who begins.

He first removes one of his opponent's stones at his choice, and the opponent does likewise. After this, the game becomes very similar to the old English game: the stones are shifted along

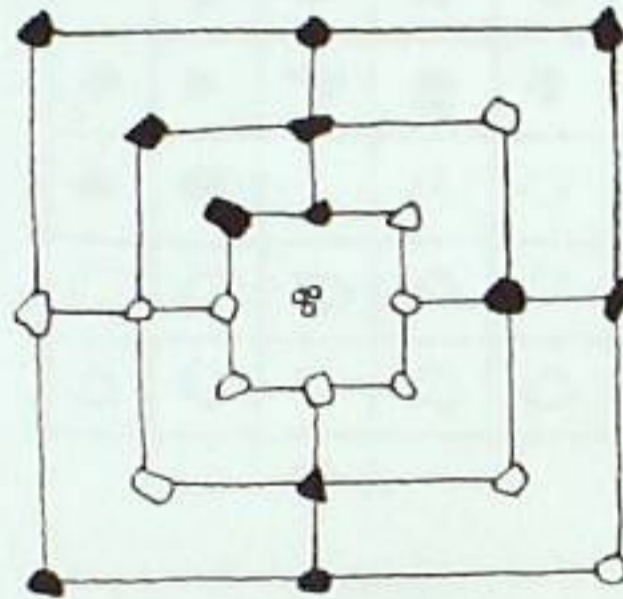


FIG. 1.

the lines from one angle or intersection to a neighbouring one which is vacant, and every time a *džāre* is formed, it gives the right to remove any one of the opponent's stones.

Should one of the players make it impossible for his opponent to move—which is called a *hāqig* (Issā·q) or *hārig* (Dā·rō·d), "rope"—he must make an extra move to provide an opening, and cannot avail himself of any *džāre* he might be making by this second move.

Jumping is unknown.

The one who draws the lines on the ground has the privilege of placing the first stone. Each subsequent game is started by the winner of the previous one.

Scores are kept in the following way: the winner of a game places in the central square a small stone, the size of a pea or a hazelnut, but of the same colour as his own pieces; should he win the next game, he places a second similar stone by the side of the first, and so on; but as soon as he loses a game, all his scoring stones are removed, and his opponent starts scoring. Four stones—i.e. four games won in unbroken succession—constitute a *gal*, "pool"; five stones make a *gabaq*, "girl."¹

¹ The prize is usually a fictitious one, nowadays at any rate; but a man often "wins" his wife from a consenting father in this way—which does not mean that he omits to provide the customary presents for his bride.

Here are a few names given to advantageous positions:—

irmā·n, "milk-giving female" (Issā·q) = *weddin* (Dā·rō·d), position which secures a *džāre* at every move, by shunting a stone to and fro;

afarrej, "owner of four" ; *qa·r*

in placing the stones, *džāra qallōq*, "crooked halter" (this position secures a *džāre* at the next move).

2. *džāra-badāχ* (Issā·q).

A simple form of *fāh*, played by children. Each of the two players has three stones of distinctive colour or kind. These are placed alternately by them on the angles formed by three vertical and three horizontal lines.

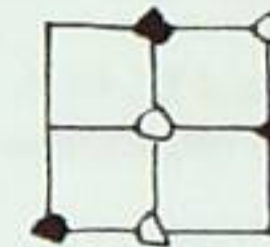


FIG. 2.

When the six stones are placed, they are moved along the lines. The first who gets his stones in a straight connected line wins the game.

3. *fantā·rad* (Issā·q) = *bū·b* (Dā·rō·d).

Related to the Arabian *si·ga* and to the Japanese *go*.

It is played on a checker of 5 × 5 squares drawn on the ground. Each of the two players provides himself with a set of 12 stones of distinctive colour, and places two stones at a time on whichever free square he chooses, with the exception of the centre one (called *qēh*, "centre").

When the twenty-four stones are placed, the person who put the last couple has the first move. The stones are shifted to any adjacent square, but never diagonally. If by so moving a player can place one of his opponent's stones between two of his own, he removes it from the game, and can go on playing as long as he sees the possibility of taking pieces by single moves. The accompanying figure shows how three stones can be taken by a single move (by shifting

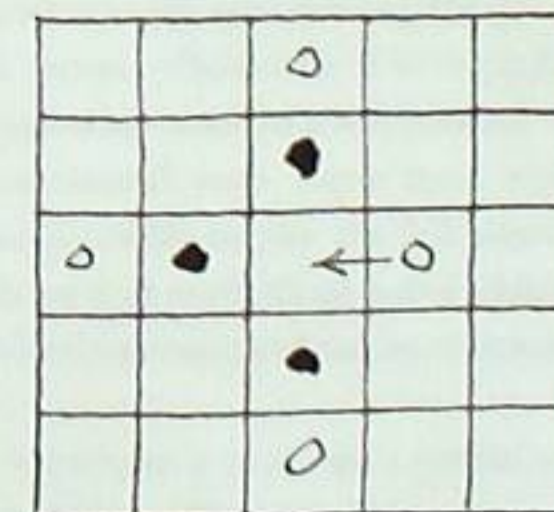


FIG. 3.

white stone as indicated by the arrow). On the other hand, a player can safely place one of his own stones between two of his opponent's. A stone in the *qēh* cannot be taken.

When a player is unable to move, his opponent must give him an opening by making an extra move.

4. *korubōddo*, "high jump" (Issā·q) = *korkabō·d*, "jump over" (Dā·rō·d).

Related to the Arabian *da·meh*, and to the European *draughts*.

It is played with two sets of twelve stones on a checker similar to that of *fantā·rad*. At the beginning of the game, the stones are disposed as shown in the accompanying figure.

The stones move as in *fantā·rad*, but they take an opponent's piece by jumping over it (not diagonally). As in our own draughts they can take several pieces in succession. There are no "kings." Taking is not compulsory.

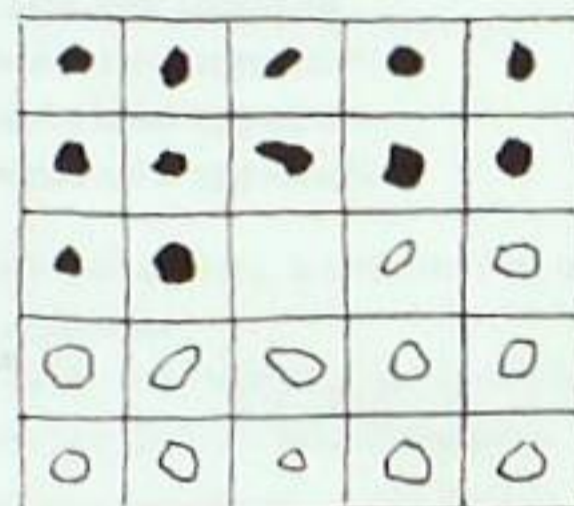


FIG. 4.

5. *lejla-gōbale*.

Related to the Arabian *mīnqala*, and to similar games found over the greater part of Africa and India.

Two parallel rows of 6, 8, or 12 holes are dug in the ground, and four balls of dry camel dung are dropped in each hole.

Each of the two players takes possession of one row. The first one to play takes the contents of the hole at the right end of his own row (A) and distributes one ball in each of the following pits: B, C, D, E; then he picks up the contents of the hole in which he has dropped his last ball (E), and distributes them in F, G, H, I, J; he distributes the contents of J in K, L, A, B, C; those of C in D, E, F, G, H, I, those of I in J, K, L, A, B, C. As his last ball drops in an empty hole (C), his turn of playing comes to an end; he takes as his winnings the last ball he has dropped (in C), together with the one which lies opposite (in J), and his opponent starts playing.

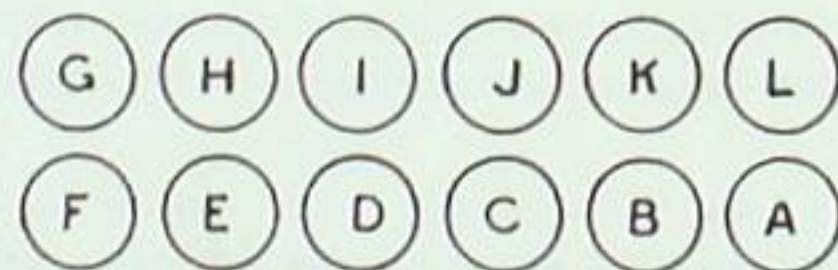


FIG. 5.

Both players are henceforth free to start their turn at whichever hole they like, providing it belongs to their own row. When a player ends his turn in one of his opponent's holes he takes nothing (*abā·r*, "famine"). When he ends it in one of his own holes, he looks at the opponent's hole which lies directly opposite; if the latter is empty he gets nothing (*abā·r*); if it contains 1, 2, 4 or more balls, he takes these, together with the one he has dropped last; but if it contains 3 balls, one of these is removed into the hole where his last ball dropped, so that each contains two balls; these two holes are now his *qū·r*, and any ball that drops into either of them cannot be touched until the end of the game, when they are taken by the owner of the *qū·r*.

When a player is unable to play, owing to the fact that all his holes are empty—with the possible exception of some *qū·r* which cannot be touched—his opponent can take all that remains in his own row, always excepting the contents of any *qū·r* which may belong to the first.

The object of the game is to secure the larger number of balls.

6. *bō·f* (Dā·rō·d).

This game belongs to the same class as the preceding one. (Some of the details given below need confirmation.)

Ten holes arranged in two rows are dug in the ground. At the outset of the game, each of the two players is provided with 20 stones, and places four of them in each of the five holes which are on his side. The first player lifts up the four stones from any one of his own holes, e.g. E, and distributes them, one in each of the following pits, F, G, H, I, then he takes the contents

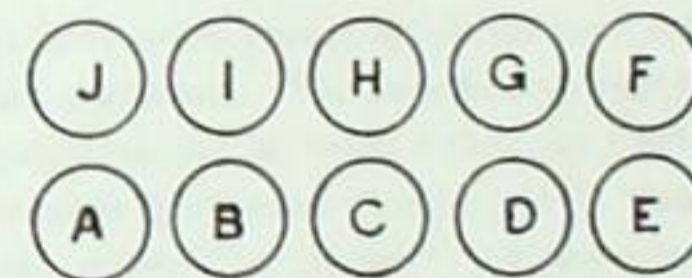


FIG. 6.

of the hole which follows next, J, and distributes them likewise in A, B, C, D. The following hole, E, being empty he finishes his turn, and takes as his winnings the contents of the next pit, F. Then the other player starts, by picking up the contents of one of the holes on his own side, and proceeds in a similar way. When the pit where a player has dropped his last stone is followed by two empty ones, he naturally gets nothing (*bō·f*).

As in *lejla-gō·bale*, when a person, whose turn it is to play, finds that all the pits on his side are empty, he forfeits all the remaining stones to his opponent.

As soon as all the holes are cleared, each player must replenish from his winnings the pits on his own side. The one who is unable to pay the full amount of four stones into each of his five pits, must close down with sand or earth those holes which he cannot keep going; they are considered as non-existent for the time being, but can be re-opened later, should the owner increase his wealth.

The aim of the game is to reduce one's opponent's provision to less than four stones, in which case he is unable to continue the game, all his pits having to be closed.

GAMES OF CHANCE AND CALCULATION.

7. *dēleb* (Dā·rō·d).

Related to the Arabian *ta·b*.

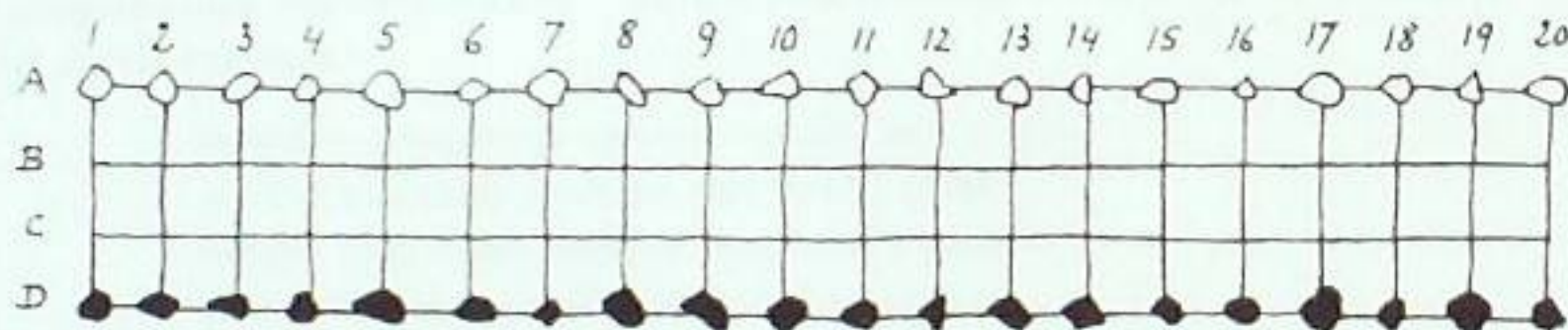
The Lots.—Billets are used in the manner of dice. They are made from a stick about 35 cm. long and nearly 1 cm. across, which is cut longitudinally and transversely into four equal sections, each of which has a convex side covered with "black" bark, and a flat one showing the "white" wood. One pair of them being held in each hand, they are briskly knocked against each other, and left to fall on the ground with a gyratory motion. The five possible combinations which may occur are called :—

- sitte* = no white side uppermost.
dēleb = 1 white side uppermost.
dug = 2 white sides uppermost.
tax·dx = 3 white sides uppermost.
çasse = 4 white sides uppermost.

A billet lying on its side is called a *gā·r*; it is counted as white if the game is played during the day time, as black if it is night time.

After throwing a *sitte*, a *dēleb*, or a *çasse*, the same person goes on playing, but after a *dug* or a *tax·dx* he must hand over the sticks to the next player.

The Field.—Four parallel lines are drawn on the ground, and are intersected by others as shown below :—



Twenty cross-lines are a convenient number, but there may be fewer or more—even four or five times as many. The two middle longitudinal lines (B and C) are called *bad*, "sea."

The Men.—The points of junction of the cross-lines with the lines A and D are covered with two sets of stones of distinctive colours or kinds.

The Players.—The players may be 2, 4, 6, 8, or more, and divide into two equal teams. Each child takes his turn after his left-hand neighbour, so that partners (who all squat on the same side) play in succession.

The Start.—One side chooses "*dēleb*" and the other "*dug*." A member of each team throws two of the billets; this is repeated, if necessary, until either a *dēleb* (3 black + 1 white), or a *dug* (2 black + 2 white) turn up to decide which team will be the first to try its luck.

Entering the game.—No player is admitted into the game proper until he has successfully passed through the three following introductory stages :—

(1) He plays with the four billets: if he throws a *dug* or a *tax·dx*, his turn is ended, and he hands over the billets to his neighbour; if a *sitte* or a *çasse* turns up, he goes on throwing; as soon as a *dēleb* appears he counts "one *dēleb*" and immediately passes on to the second stage.

(2) He plays with three billets: if he casts either three black, or two black and one white, he adds a *dēleb* to his score, and goes on playing; if three white turn up, he counts a *çasse* and goes on playing; but as soon as one black and two white appear he passes into the third stage.

(3) He now plays with two billets: if he has the misfortune of getting two black (*hab*), all the *dēleb* and *çasse* he may have scored are lost, and he will have to start the whole process over again when his next turn comes; if he gets two white, he counts a *çasse* and reverts immediately into the second stage; but if he casts one white and one black (*çag*), he enters definitely into the game by making good whatever *dēleb* and *çasse* he may have summed up, and he hands the billets to his neighbour. Henceforth he will always play with the whole set of four sticks.

Move of the Men.—The men progress along the longitudinal lines, in boustrophedon. One team moves its first piece A 1 successively to B 1, B 2, B 3 . . . B 20, C 20, . . . C 1, D 1, . . . D 20, when the man becomes a *badmā·h*, "sea-farer," and comes back through C 20, . . . C 1, B 1, . . . B 20, A 20, . . . etc. The other team advances D 20 to C 20 . . . C 1, B 1, and so forth.

The number of points to move is determined by the throws: a *dēleb* counts as 1, a *dug* as 2, a *tax·dx* as 3, a *çasse* as 4, and a *sitte* as 6. The boys do not count these points by means of the Somali numerals, but use special words: to count 3 they say: *tūh, tāh tax·dx*; to count 4: *çasse* ("reddish"), *bū·ri* ("tobacco"), *džemana* ("coffee-pot"), *sōnkor* ("sugar"); to count 6: *inna, sē·ra, wāha, ārab, qāmma, qabsej* ("he caught"). A player usually waits until a *dug* or a *tax·dx* has brought his turn to an end, before he moves any stone; in this way, he can dispose of his throws with greater discrimination. The number of points given by each throw cannot be distributed among different pieces; it must be executed in full or not at all; but the order in which the throws occurred does not matter.

Liberating the Men.—As long as a man occupies its original position, it is a "slave" (*horē·l*). It is not allowed to travel until it has been freed, i.e. before it has been moved one single step (A 1 to B 1, A 2 to A 1, etc., D 20 to C 20, D 19 to D 20, etc.). This can only be done by means of a *dēleb*, and each team is obliged to use all their *dēleb* for this purpose until all their men have been thus liberated.

Taking Men.—A man can pass over other men of its own kind, but not over an enemy. If a throw of the billets brings it to the exact place occupied by a man of the other team, he "eats" it, i.e. removes it from the game and takes his place. The aim of the game is to eat up every one of the opponents' men.

Storing the dēleb.—When one team has liberated all its men, it is free to turn its *dēleb* to any use it likes; it can even store them up for use at some critical moment, e.g. for putting out

