

OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

# OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

The Ancient Myths  
as Medicine for the Hardships  
of Life in Children's  
and Young Adults' Culture

Edited by  
Katarzyna Marciniak



OUR MYTHICAL  
HOPE

“OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD” Series

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PART I

# Playing with the Past





## PLAYING WITH LIFE UNCERTAINTIES IN ANTIQUITY\*

In Ancient Greek, παιδιά (*paidiá*; play) and παιδεία (*paideía*; education) derive from the same root of παῖς (*país*; child), which is why scholars used to associate ludic culture mainly with childhood and education.<sup>1</sup> The cultural importance of games, however, goes far beyond the physical and mental development of children. Games were ubiquitous in Ancient Greece, among children and adults, women and men, free individuals and slaves. They shaped the players themselves because their rules reflected social and religious norms and expectations. Their study can thus provide a privileged access to a past social imaginary. This chapter examines how Greek vase depictions of skill and chance games, mainly played by young individuals, especially maidens, must be read on a metaphorical level. The aim of the painters was not to portray a realistic game, allowing us to reconstruct ancient rules, but to express visually how life's uncertainties were managed by girls of prenuptial age. They also translate visually a verbal pun which is based on the double meaning of παίζω (*paízō*), 'play' and 'play amorously', or 'toy with love emotion'. In these metaphoric scenes, girls lead the game in an agonistic way.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Stefano de' Siena, *Il gioco e i giocattoli nel mondo classico. Aspetti ludici della sfera privata*, Modena: Mucchi, 2009.

## Love Divination

The first example is a game in which one uses one's fingers, called κλήρος δία δακτύλων (*klēros díá daktýlōn*), 'casting of lots with fingers'.<sup>2</sup> The game is found in Greek iconography since the mid-fifth century BC.<sup>3</sup> The participants are usually women, playing together or with a young man of the same age category, or, more rarely, with Aphrodite.<sup>4</sup> The only men playing against each other are Erotes and satyrs.<sup>5</sup> Gods sometimes play together, like Eros with Nike or Aphrodite. The game always takes place outdoors, whether it is in the city or in the countryside. The players hold a stick with one hand and throw out the fingers of the other hand. As it is played today, the winner is the person who guesses the total number of extended fingers, shouting the result. But other rules are possible, as in Kabylia (Algeria) where the raised fingers are counted.<sup>6</sup> Although the stick does not resemble exactly a shepherd's crook, which usually had a hook at one end, it could still allude to this rural context.

On a hydria by the Washing Painter in Warsaw (see Fig. 1; ca. 440–420 BC), the context is prenuptial. The scene takes place at a fountain house. Instead of fetching water, two handsome maidens, wearing thin clothes and adorned with jewellery, are sitting on hydriai; they are engaged in a playful activity, drawing lots with their fingers. Several elements in the scene point to the meaning of the game. The context is festive, most likely a marriage. The fountain could be that of the Kallirhōē spring, 'lovely flowing', where water was fetched for the bride's (νύμφη; *nýmphē*) bath,<sup>7</sup> but it could be another Athenian fountain also associated with the organization of the feast. In other scenes depicting this game,

<sup>2</sup> Phot., *Bibl.* 149a.17. It is also called in Greek δακτύλων ἐπάλλαξις (*daktýlōn epállaxis*), or λαχμός (*lachmós*), in Latin *micare digitis*. See Cic., *Div.* 2.41.85. Most sources date to the Roman period, but the nature of the game is different; it involves men only and is played for money; see Véronique Dasen, "Jeux de l'amour et du hasard en Grèce ancienne", *Kernos* 29 (2016), 85–91.

<sup>3</sup> For a catalogue, see Herbert A. Cahn, "Morra. Drei Silene beim Knobeln", in Heide Froning, Tonio Hölscher, and Harald F. Mielsch, eds., *Kotinos. Festschrift für Erika Simon*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1992, 214–217.

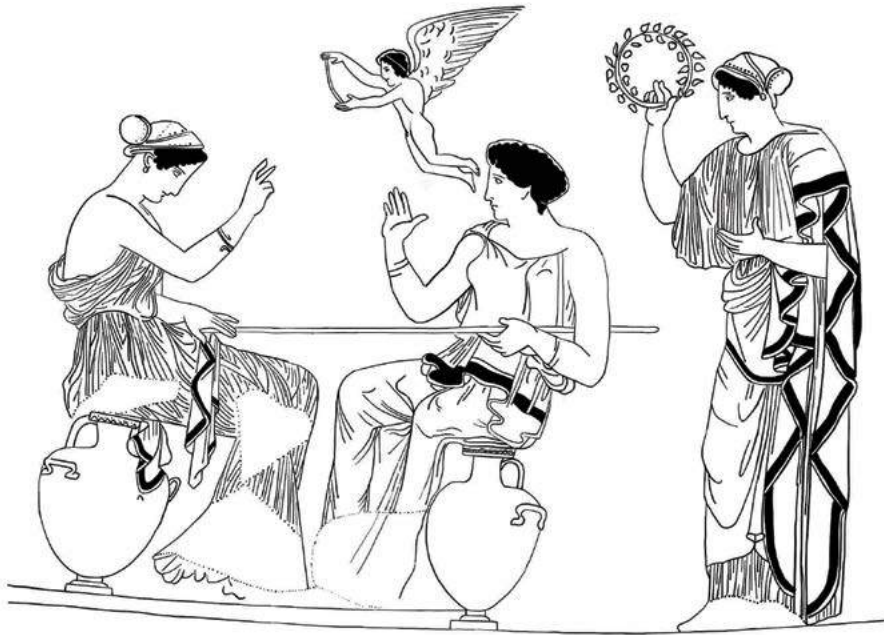
<sup>4</sup> Dasen, "Jeux de l'amour", Fig. 12 (girl and youth) and Fig. 14 (girls and Aphrodite).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, Fig. 10 (Erotes) and Fig. 11 (satyrs).

<sup>6</sup> Said Boulifa, "Jeux en Kabylie au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Encyclopédie berbère* 25 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.4000/encyclopedieberbere.1503>, cols. 92–94, § 23 "Tirage au sort".

<sup>7</sup> On fountain scenes, see Victoria Sabetai, "The Poetics of Maidenhood: Visual Constructs of Womanhood in Vase-Painting", in Stefan Schmidt and John H. Oakley, eds., *Hermeneutik der Bilder. Ikonographie und Interpretation griechischer Vasenmalerei*, "Beihefte zum Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum" 4, München: C.H. Beck, 2009, 103–114. On the prenuptial bath and Kallirhōē, see John H. Oakley and Rebecca H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, 15–16; Victoria Sabetai, "Women and the Cycle of Life", in Nikolaos Kaltsas

the girl plays with a handsome young man; she is sitting on a chest which looks like a dowry chest containing female belongings, clothes, and jewellery, part of marriage preparations.<sup>8</sup> On the hydria attributed to the Washing Painter, the maidens cast lots with their fingers instead of working, as though too impatient to know who will marry first. A woman brings a wreath, possibly myrtle, like the one used in weddings, to crown the winner, and a winged Eros flies towards the left player, bringing a sash or belt, the token of a bride's success and beauty.



**Figure 1:** Washing Painter, Attic red-figure hydria, ca. 440–420 BC. Gołuchów, National Museum of Archaeology in Warsaw, inv. no. 14299.3. Line drawing by Véronique Dasen.

The nuptial dimension of this game is used in a comical way on a skyphos (a deep wine cup) from the Theban Kabirion (see Fig. 2; ca. 420–410 BC); the scene is a parody of the judgement of Paris, who had to choose the most beautiful

and Alan Shapiro, eds., *Worshipping Women: Ritual and Reality in Classical Athens*, New York, NY: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2008, 293.

<sup>8</sup> Dasen, "Jeux de l'amour", Fig. 12, Fig. 14. On chests and boxes, see François Lissarrague, "Women, Boxes and Containers: Some Metaphors", in Ellen D. Reeder, ed., *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, Baltimore, MD: Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery, 1995, 91–101. The chest can also contain scrolls with musical or poetic texts, alluding to the literacy of the women.

goddess amongst Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite.<sup>9</sup> On one side, Hera is sitting on a rock, holding a sceptre; her head is veiled, indicating that she is already married, as opposed to the other two goddesses. Beside her, a young woman with a naked breast, most likely Helen, is waiting for the outcome of the contest, holding a wreath in anticipation of her victory, that is to say her marriage to Paris. Hermes, holding a κηρύκειον (*kērýkeion*), walks towards them, letting Paris make up his mind alone. On the other side, Paris, sitting on a rock, identified by his Phrygian hat and oriental boots, plays the lyre. Before him, two goddesses, Aphrodite and Athena, are sitting with the shepherd knotted staff between them, drawing lots with their fingers. By depicting the contest as a playful divinatory process, the painter suggests that neither the sex appeal nor the promise of the goddesses determined Paris' choice. The decision was in the hands of the gods, as were its tragic consequences – Helen's abduction and the Trojan War. The presence of Helen may not be as passive as it appears. Some ancient authors use her addiction to games to illustrate her deviant behaviour, first as an adulterous wife abducted by Paris, abandoning husband and children, second as an expert in powerful φάρμακα (*phármaka*), remedies and poisons. In the Roman period, Ptolemy Chennus (second century AD), the author of the parodic *New History* summed up by Photius, adds to her lustful nature and its dire consequences her addiction to games with Paris, a blame that may be a transposition from gossip about Cleopatra with Mark Antony.<sup>10</sup> Ptolemy Chennus thus credits her with the invention of the game *klēros díā daktýlōn* and winning against Paris:

Ἑλένη πρώτη ἐπενόησε τὸν διὰ δακτύλων κληρον, καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ λαχοῦσα ἐνίκησε· καὶ ὡς Ἀφροδίτης εἶη θυγάτηρ. (Phot., *Bibl.* 149a.16–18)

Helen was the first to imagine drawing lots with the fingers and [...] she won playing with Alexander; she was the daughter of Aphrodite.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> On the iconography of the judgement of Paris (with earlier bibliography), see Florence Gherchanoc, *Concours de beauté et beautés du corps en Grèce ancienne. Discours et pratiques*, Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2016, 19–47, esp. 40–41, Fig. 11 (interpreted as Nike). See also Alexandre G. Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 270, Fig. 140 (as Aphrodite).

<sup>10</sup> Plut., *Vit., Ant.* 29. For the sources on Roman women at play, see Véronique Dasen and Nicolas Mathieu, "Margaris ou l'amour en jeu", in Véronique Dasen, ed., *Dossier: Eros en jeu*, "Métis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens" N.S. 19, Athens and Paris: Daedalus and EHESS, 2021, 123–146.

<sup>11</sup> Trans. from Photius, *Bibliotheca*, trans. John Henry Freese (here and thereafter revised by the author – V.D.), London and New York, NY: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Macmillan Company, 1920, ad loc.

She even won the right to choose the name of her daughter in a game of knucklebones with Paris:

Ὡς γένοιτο παῖς θήλεια ἐξ Ἀλεξάνδρου Ἑλένη, διαφιλονεικησάντων δὲ περὶ τῆς κλήσεως (ὁ μὲν γὰρ Ἀλεξάνδραν, ἡ δ' Ἑλένην ὀνομάζειν ἤξιον) νικᾷ Ἑλένη, ἀστραγάλοις λαβοῦσα τὸ κῦρος, καὶ ἡ παῖς τῇ μητρὶ ὀμώνυμος ἐγεγόνει. Ταύτην ἀναιρεθῆναί φασιν ὑπὸ Ἑκάβης ἐν τῇ Ἰλίου ἀλώσει. (Phot., *Bibl.* 149b.8–12)

Helen had a daughter by Alexander; they disagreed about the name to give her; he wanted to call her Alexandra, she wanted to call her Helen; Helen won, in a game of knucklebones, the right to choose and named her daughter after her own name; this daughter was killed, it is said, by Hecuba when Troy was taken.



**Figure 2:** Two scenes from a Boeotian skyphos, ca. 420–410 BC, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 99.533. Vectorized drawing © by Alexandre G. Mitchell. Used with his kind permission.

## ***Ephedrismós* and the Taming of the Filly**

The lexicographer Julius Pollux (second century AD) describes the rules of the ἐφεδρισμός (*ephedrismós*) game as follows:

Λίθον καταστησάμενοι πόρρωθεν αὐτοῦ στοχάζονται σφαίραις ἢ λίθοις· ὁ δ' οὐκ ἀνατρέψας τὸν ἀνατρέψαντα φέρει, τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐπειλημμένος ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, ἕως ἂν ἀπλανῶς ἔλθῃ ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον. (Poll., *Onom.* 9.119)

They place a stone upright on the ground and throw balls or stones at it from a distance. The one who fails to overturn the stone carries the other, having his eyes blindfolded by the rider's hands, until – if he does not go astray – he touches the stone.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Trans. from Jenifer Neils and John H. Oakley, eds., *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press and Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, 2003, 275. The term *ephedrismós* derives from the Greek verb ἐφεδρίζω (*ephedrízō*;



Because of the close physical contact, the partners are usually of the same sex.<sup>13</sup>

The *ephedrismós* game is used explicitly with a metaphorical meaning on an Apulian skyphos from the workshop of the Ilioupersis Painter (see Fig. 3; ca. 375–350 BC). On one side, Eros sits upon the back of a maiden, covering her eyes with his hands. The girl is dressed as an attractive παρθένος (*parthénos*), wearing a thin belted chiton, a necklace, and bracelets. She steps forward, stooping because of the god's weight on her back, attempting to target a pile of rocks painted in white. The group can be interpreted as a visual pun: riding the girl refers to marriage conceived as the taming of a filly. This metaphor is very frequent in Ancient Greek literature. Euripides thus qualifies the unmarried Iole, the daughter of Eurytus, King of Oechalia, as πῶλος (*phōlos*) – 'filly', ἄζυξ (*ázyx*) – 'un-yoked' (ὁ ζυγός; *ho zygos* – 'yoke'), who is unmarried.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the poet Anacreon (sixth century BC) describes an erotic pursuit with the image of bridling and riding a filly:

Πῶλε Θρηκική, τί δὴ με λοξὸν ὄμμασι βλέπουσα  
νηλέως φεύγεις, δοκεῖς δέ μ' οὐδὲν εἰδέναι σοφόν;  
ἴσθι τοι, καλῶς μὲν ἄν τοι τὸν χαλινὸν ἐμβάλοιμι,  
ἠνίας δ' ἔχων στρέφοιμί σ' ἀμφὶ τέρματα δρόμου·  
νῦν δὲ λειμῶνάς τε βόσκειαι κοῦφά τε σκιρτώσα παίζεις,  
δεξιὸν γὰρ ἵπποπείρην οὐκ ἔχεις ἐπεμβάτην.

(Anac., fr. 417 Page)

Thracian filly, why do you look at me from the corner of your eye and flee stubbornly from me, supposing that I have no skill? Let me tell you, I could

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to sit upon). See Ursula Mandel, "Die ungleichen Spielerinnen. Zur Bedeutung weiblicher Ephedrismosgruppen", in Peter C. Bol, ed., *Hellenistische Gruppen. Gedenkschrift für Andreas Linfert*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1999, 213–266; Daniela Ventrelli, "Le jeu de l'ephedrismos", in Véronique Dasen, ed., *Ludique. Jouer dans l'Antiquité, Lugdunum, Musée et Théâtres romains, 20 juin–1er décembre 2019*, Gent: Snoeck, 2019, 68–69; Salvatore Costanza, *Giulio Polluce, Onomasticon: excerpta de ludis. Materiali per la storia del gioco nel mondo greco-romano*, "Hellenica" 81, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2019, 152–153.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Neils and Oakley, eds., *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece*, Cat. No. 83 (two girls), No. 84 (girl and satyr).

<sup>14</sup> Eur., *Hipp.* 546; Arist., *Hist. an.* 572a.30, describes rutting mares with the verb *paizō*. On girls as fillies, see Claude Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their Morphology, Religious Role, and Social Function*, trans. Derek Collins and Janice Orion, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, 238–239 (ed. pr. in French as *Les chœurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque*, Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo & Bizzarri, 1977); Claude Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, 70–71 and 324–325 (ed. pr. in French as *L'Éros dans la Grèce antique*, Paris: Belin, 1996 [with earlier bibliography]).

neatly put the bridle on you and with the reins in my hand wheel you round the turn post of the racecourse; instead, you graze in the meadows and frisk and frolic lightly, since you have no skilled horseman to ride you.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 3:** Ilioupersis Painter, Apulian red-figure skyphos, ca. 375–350 BC, Providence, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, inv. no. 25.089, photographs by Erik Gould. Images courtesy of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence.

On the Apulian skyphos, the group symbolizes both the constraint of love imposed by Eros, who “blinds” his victim, as well as the uncertainties of fate, which may be compared to the girl’s hesitant steps. Her cautious progression represents the disquieting transition from *parthénos* to *nýmphē*, bride. Yet, she is not passive; she is willing and taking part in the game. Above the pile of rocks, a fringed sash is suspended, alluding to marriage, the victorious result of the erotic ἀγών (*agón*).

On the other side of the skyphos, we find depicted the ideal couple. A young man is standing, naked, a ἱμάτιον (*himátion*) on his shoulders, holding a strigil, the attribute of the athlete and καλοκαγαθία (*kalokagathía*; ‘beautiful goodness’), and achieved citizenship.<sup>16</sup> The woman facing him is sitting on a rock, adorned with earrings, a necklace, and bracelets, holding a dove in her hand, the emblem of her χάρις (*cháris*) as well as a reminder of Aphrodite’s presence. Behind her, a circular device may allude to an erotic ball game.

<sup>15</sup> Trans. from *Greek Lyric, Volume II: Anacreon, Anacreontea, Choral Lyric from Olympus to Alcman*, ed. and trans. David A. Campbell, “Loeb Classical Library” 143, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Heather L. Reid, “The Philosophy of the Strigil: Gymnasium Culture in Magna Graecia”, forthcoming.

## The See-Saw Maidens and Winged Horses

In other pictures, maidens play a more active part, as in the see-saw game, recently studied by John Richard Green.<sup>17</sup> Only girls of prenuptial age participated in this game. No boy is ever depicted on a see-saw. The rule was simple: the players did not sit, as they do today, pushing their feet into the ground, but stood on the plank; they jumped in turn on the board in order to go up and down. The game was thus very acrobatic, training physical fitness and concentration. No ancient source describes it, but it may be noted that Modern Greek names include the root ζυγός (*zygós*; 'yoke'), referring to 'the beam of a weighing scale' – τὸν ζυγὸν ταλάντου (*tòn zygòn talántou*).<sup>18</sup>

The erotic connotations of the play, possibly contained in the name, referring again to the yoke of marriage, underpins the imagery of a fragmentary Attic column-krater attributed to the Leningrad Painter (see Fig. 4; ca. 470–460 BC).<sup>19</sup> The plank rests on a tree log placed in front of an apple tree, showing that the scene takes place outside. Both girls wear a belted χιτῶν (*chitón*). The one on the left has a thicker garment, more elaborate, with different patterns embroidered or woven. She wears earrings, a necklace, and a fillet, and the lower part of her hair is neatly tied in a cloth bag. The head of the girl on the right is missing, but the end of a headdress called σάκκος (*sákkos*) is identifiable near her breast.

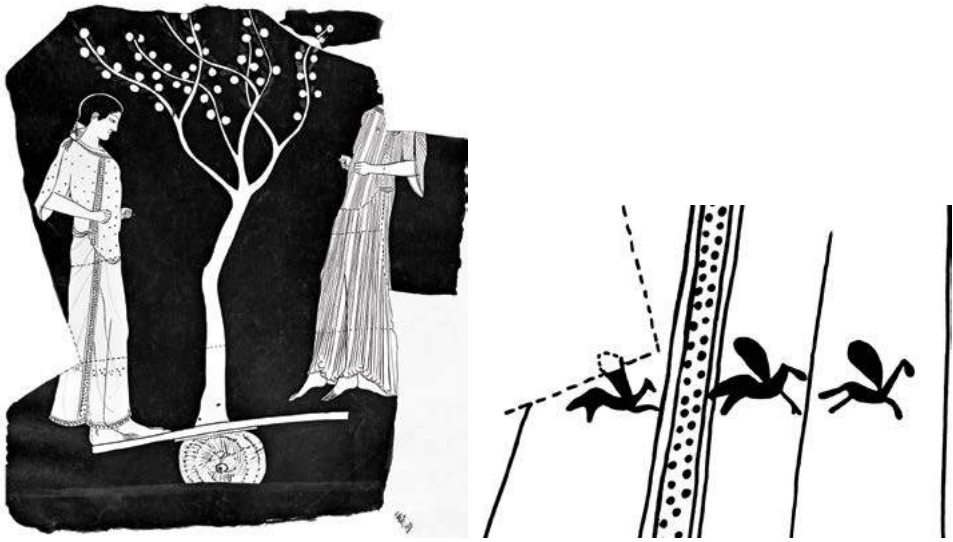
Ergonomically, the scene is very realistic. The players' posture is focused, with closed fists. One maiden is jumping, the other falls back. Both wear a girded chiton that characterizes active girls. The erotic dimension of the scene is present at several levels. As Green noted, the game allows the painter to display the physical beauty of the maidens in an agonistic context similar to that of young men training in the palaestra, with the difference that girls are always clothed.<sup>20</sup> This acrobatic game also demonstrates their self-control, a quintessential part of the expected σωφροσύνη (*sōphrosýnē*), or wisdom, of the marriageable

<sup>17</sup> John Richard Green, "Zeus on a See-Saw: A Comic Scene from Paestum", *Logeion: A Journal of Ancient Theatre* 4 (2014), 1–27, with a list of ten Attic and south Italian vases.

<sup>18</sup> John Davidson Beazley, in Lacey Davis Caskey and John Davidson Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, vol. 3, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, No. 149, reports several Modern Greek names, such as δραμπάλα (*drampála*), τραμπάλα (*trampála*), κούνια (*kóúnia*) in many districts, ζαγκουβάνα (*zagkouvána* – in Chaldia Pontou), τσουντσουβάνα (*tsoun-tsouvána* – in Kotyora Pontou), γκούλιαρος (*gkóúliaros*), and ζύγκαρος (*zýgkaros*; = ζύγαρος; *zýgaros*? – in Epirus), ζυοτήρι (*zyotíri*; = ζυγοτήρι; *zygotíri* – on Cyprus), ζυγόγυρος (*zygógyros* – on Rhodes).

<sup>19</sup> See Neils and Oakley, eds., *Coming of Age*, No. 82; Green, "Zeus on a See-Saw", No. 2, Fig. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Green, "Zeus on a See-Saw", No. 6, Fig. 10.



**Figure 4:** Leningrad Painter, Attic red-figure column-krater fragments, ca. 470–460 BC. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 10.191, photograph from the Beazley Archive (after Lacey Davis Caskey and John Davidson Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, vol. 3, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, 48–49, No. 149, plate 85). Image courtesy of the Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford. Detail of the “left-side” girl’s dress – line drawing by Véronique Dasen.

girl. The Boston krater delivers also a more complex erotic discourse, referring to Aphrodite’s orchard, to the taming of maidens, and to ἐρωτοστασία (*erōtostasía*), or the “weighing of love” as described by modern scholars.

## Aphrodite’s Orchard

The presence of apples on the tree is significant. For many authors, the semantic field of μήλον (*mēlon*) or μάλον (*mālon*) designates in a generic way a round and fleshy fruit: apple, quince, or pomegranate. It is also used to describe an erotized feminine body, the cheeks, the bosom, and the sex. The image of the mature apple on the tree behind the players thus refers to the maturity of maidens ready for marriage.<sup>21</sup> *Mēlon* or *mālon* is also the fruit *par excellence*

<sup>21</sup> On the eroticism of women plucking fruits, see Susanne Pfisterer-Haas, “Mädchen und Frauen im Obstgarten und beim Ballspiel. Untersuchungen zu zwei vorhochzeitlichen Motiven und zur Liebessymbolik des Apfels auf Vasen archaischer und klassischer Zeit”, in *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung*, vol. 118, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2003, 139–195.

of two famous orchards, the κῆπος (*kēpos*) of Aphrodite in Paphos and that of the Hesperides, which carry golden fruits for the marriage of Zeus and Hera. The gift offered by Paris to the most beautiful goddess is an apple. In wedding rites, a pomegranate was given to the bride, possibly as a reminder of the six pomegranate seeds Kore ('young girl' in Greek) ate in the Underworld as a sign of consent to marry Hades, and then changing her name to Persephone.<sup>22</sup>

"Throwing the apple", μηλοβολεῖν (*mēloboleîn*), is a proverbial expression for an invitation to reciprocal love.<sup>23</sup> For instance, Theocritus (third century BC) describes how Clearista throws apples to a goatherd who pleases her:

βάλλει καὶ μάλοισι τὸν αἰπόλον ἅ Κλεαρίστα  
τὰς αἴγας παρελᾶντα καὶ ἀδύ τι ποπυλιάσδει.  
(Theoc., *Id.* 5.88)

And Clearista pelts the goatherd with apples as he drives his flock by her, and she whistles to him sweetly.<sup>24</sup>

In the *Greek Anthology*, Meleager of Gadara (first century BC) transforms a ball into a heart with which Eros plays:

Σφαιριστὰν τὸν Ἔρωτα τρέφω σοὶ δ', Ἡλιοδώρα,  
βάλλει τὰν ἐν ἐμοὶ παλλομένην κραδίαν.  
ἀλλ' ἄγε συμπαίκτην δέξαι Πόθον· εἰ δ' ἀπὸ σεῦ με  
ρίψαις, οὐκ οἴσω τὰν ἀπάλαιστρον ὕβριν.  
(5.214)

I am training Love to play with a ball: he throws to you, Heliodora, the heart that bounces within me. Come now, take Desire as your playmate; if you cast me from you, I will not bear this unsportsmanlike offense.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Schol. vet. in Ar. *Nub.* 997c: μηλοβολεῖν ἔλεγον τὸ εἰς ἀφροδίσια δελεάζειν, ἐπεὶ τὸ μῆλον Ἀφροδίτης ἐστὶν ἱερόν ("they said 'to throw apples' to attract someone to Aphrodite's pleasures because the apple is sacred to Aphrodite"). Personal trans. from Kyriaki Katsarelia (unpublished).

<sup>24</sup> Trans. from *Theocritus, Moschus, Bion*, ed. and trans. Neil Hopkinson, "Loeb Classical Library" 28, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Trans. from *The Greek Anthology, Volume I: Books 1–5*, trans. W.R. Paton, rev. Michael A. Tueller, "Loeb Classical Library" 67, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. Cf. *ibidem*, 5.80: Μῆλον ἐγὼ βάλλει με φιλῶν σέ τις. ἀλλ' ἐπίνευσον, Ξανθίππη· κἀγὼ καὶ σὺ μαραινόμεθα ("I am an apple. The one who sends me is in love with you. Nod your consent, Xanthippe; both I and you are wasting away").

The golden apples of Aphrodite's *kēpos* can become instruments of love magic. In the story of Atalanta, Hippomenes uses the attraction of these apples to win the race against the indomitable *parthénos*, and wins her heart. Theocritus explains how Atalanta loses her mind as a result of discovering the precious fruits, and is bewitched by love:

Ἴππομένης, ὅκα δὴ τὰν παρθένον ἤθελε γᾶμαι,  
 μᾶλ' ἐν χερσὶν ἐλῶν δρόμον ἄνυεν· ἅ δ' Ἀταλάντα  
 ὡς ἴδεν, ὡς ἐμάνη, ὡς ἐς βαθὺν ἄλατ' ἔρωτα.

(Theoc., *Id.* 3.40–42)

Hippomenes, when he wished to marry the girl, ran the race with apples in his hands, and as soon as Atalanta saw them she leaped deep in love.<sup>26</sup>

Apples are also included in the preparation of aphrodisiac philtres, like that described on a Greek magical papyrus which prescribes using *mēloboleîn* to possess the desired woman, body and soul, ψυχή (*psyché*), by arousing the loving madness – μανία (*manía*), desire – ἔρωσ (*érōs*), love – φιλία (*philia*), and affection – στοργή (*storgé*).<sup>27</sup>

On a kylix attributed to the Penthesilea Painter (see Fig. 5; ca. 450–440 BC), a young man stands before a seated maiden. Behind the youth, a κάλαθος (*kálathos*), or wool basket, and a spindle allude to the girl's φιλεργία (*philergia*). The young man's pose, leaning on his walking stick, suggests they are conversing. The girl manipulates two fruits, yarn balls, or real balls that she seems to present to him, as though ready to start juggling with them. The suspended sash between them reinforces the allusion to courtship. These juggling scenes with balls or apples should not be interpreted at face value: they are not just balls of wool used as toys in an innocent game played by maidens promised in marriage in their leisure time. The painters represent a visual invitation to a two-way love relationship. There is a caveat: in iconography, women, not men, practise juggling, while in literary sources it is mostly men who try to entice women with apples. The vases show girls actively attempting to arouse men's desire in agonistic terms.

<sup>26</sup> Trans. from *Theocritus, Moschus, Bion*, ed. Hopkinson; Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 69–75.

<sup>27</sup> PGM CXXII.5–25 (in English as *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, ed. and trans. Hans Dieter Betz, Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, 75–78.



**Figure 5:** Pentesilea Painter, Attic red-figure kylix, ca. 450–440 BC, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 13.84. Line drawing by Véronique Dasen.

## The Taming of Maidens

On the krater attributed to the Leningrad Painter (see above, Fig. 4), the girl on the left side of the see-saw wears a dress decorated with an intriguing pattern: a frieze of winged horses. Various interpretations could explain this detail. The winged horse Pegasus' name is connected semantically to fountain and spring, πηγῆ (*pēgḗ*), and wherever the horse's hooves struck land, a spring was said to form, as on Mount Helicon.<sup>28</sup> The motif could also hint at the generic scenes

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<sup>28</sup> On the Hippocrene spring (ἵππος; *híppos* – 'the horse'; κρήνη; *krēnḗ* – 'the spring') produced by the stroke of the hoof of Pegasus on Mount Helicon, see Hes., *Theog.* 6.

of maidens fetching water at the fountain house, which were very popular in archaic vase-painting,<sup>29</sup> which could suggest that the two girls on the see-saw were of the same age category.

It is, however, more likely that Pegasus referred to the fate of Hippe, Chiron's daughter, described by Euripides in his *Melanippe Wise*. The *parthénos* was hunting in the forest when she was raped by Aeolus, son of Hellen. She became pregnant and fled to the mountains to give birth:

[...] κάκεϊ ὠδινούσης αὐτῆς τὸν πατέρα ἐλθεῖν κατὰ ζήτησιν, τὴν δὲ εὔξασθαι καταλαμβανομένην πρὸς τὸ μὴ γνωσθῆναι μεταμορφωθῆναι· καὶ οὕτως γενέσθαι ἵππον τεκοῦσαν τὸ παιδίον· διὰ δὲ τὴν εὐσέβειαν αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς εἰς τὰ ἄστρα ὑπὸ τῆς Ἄρτεμιδος τεθῆναι.

(Eur., *Melanippe Wise* F488)

[...] while she was in labour there her father came in search of her, and as she was caught she prayed to be transformed so as not to be recognized; thus she became a horse after giving birth to her child, and because of her and her father's piety she was placed by Artemis amongst the stars.<sup>30</sup>

Hyginus adds in his *Astronomica* (2.18) that this female Pegasus was placed out of sight of the centaur, her father, Chiron, showing only half her body, to hide her sex.<sup>31</sup>

A horse jump was also part of *χελιχελώνη* (*chelichelónē*), a game of *parthénoi* which consisted in girls dancing in a circle around a young girl who would suddenly jump "like a horse" on one of the girls in the group who would then take her place. Julius Pollux preserved the rhyme that was sung in the game:

ἡ δὲ χελιχελώνη, παρθένων ἐστὶν ἡ παιδιά, παρόμοιόν τι ἔχουσα τῆ χύτρα· ἡ μὲν γὰρ κάθηται, καὶ καλεῖται χελώνη, αἱ δὲ περιτρέχουσιν ἀνερωτῶσα

<sup>29</sup> On water-fetching scenes as metaphors for maidenhood, see Sabetai, "The Poetics of Maidenhood", 103–114. She notes on p. 105 that the inscribed names of the girls at the fountain house refer to flowers, "poetically associating maidens with blossoming and beauty", also accentuated by the inscription *καλή* (*kalē*). See also Guy Hedreen, "So-and-So *kalē*": A Brief Reexamination of the 'Beautiful' Woman", in Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, ed., *Epigraphy of Art: Ancient Greek Vase-Inscriptions and Vase-Paintings*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2016, 53–72.

<sup>30</sup> Trans. from Euripides, *Volume VII: Fragments. Aegeus–Meleager*, eds. and trans. Christopher Collard and Martin Cropp, "Loeb Classical Library" 504, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. On rape and marriage, see Andrew Stewart, "Rape?", in Ellen D. Reeder, ed., *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, Baltimore, MD: Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery, 1995, 74–90.

<sup>31</sup> Also described in Eratsth., *Cat.* 18; Ov., *Met.* 2.665–675. See Arnaud Zucker, ed., *L'encyclopédie du ciel. Mythologie, astronomie, astrologie*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 2016, 135–140.



χελιχελώνη, τί ποιεῖς ἐν τῷ μέσῳ;  
 ἢ δὲ ἀποκρίνεται  
 ἔρια μαρύομαι καὶ κρόκην Μιλησίαν.  
 εἴτ' ἐκεῖναι πάλιν ἐκβῶσιν  
 ὁ δ' ἔκγονός σου τί ποιῶν ἀπώλετο;  
 ἢ δέ φησι  
 λευκᾶν ἀφ' ἵππων εἰς θάλασσαν ἄλατο.  
 (Poll., *Onom.* 9.125)

The "tortoise" is a girls' game, similar to the "pot". One girl sits and is called the "tortoise" whereas the others run around her asking her: "Tortoise, what are you doing in the middle? I'm weaving wool and Milesian thread". Then they shout back: "What was your son doing when he died? From white horses into the sea he was – jumping".<sup>32</sup>

As Andromache Karanika demonstrated,<sup>33</sup> the tortoise game is a form of choral training teaching a girl social expectations and norms with dynamic role-play. The girl first sits at the centre, motionless, like a tortoise, personifying the αἰδώς (*aidōs*), modesty, of the ideal γυνή (*gynē*), the married, wool-working woman, φιλεργός (*philergós*).<sup>34</sup> She is expected to have born a son, and may be weaving his shroud, as she is asked about the cause of his death. When the tortoise utters the word "to jump", she takes the role of the son and leaps onto the closest player who then takes her place.<sup>35</sup> The erotic symbolism of leaping is expressed in a male context by another fragment of Anacreon's poetry. The image of the leaping horse transmits the violence of the feelings of love: ἀρθεις δηῦτ' ἀπὸ Λευκάδος πέτρης ἐς πολιὸν κῦμα κολυμβῶ μεθύων ἔρωτι ("See, once again I climb up and dive from the Leucadian cliff into the grey waves, drunk

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<sup>32</sup> Trans. from Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 74; see also Andromache Karanika, "Playing the Tortoise: Reading Symbols of an Ancient Folk Game", *Helios* 39.2 (2012), 101–120; Salvatore Costanza, "Performance e giochi d'iniziazione in Grecia antica: la 'tarta-tartaruga' (*chelichelónē*) e il 'calderone' (*chytrinda*)", *Mantichora* 7 (2017), 72–91, and his *Giulio Polluce, Onomasticon excerpta de ludis. On similar games in Modern Greek culture*, see Salvatore Costanza, "Pollux témoin des jeux: continuité, survie et réception dans la culture ludique néogrecque", in Véronique Dasen and Marco Vespa, eds., *Ancient Play and Games: Definition, Transmission, Reception*, "Jeu/Play/Spiel" 2, Liège: Liège University Press, 2021, 329–342.

<sup>33</sup> Karanika, "Playing the Tortoise", and her *Voices at Work: Women, Performance, and Labor in Ancient Greece*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014, 164–177.

<sup>34</sup> See Gloria Ferrari, *Figures of Speech: Men and Maidens in Ancient Greece*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 60.

<sup>35</sup> See similar rhymes in Erinna's *Distaff* 15–17; Karanika, "Playing the Tortoise", 7–9.

with love").<sup>36</sup> In the *chelichlónē* rhyme, the girl's leap may allude to the danger of sexual intercourse as well as of the madness caused by love. The krater attributed to the Leningrad Painter captures two young girls balancing very skilfully, and the idea of the girls being at risk is further enhanced by the flying horses on the girl's dress, a reminder of Hippé's terrible fate.



**Figure 6:** Boeotian skyphos, ca. 425–400 BC, private collection, photograph © by Nik Bürgin, Basel, 2014. Image courtesy of Jean-David Cahn, AG Gallery, Basel.

Vase-painters sometimes compare explicitly the training of girls with that of boys. On a Boeotian skyphos (see Fig. 6; ca. 425–400 BC), a maiden sits on a chest. She is ready to throw a ball to supernatural partners, a small Eros with stretched-out arms, carried on the shoulders of a companion. The scheme of the scene is borrowed from boys' games at the palaestra. On a black-figure lekythos attributed to the Edinburgh Painter (ca. 500 BC),<sup>37</sup> the trainer is an old, bearded man sitting before two teams of young people perched upon the shoulders

<sup>36</sup> Anac., fr. 376 Page (trans. from *Greek Lyric, Volume II*, ed. and trans. Campbell). See Karanika, "Playing the Tortoise", 3.

<sup>37</sup> Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1890.27; BA 380847 (Beazley Archive, Classical Art Research Centre, <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk>, accessed 14 February 2020). See also London, British Museum B 182; BA 301522.

of companions, like the Boeotian Erotes. On the Boeotian skyphos, the *agón* is feminized and takes place in an imaginary bridal space where the woman rules over the love game and calls the shots.<sup>38</sup>

## **An *erōtostasia*?**

On a red-figure Attic hydria from the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid, the erotic meaning of the game is revealed by the supernatural presence of Eros in the middle, ready to offer a sash to the winner (see Fig. 7; ca. 440–430 BC). The players are called Archedike and Hapalina, their names adding to the erotic connotations of the play, as Hapalina means ‘the sweet one’, and Archedike may refer to the name of a famous hetaira, thus mingling two levels of sexual attraction, for a bride or a lover.<sup>39</sup>

A form of *erōtostasia* takes place on a red-figure krater from Metaponto (390–380 BC);<sup>40</sup> two Erotes substitute for the girls on the plank, holding the end of a sash, as in a *klēros díá daktýlōn* game. The divinatory dimension of the play is even more explicit on the bezel of a Hellenistic gold ring (see Fig. 8; ca. 350 BC).<sup>41</sup> Aphrodite weighs two Erotes sitting in the trays of her scales. The outcome of the weighing contest is still suspended, but Aphrodite displays her power over the struggles of love.<sup>42</sup> The image transfers the conventional

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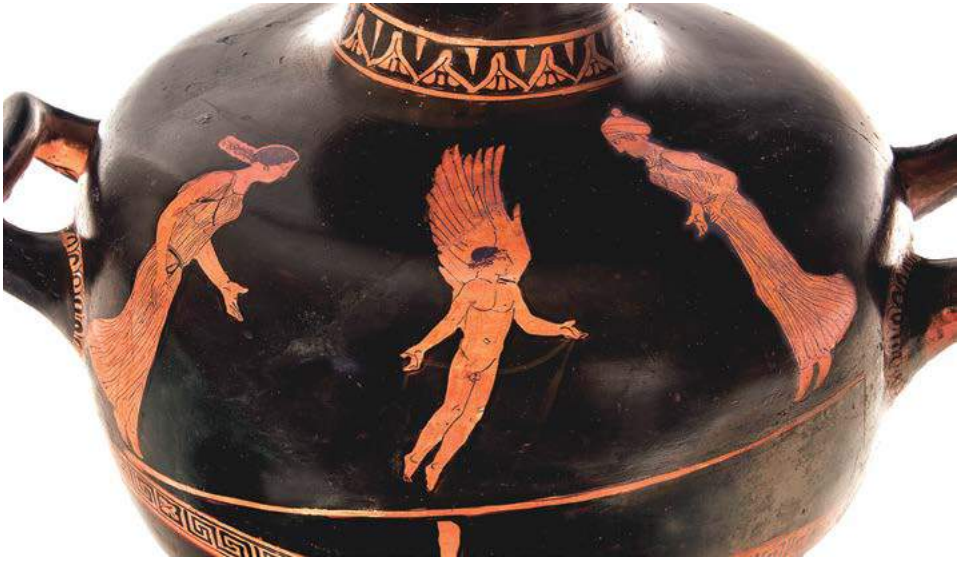
<sup>38</sup> See the ball-playing scene in a prenuptial scene on a Boeotian pyxis in Christina Avronidaki, “An Assortment of Bridal Images on a Boeotian Red-Figure Pyxis from the Workshop of the Painter of the Great Athenian Kantharos”, in Stine Schierup and Victoria Sabetai, eds., *The Regional Production of Red-Figure Pottery: Greece, Magna Graecia and Etruria*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2014, 81–101.

<sup>39</sup> See Ricardo Olmos, “Archedike und Hapalina. Hetären auf einer Wippe”, in Elke Böhr and Wolfram Martini, eds., *Studien zur Mythologie und Vasenmalerei. Festschrift für Konrad Schauenburg*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1986, 107–113; Green, “Zeus on a See-Saw”, No. 3, Fig. 7a–b.

<sup>40</sup> Konrad Schauenburg, “Erotenspiele, 1. Teil”, *Antike Welt. Zeitschrift für Archäologie und Urgeschichte* 7.3 (1976), 43, Fig. 20; Véronique Dasen, ed., *Ludique. Jouer dans l’Antiquité, Lugdunum, musée et théâtres romains, 20 juin–1er décembre 2019*, Gent: Snoeck, 2019, 60, Fig. 1. For a parallel in a gymnasium context on a Gnathia vessel (with hoop, strigil, and aryballos), see Schauenburg, “Erotenspiele, 1. Teil”, 43, Fig. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey Spier, *Ancient Gems and Finger Rings: Catalogue of the Collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum*, Malibu, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1992, 34, No. 51. See also Angelos Delivorrias, s.v. “Aphrodite”, in Lilly Kahil et al., eds., *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*, vol. 2.1: *Aphrodisias–Athena*, Zürich and München: Artemis Verlag, 1984, esp. s.v. “Aphrodite bei der Erotostasia”, *ibidem*, 120, Nos. 1246–1249; and the gold ring, Boston Museum of Fine Arts 23.594 (late fifth century BC).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Anac., fr. 398 Page: ἀστραγάλοι δ’ Ἐρωτός εἰσιν μανία τε καὶ κυδοιμοί (“The knucklebones of Love are madness and uproar”; trans. from *Greek Lyric, Volume II*, ed. and trans. Campbell).



**Figure 7:** Attic red-figure hydria, ca. 440–430 BC, National Archaeological Museum, Madrid, inv. no. 11128, photograph by Ángel Martínez Levas. Image © by the National Archaeological Museum, Madrid. Used with permission.

*psychostasía* scenes, the weighing of warriors' fates (κηροστασία [*kērostatasía*] or ψυχοστασία [*psychostasía*]) on Zeus' scales (τάλαντα; *tálanta*),<sup>43</sup> to a courtship context.

## Conclusion

Representations of ancient games shed light on the collective and social values that govern the emotional life of maidens under the patronage of Eros and Aphrodite. The games of skill and chance are all characterized by upward and downward movements, like the players on the see-saw or juggler's balls, visual cues that display the dynamics of love. They also express the perception of love as a risk-taking affair and a potential source of "agón-y". Depictions of the *ephedrismós* game can act as visual metaphors of maidens as untamed

<sup>43</sup> Hom., *Il.* 8.68–74. On Aphrodite as a figure of authority in these scenes, with a possible parodic dimension, see Hannah Lisbeth Jones, *Weighing Iconography of Love in Classical and Early Hellenistic Art: Considering Allusions and Metaphor in Images of Aphrodite Balancing Eros*, Senior Honors Thesis, University of Utah, 2012, <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=205788> (accessed 14 February 2020).



**Figure 8:** Ring with Aphrodite weighing two Eroses, gold (2.2 × 1.8 cm), ca. 350 BC, J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Villa in Malibu, California, inv. no. 85.AM.277, photograph © by the J. Paul Getty Museum. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

beings civilized by marriage. The agonistic dimension of play reveals, however, that maidens were not perceived only as objects of male desire. They were also actively engaged, riding successfully on the indefinite semantic field of the verb *παίζω* (*paízō*) – namely, seduction, love, prosperity, and happiness, without forgetting pleasure that ensured fertility.