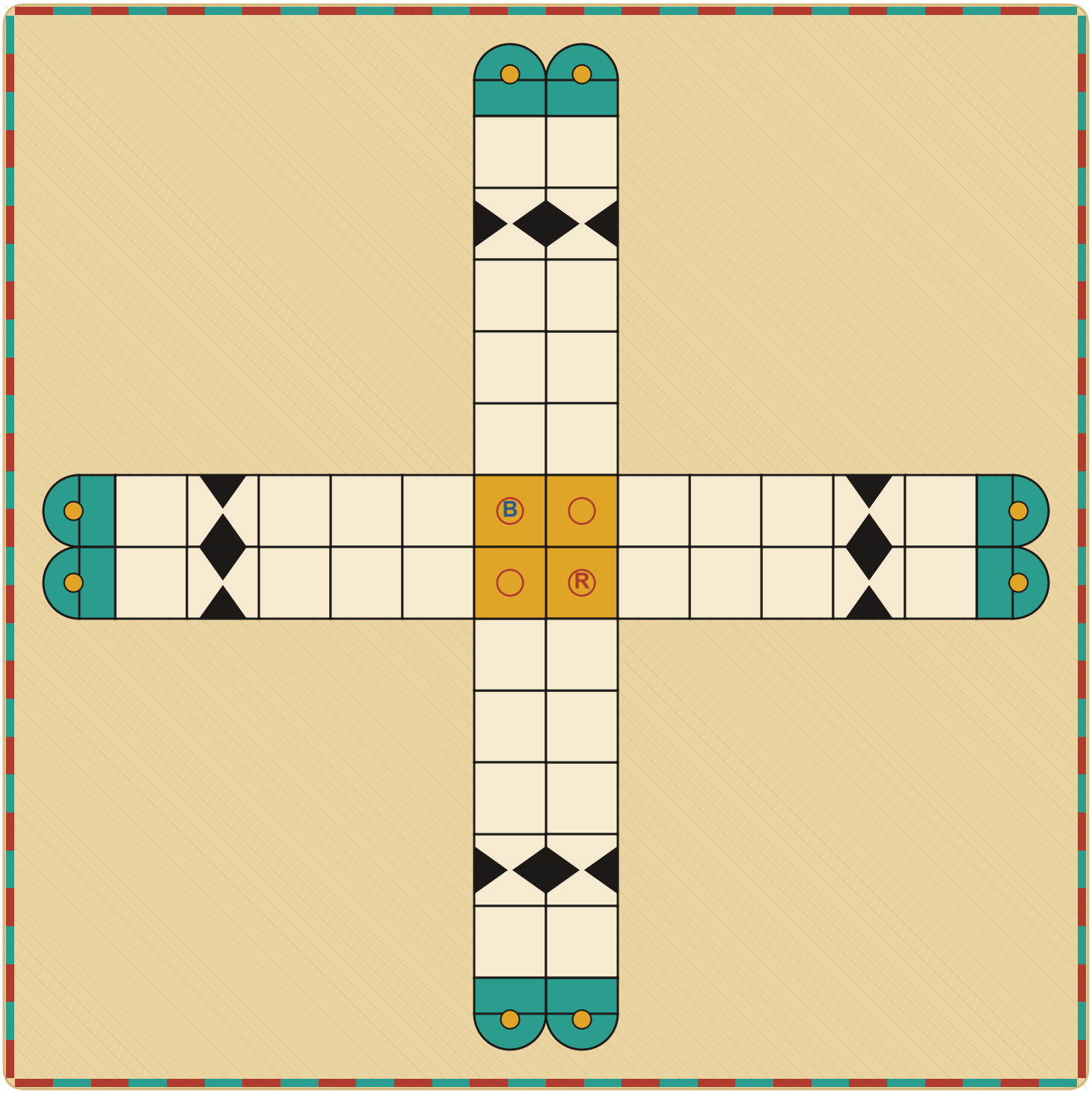
Patolli

Game board · Aztec Empire and Mesoamerica · 2 players



Rounded end square: throw again

Black wedges: pay 2 beans

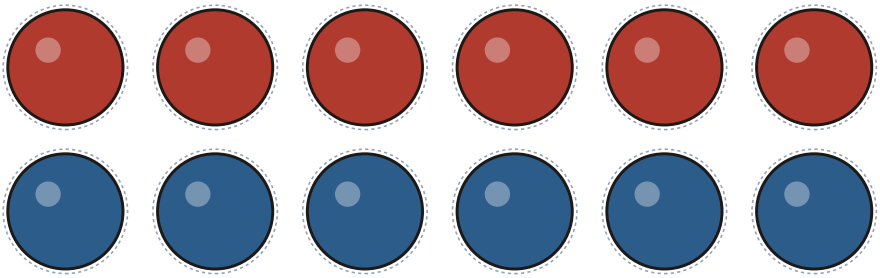
Center: you can bump here

R = Red starts here. B = Blue starts here. The rules are on the "How to Play" page.

Patolli: Pieces, Beans and Treasure

Cut out the stones, the 5 throwing beans and the cacao-bean treasure.

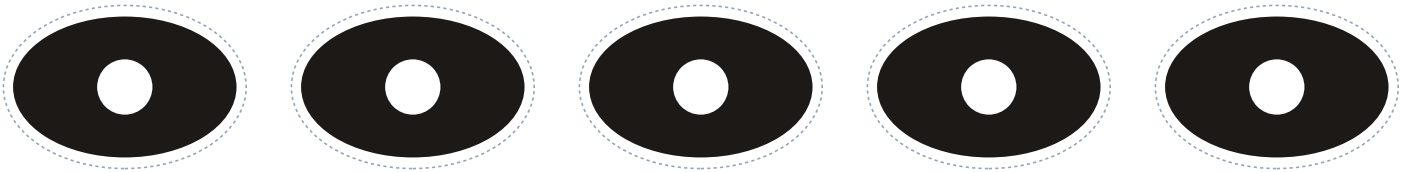
Red stones and Blue stones



Use 3 each for a 30-minute game. Aztec players used 6 each.

Throwing beans (make 5)

Print on card stock if you can. The printed side has the white dot. The back is blank.



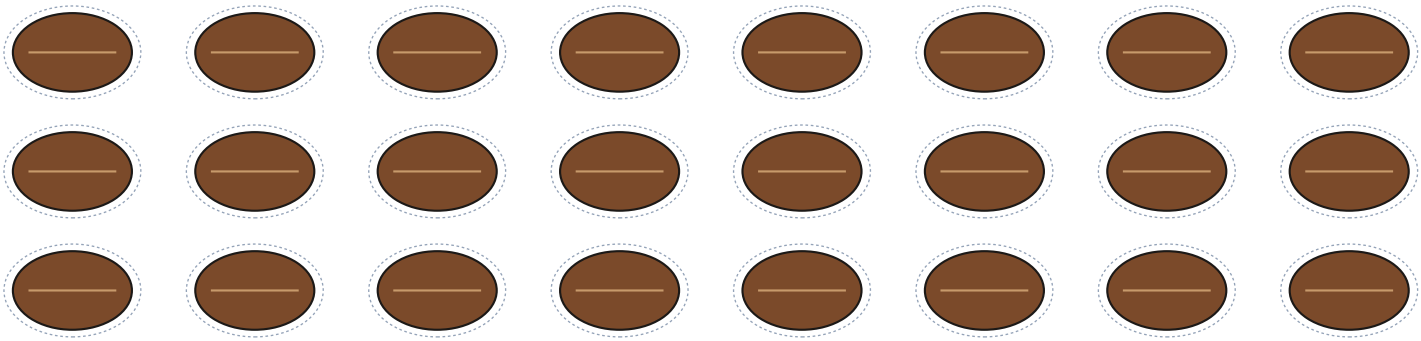
How to count a throw

0 dots up	no move: your turn is over
1, 2, 3 or 4 dots up	move 1, 2, 3 or 4 squares
all 5 dots up	move 10 squares!

No beans? Flip 5 coins and count the heads as dots. The odds are the same.

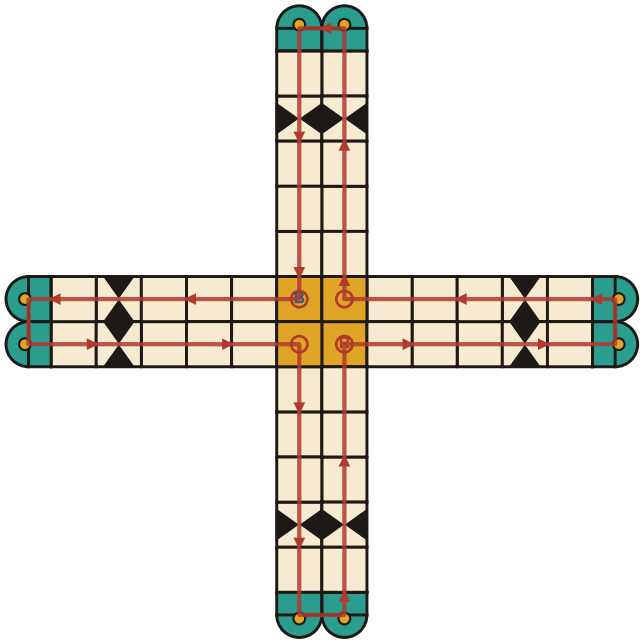
Cacao-bean treasure (24)

The Aztecs used cacao beans as money. Each player starts with 10. Real dried beans work too.



Patolli: How to Play

2 players · about 30 minutes · ages 8 and up



Red's path

Red starts on the R square in the center, goes out along the right arm, across the rounded end and back, through the center into the top arm, and so on around all four arms, until it reaches R again: home.

Blue starts on B and goes the same way round, starting with the left arm.

One lap is 52 squares.

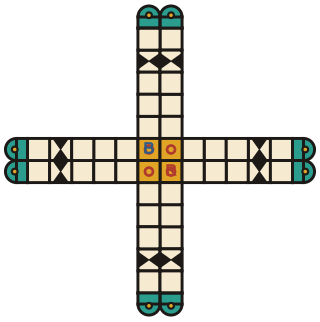
1. **Set up**
   One player is Red and one is Blue. Each takes 3 stones (6 for the long game) and 10 cacao beans of treasure. You also need the 5 throwing beans, kept apart from the treasure. All stones start off the board. Both throw the beans: the higher throw goes first (tie: throw again).
2. **Throw**
   Throw the 5 beans and count the dots facing up: 1 to 4 means move that many squares. All 5 dots up means move 10. No dots up means your turn is over.
3. **Move**
   Bring a new stone onto the board (a throw of 1 puts it on your start square, a 3 puts it 2 squares past it), or move a stone already on the board. All stones go the same way around the whole cross, as the arrows show. You may jump over any stone. If you can move, you must.
4. **Landing**
   You may not land on your own stone. Outside the center you may not land on your opponent's stone either. In the 4 center squares you can: their stone goes back off the board to start again.
5. **Special squares**
   Land on a rounded end square and you throw again. Land on a square with black wedges and you pay 2 beans to your opponent.
6. **Home**
   A stone that goes all the way around and reaches its start square again is home: take it off. It does not need an exact throw. Each time a stone gets home, your opponent pays you 1 bean.
7. **Win**
   The first player to get all their stones home wins. If a player has to pay and cannot pay all of it, the other player wins at once.

About these rules: The Spanish banned patolli after 1521 and nobody wrote down the full rules. These rules are a reconstruction, based on descriptions by Spanish friars such as Diego Duran. Aztec players bet real treasure. We play for paper beans.

Patolli: The Aztec Bean Game

Name _____

Read about a game played across Mexico and Central America.



A patolli board, drawn from reconstructions of the Aztec game.

Long before the Spanish arrived, people across Mexico and Central America played a race game called patolli. More than 1,000 years ago, Maya people cut patolli boards into the plaster floors and benches of their palaces and temples. By the 1400s it was a favorite game of the Aztecs, who are also called the Mexica.

The board was painted on a woven mat, in the shape of a cross. Instead of dice, players threw five large beans, each marked with a white dot on one side, and moved small colored stones around the track. The name patolli comes from the Aztec word for these beans.

Patolli was a gambling game. Before they played, people bet blankets, jewels, food and other treasures, and some players lost everything they owned. Gamblers carried their rolled-up mats with them and asked Macuilxochitl, a god of games and fun, to bring them luck.

After the Spanish conquered the Aztec Empire in 1521, priests saw the game as part of the Aztec religion. They banned patolli and burned the mats and beans. What we know comes from descriptions written by Spanish friars such as Diego Duran, so the rules people play today are a reconstruction.

Questions

1. Which people cut patolli boards into the floors of their palaces and temples?

2. What did players throw instead of dice?

3. Name two things people bet when they played patolli.

4. Why are the rules people play today called a reconstruction?