

Senet

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Senet (or **senat**^[1]), a board game from predynastic and ancient Egypt, is the oldest board game whose ancient existence has been confirmed, dating to *circa* 3500 BC.^[2] The full name of the game in Egyptian was *sn.t n.t H'b* meaning the "passing game."

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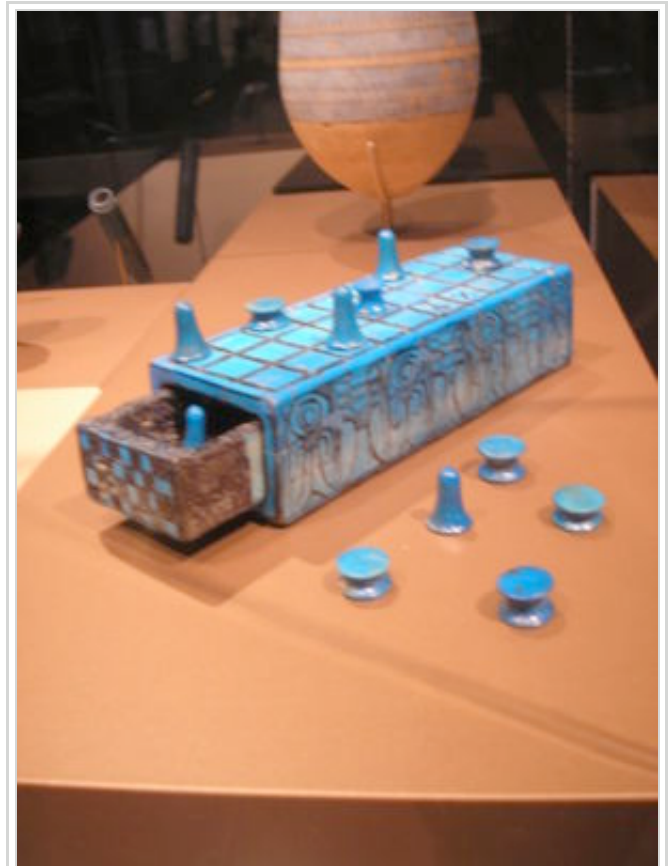
History

Senet may be the oldest board game in World History, although it is impossible to prove which game is the oldest. The oldest remnants of any ancient board game ever unearthed however are those of Senet, found in Predynastic and First Dynasty burials of Egypt^[2], circa 3500 BC and 3100 BC respectively. Senet is also featured in a painting from the tomb of Merknera (3300–2700 BC) (see external links below). Another painting of this ancient game is from the Third Dynasty tomb of Hesy (c. 2686–2613 BC). It is also depicted in a painting in the tomb of Rashepes (c. 2500 BC).

By the time of the New Kingdom in Egypt (1567–1085 BC), it had become a kind of talisman for the journey of the dead. Because of the element of luck in the game and the Egyptian belief in determinism, it was believed that a successful player was under the protection of the major gods of the national pantheon: Ra, Thoth, and sometimes Osiris. Consequently, Senet boards were often placed in the



Nefertari playing Senet. Painting in tomb of Egyptian Queen Nefertari (1295–1255 BC)



grave alongside other useful objects for the dangerous journey through the afterlife and the game is referred to in Chapter XVII of the Book of the Dead. The game was also adopted in the Levant and as far as Cyprus and Crete but with apparently less religious significance.

A Senet game from the tomb of Amenhotep III — the Brooklyn Museum, New York City

Gameplay

The Senet gameboard is a grid of thirty squares, arranged in three rows of ten. A Senet game has two sets of pawns (at least five of each and, in some sets, more). Senet was apparently a race game for two players, with moves determined by tosses of throwstick or, sometimes, knucklebone.

The actual rules of the game are a topic of some debate, although historians have made educated guesses. Timothy Kendall and R.C. Bell are two Senet historians who have proposed (different) sets of rules to play the game. These rules have been adopted by different companies which make Senet sets for sale today.

References

- [^] A history of board games (<http://www.ccg.com/games/index.htm>)
- [^] *a b* In Search of the Meaning of Senet (<http://www.gamesmuseum.uwaterloo.ca/Archives/Piccione/index.html>) by Peter A. Piccione

See also

- Mehen, another ancient game.

External links

- Play a version of Senet online at the British Museum (http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/life/activity/act_main.html)

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Categories: Abstract strategy games | History of board games | Ancient Egyptian culture

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